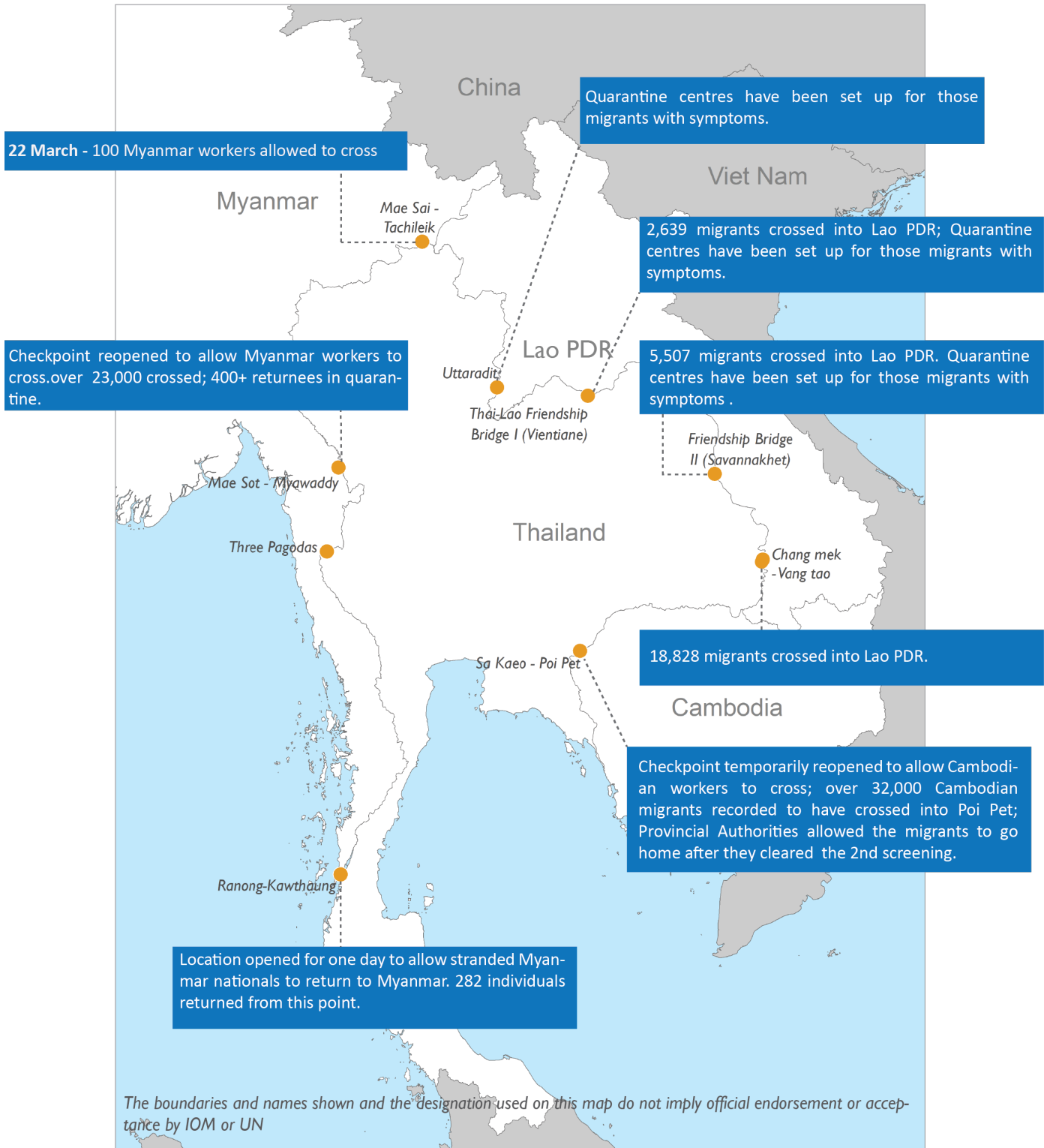


Movement Overview: Thailand to Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (the) and Myanmar (Post 22 March 2020)



● Border crossing points □ International boundary

*migrant numbers collated through various government and humanitarian sources – subject to further change as the situation evolves

OVERVIEW

As the number of COVID-19 cases increases across a growing number of countries in the Asia Pacific, IOM is concerned about the impacts on migrants, refugees, IDPs, returnees and other vulnerable groups. Migrants may be disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19 transmission due to their living and working conditions and barriers and exclusion from health systems, public education and outreach. The mobility restrictions applied by various governments since the outbreak of the pandemic have had a complex and multifaceted impact on the global mobility context.

The announcement of wide-ranging business closures by the governor of Bangkok on Saturday, 21 March 2020 triggered a mass movement of migrants from Bangkok, Thailand to their home provinces within Thailand, as well as across borders to home countries: Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (the) and Myanmar. There continues to be an increase in returns seen, and it is expected that after the Government of Thailand's announcement of emergency decree measures additional migrants will return in the coming days.

This could lead to the seeding of new clusters in areas of return, transmission among returnees during crowded buses and border crossings, as well as those held in collective settings for quarantine. The majority of home communities are rural areas in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (the) and Myanmar, which are unprepared for monitoring, testing or treating any COVID-19 cases that may arise. Unlike the patterns from other countries with the majority of cases starting in urban areas, in these three countries of return rural areas may drive transmission. While official border crossings have increasingly closed, this has not slowed returns. There has instead been a subsequent increase in crossings at unofficial border points. There are also concerns regarding the economic impacts for migrants who have had to leave their employment or have lost their jobs. IOM is present in all four countries to monitor and support as much as possible with available resources and staffing.



IOM staff supporting the return of Cambodian returnees at the Poipet crossing point, 24 March 2020.

IOM RESPONSE

THAILAND

In the face of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Government of Thailand has released a series of measures to curb the spread of the virus in Thailand. These measures have included shutting down non-essential businesses and operations across the country and limiting travel both within Thailand and between other countries. As of 19 March 2020, the Thai government began restricting travel across borders. At the Myanmar border, only Thai and Myanmar nationals were allowed to pass; starting 22 March 2020, the Government of Thailand began to close border checkpoints across the country (for people) and prohibit movement at unofficial crossings.



Migrants waiting to cross in Mae Sot at the 2nd Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge, 26 March 2020.

THAILAND CONT.

In response to these new measures, many migrant workers living in Thailand have returned home, especially to the neighboring countries of Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao People’s Democratic Republic (the). IOM has been tracking these movements and supporting migrants with essential services, where feasible, as they make these journeys.

On 26 March 2020, the Government of Thailand issued an emergency decree that bans entry to non-Thai nationals, with the exception of shippers, diplomats, drivers, pilots and others permitted by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.



Fever surveillance at matriculation exam in Myitkyina Township, Myanmar.

CAMBODIA

The IOM country office in Cambodia is providing reception support to returnees at the Poipet border crossing with Thailand, which includes support with meals, health screenings and hygiene education. IOM is leading a UN task force to monitor and provide support to returnees in their home provinces, which also includes the WFP, UNAIDS and UNICEF. IOM is also coordinating with the government on additional support and preparedness in areas of return, support for home monitoring and scaling up preparedness in provinces.



IOM staff assists in screening migrants coming back to Myanmar at the Tha Yat Pin border crossing point, 22 March 2020.

THE LAO PEOPLE’S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic is experiencing high numbers of migrants at three international border checkpoints with Thailand, two in southern Lao People’s Democratic Republic (the) and one in Vientiane Capital. As of 25 March 2020, quarantine centers have been set up for those migrants with symptoms who will be housed there for 14 days. The Ministry has requested IOM’s support with food distribution, community risk awareness and data collection with a particular focus on identifying provinces of return so community health workers can prepare to provide necessary services at destination locations.



Migrants waiting to cross in Mae Sot at the 2nd Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge, 26 March 2020.

MYANMAR

According to the IOM country office in Myanmar there are 400+ returnees in quarantine at two locations on the Myawaddy border with Thailand. The Department of Labor has requested IOM’s support with data collection, meeting immediate needs on return (shelter, food, NFIs, health support) and risk communication.

CONTACTS

For more information contact: ROBangkokMigrationHealth@iom.int