IDENTIFYING EMPLOYMENT-SPECIFIC RISKS FACING MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE CLEANING SERVICES, LOGISTICS AND PRIVATE SECURITY SECTORS FROM ASIAN NATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
IDENTIFYING EMPLOYMENT-SPECIFIC RISKS FACING MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE CLEANING SERVICES, LOGISTICS AND PRIVATE SECURITY SECTORS FROM ASIAN NATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

JUNE 2022

Prepared by:
Katrin Marchand, PhD
Ortrun Merkle, PhD
Lalaine Siruno
Mohammad Khalaf
Alice Antoniou
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Katrin Marchand, Ortrun Merkle, Lalaine Siruno, Mohammad Khalaf and Alice Antoniou from United Nations University–MERIT and Maastricht University. The authors are grateful to several people who played an important role in the development and implementation of this study. We would like to acknowledge the invaluable support of the focal points at IOM CREST, Marion Biolena and Mark Aludino, who supported the study at every step of its development. We would also like to thank Adriana Marin Peroza, Lana Eekelschot and Jessica Steffens for their assistance with the desk review and the transcription of the interviews. Furthermore, we are extremely grateful to the different stakeholders who granted us valuable time to speak with them during the interviews and the validation meeting. This study was only possible due to the experiences and insights they kindly shared with us.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF BOXES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Focusing the study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Data collection and analysis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Limitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. KEY LABOUR AND HUMAN RIGHTS RISKS TO MIGRANT WORKERS FROM ASIAN NATIONS IN THE CLEANING SERVICES, LOGISTICS AND PRIVATE SECURITY SECTORS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Cleaning services</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Private security services</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3. Logistics</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4. Factors increasing migrant worker vulnerabilities</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. COVID-19 AND RISKS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Cleaning services</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2. Private security services</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3. Logistics</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4. COVID-19 and the incidence of forced labour, trafficking and exploitation</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1. Trafficking risks</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2. Labour abuses in South and South-East Asia</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3. Labour abuses in the Gulf Cooperation Council</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. SOCIAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES AVAILABLE TO MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE FOCUS SECTORS

5.1. Long-term government social protection policies for migrant workers
   5.1.1. Origin countries’ social protection measures for migrant workers
   5.1.2. Destination countries’ social protection measures for migrant workers

5.2. Long-term private and industry-based social protection for migrant workers

5.3. Social protection for migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic
   5.3.1. Origin countries’ COVID-19 social protection policies
   5.3.2. Destination countries’ COVID-19 social protection policies
   5.3.3. Private and industry-based social protection for migrant workers

5.4. Gaps in social protection for migrant workers

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7. ANNEXES

8. REFERENCES
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Interview participants by stakeholder category and sex 7
Table 2: Validation meeting participants by stakeholder category and sex 8
Table 3: Overview of risks faced by migrant workers in the cleaning sector 15
Table 4: Pandemic-induced risks for migrant workers 25
Table 5: Migrant worker vulnerabilities in ILO rapid assessment 35

LIST OF BOXES

Box 1: Study objectives 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CREST</td>
<td>Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>Gulf Cooperation Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHRB</td>
<td>Institute for Human Rights and Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTSA</td>
<td>One-Roof Integrated Service Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Migrant Forum in Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPE</td>
<td>Personal protective equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION
1. INTRODUCTION

More people are currently migrating for work purposes than at any time in recorded history. The latest estimate of the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021a) records a total of 169 million international migrant workers in 2019, accounting for 4.9 per cent of the global labour force. This marks an increase in the total number of international migrant workers of around 3 per cent since 2017 and almost 13 per cent since 2013. At the same time, migrant workers are considered to be among the most vulnerable groups within their communities and countries of destination. They often work under conditions that increase their exposure to risks and vulnerabilities, such as minimal safety measurements (Quandt et al., 2013) and are more vulnerable to human trafficking, human rights violations and to working in bad conditions than those of non-migrant background (ILO and Walk Free Foundation, 2017). Limited knowledge and access to health-care systems, in addition to language and cultural barriers (Abbasian and Hellgren, 2012), the dire need for employment and the fear of deportation are just some of the factors that increase the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers around the world (Arcury et al., 2013; Moyce and Schenker, 2018).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has recently impacted the global economy and labour markets around the world, and consequently labour migration and labour migrants. In the context of the pandemic, migrant workers have been found to be more prone to its negative impacts than non-migrant workers. The effects of the pandemic are indeed “hardest” for those already in vulnerable situations pre-pandemic (United Nations, 2020:2). Migrant workers have to face a combination of health, socioeconomic and protection challenges, or in other words, the compounding effects of job loss or reduced wages while at the same time having to deal with a fast-spreading virus and potentially additional health-care costs, while having limited access to social welfare and benefits (Siegel, 2020).

While this situation has been recognized to be the case for migrant workers generally, there is a knowledge gap on the risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers in specific sectors, while it is also known that work in different sectors is associated with different sets of risks and vulnerabilities. This is the context within which the present study examines the risks – including both long-term and pandemic-induced labour and human rights risks – faced by migrant workers from the Asia-Pacific region in the following focus sectors: cleaning services; logistics; and private security services.

This research has six specific objectives centred around identifying the main risks and vulnerabilities experienced by migrant workers in the focus sectors, the main factors causing these, social protection initiatives for migrant workers and recommendations for strengthening the protection of migrant workers in the three focus sectors. The detailed objectives are listed below in Box 1. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing and therefore definite conclusions cannot be drawn when it comes to the pandemic-induced risks and vulnerabilities.
1. INTRODUCTION

Box 1: Study objectives

1. Identify the key labour and human rights risks to migrant workers in the aforementioned work sectors and establish how such risks are linked with the context in which the companies in these sectors operate.

2. Identify the factors, sector-linked or otherwise, that exacerbate the different risks or vulnerabilities identified.

3. Map out the typical recruitment and employment arrangements for the three identified sectors and determine how and to what extent such arrangements impact on migrant risks.

4. Determine the different private, industry-based and government-led social protection initiatives currently available to migrant workers and the impact of such programmes.

5. Describe potential impact trends of COVID-19 on the identified sectors and anticipated changes in terms of migrant risks and vulnerabilities.

6. Provide recommendations to governments, regulators, brands and employers to address prevalent migrant worker concerns, tailormade to address the sector-specific risks.

To meet these objectives, this study took a mixed-methods approach consisting of desk review and semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders. Section 2 below provides a more detailed overview of the methodology applied throughout the research, while Sections 3 and 4 provide an overview of the key labour and human rights risks for migrant workers, both long term and specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. These two sections include findings around recruitment and employment arrangements, and trends in terms of changes due to the pandemic, respectively. Section 5 then discusses social protection provided for migrant workers by governments of countries of destination and origin, as well as private and industry-based protection mechanisms. Section 6 concludes with a summary and recommendations.
2. METHODOLOGY
2. METHODOLOGY

As discussed before, this research project deals with a still ongoing, rapidly evolving phenomenon for which a mixed-methods study has been deemed the most relevant approach. The specific approach taken is discussed in more detail below. In brief, primary data were collected through online semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders, while secondary data were collected through a systematic desk review of relevant academic and grey literatures, as well as participation in different relevant webinars. The data collected were transcribed, coded and analysed qualitatively using ATLAS.ti.¹ In a first step, however, it was necessary to focus the study further, both geographically as well as in terms of the sectors.

2.1. FOCUSING THE STUDY

To operationalize the study, it was first necessary to concentrate the research further, both geographically and in terms of the focus sectors. The initial geographical focus of this study included contact point countries and territories of the International Organization for Migration’s Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking (IOM CREST) initiative, namely Malaysia; Thailand; Bangladesh; the Philippines; Viet Nam and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China. After the first couple of interviews, however, it became apparent that the majority of migrant workers from traditional countries of origin like the Philippines are deployed to the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Upon consultation with IOM, a decision was therefore made to expand the geographical focus of the study to include these GCC countries as countries of destination.

To further focus the study, the research team and the IOM CREST focal points jointly narrowed down the three sectors to ensure that the research was both relevant and manageable in terms of scope. Within this report, the three focus sectors should therefore be understood in the following way:

► **Cleaning services:** cleaning companies or companies providing janitorial services, having contracted workers for the purpose of cleaning or washing by hand or machine, of furniture, windows, carpets, doors, floors, tools or machinery, under supervision at the premises of a client.

► **Private security services:** security services related to the guarding and protection of persons and objects, such as convoys, buildings and other places, and security-related occupations in which the provision or use of firearms may be necessary, for example in providing security to oil and gas exploration and drilling, and road and railway construction projects.

► **Logistics:** inland intermodal freight transport, storage and warehousing, and last-mile delivery.

¹ ATLAS.ti is a computer program used for qualitative data analysis, particularly for coding and analysing transcripts, among other tasks.
2. METHODOLOGY

2.2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

As explained above, this study took a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research and semi-structured interviews. The first step was a literature review, which was important in the overall study design as it provided inputs for each of the six study objectives. In addition, it aided in the identification of potential interview participants.

For this exercise, academic publications were consulted, as well as different kinds of grey literature, including research reports and policy briefs produced by international and civil society organizations, press releases by government agencies and news articles. It is important to mention that the existing literature on the specific risks in the focus sectors in this geographic region is sparse, making the present study significant in filling the gap. Throughout the literature search, the scope was therefore broadened to include literature on other geographical areas, as well as information on risks and vulnerabilities of migrant workers more generally. Each of the identified resources was then mapped against the study objectives, and the literature therefore complements the data gathered through the interviews, which are further discussed below.

Alongside the literature review, a stakeholder mapping was conducted to which the IOM focal points also provided additional inputs. The goal of this mapping exercise was to identify recruitment associations, recruitment agencies, migrant worker associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), government agencies and other key informants that are relevant to the topic of this study. This mapping therefore served as the basis for sending out invitations to participate in the study.

The research team also attended the following webinars to gather some additional information and to identify key stakeholders:

- “Destination Destination Destination” – What Governments Can Do to Ensure Fair and Ethical Recruitment, Institute for Human Rights & Business (IHRB), 7 July 2021;
- Fair Recruitment in Review – The Philippines to Taiwan: Falling Through the Cracks?, IHRB, 20 October 2021.

In the next step, recruitment of interviewees was conducted, for which a concept note outlining the objectives of the study as well as data protection measures was prepared. This note was then sent out with the invitations to participate to the identified relevant stakeholders. A total of 94 individuals were contacted with requests to participate in an interview.

As discussed below, the response rate was rather low at around 25 per cent, with the research team ultimately interviewing 24 individuals. A mixture of convenience and snowball sampling was used. All interviews took place between late August and late October 2021. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the interview participants by category of stakeholder and sex of the respondent.
2. METHODOLOGY

Table 1: Interview participants by stakeholder category and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment agency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government official</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO/Migrant advocacy group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To structure the interviews, interview guides were developed for the different stakeholders. These are attached to this report as Annex 1 for reference and were adapted to the category of the stakeholder and their background to ensure that relevant questions were asked and as much information as possible could be collected. All the interviews were conducted online over Zoom, with the exception of one which was conducted via WhatsApp video call. The average duration of the interviews was 66 minutes and all participants consented to voice recording of the interview.

To facilitate the analysis of the data, all interviews were transcribed. One interview was conducted in Filipino and was subsequently translated into English by a native Filipino member of the research team, who was careful to maintain meaning in the translation process. Subsequently the transcripts were coded and analysed using the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti. A coding structure was developed based on the study objectives in order to facilitate the thematic coding of the transcripts. In addition, pertinent documents and additional resources mentioned by interview participants were also consulted and further included in the analysis.

A validation meeting was organized in late November 2021 to discuss preliminary findings and solicit additional inputs for the study. Out of the 24 interview participants, 16 attended the validation meeting, along with 21 other stakeholders. Table 2 provides an overview of the categories of stakeholders that attended the meeting, as well as the breakdown by gender.
2. METHODOLOGY

Comments and discussions from the validation meeting further fed into this final report. Overall, the data collected from the interviews, together with those from the literature review and additional inputs from the validation meeting, are therefore the basis from which the findings of this study are derived.

2.3. LIMITATIONS

At this stage, it is also important to mention the limitations that this study faced. Conducting the research was especially challenging as it was conducted during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that all fieldwork had to be conducted virtually, which comes with its own set of challenges. Moving to purely virtual fieldwork on a sensitive topic within a limited time frame meant that reaching members of the target group, specifically migrant workers, was extremely difficult. Accessing and building trust with the different stakeholder groups through online channels required a lot of effort and relied heavily on existing networks.

Despite the combined efforts of the research team and IOM CREST staff in the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam, the total number of interview participants was relatively low, indicating a response rate of only about 25 per cent. Only one migrant worker participated in the study, and no facility owner or employer in a country of destination could be reached. The researchers hoped that snowballing through the participating recruitment agencies would facilitate contacts with other stakeholders, but despite numerous introductions, this did not turn out to be the case. While this is a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment agency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government official</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO/Migrant advocacy group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry representative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research team</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM staff</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Validation meeting participants by stakeholder category and sex

Identifying Employment-Specific Risks Facing Migrant Workers in the Cleaning Services, Logistics and Private Security Sectors from Asian Nations in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic
significant limitation, the desk review and the interviews with NGOs, migrant advocacy groups and civil society organizations also allowed the research team to understand the experiences of migrants who did not directly participate in the study.

Furthermore, the sampling approach (convenience, non-probability sampling) also resulted in data from the Philippines being the most frequent. The IOM mission in the Philippines commissioned this project and their warm contacts with stakeholders in the country proved helpful. As the Philippines is primarily deploying migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, a significant portion of the interview data revolves around the Philippines–Saudi Arabia migration corridor. In addition, recruitment agencies and key informants shared the insight that not many Asian workers are deployed in the security sector anymore. Particularly in the GCC, security guards from African countries are usually hired. As a consequence, not a lot of pertinent data on this sector could be obtained during the interviews, which further limits the conclusions that can be drawn for this specific sector.

The breakdown of the interview participants by country was as follows: Philippines (12); United Kingdom (3); Canada and Singapore (2 each); and India, Saudi Arabia, and the United States of America (1 each), Hong Kong SAR, China and Macao SAR, China.

Precisely because the findings of this study are based on a limited, non-representative sample, the research team and IOM do not attempt to put forward generalizable conclusions and advise readers to interpret the results with these limitations in mind.
3.
KEY LABOUR AND HUMAN RIGHTS RISKS TO MIGRANT WORKERS FROM ASIAN NATIONS IN THE CLEANING SERVICES, LOGISTICS AND PRIVATE SECURITY SECTORS
This section will turn to the desk review and the interviews to identify the key labour and human rights risks to migrant workers in the aforementioned focus sectors and establish how such risks are linked with the context in which the companies in these sectors operate. The section will first provide a general overview of the risks for international migrant workers, before engaging with the three specific sectors. It will then provide an overview of the factors that make migrant workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation, before the next section takes a closer look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers in these sectors.

The desk review largely confirmed what prompted this study to be commissioned in the first place: the academic and grey literature addressing the specific risks and vulnerabilities of migrant workers in the focus sectors is sparse. A study by Sedex (2020) focused on the risks common across the security, cleaning and catering sectors and highlights the fact that security guards, cleaners of buildings or industrial facilities, and operators of canteens in workplaces are typically low-skilled migrant workers contracted through outsourced third-party labour providers and agencies. The common risk issues identified within this study are:

1. **Forced labour** – payment of recruitment fees and deceptive recruitment; breach of contracts, forced overtime and threats of deportation are reported to be common for migrant workers in the security guard sector in Malaysia.

2. **Wages** – wages below national minimums, wage delays, non-payment of wages or illegal deductions are commonly reported for migrant security guards and cleaners in Yemen, Malawi, United Arab Emirates, Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

3. **Working hours** – excessive work hours and unremunerated overtime payments are common for security guards and office and hotel cleaners. One of the interviewees explained:

   > And of course, it’s not uncommon to get complaints about unpaid overtime. There are issues, you know in terms of computation, a lot of companies can get creative, like if you work 10 hours today but you’re only working 6 hours tomorrow, then you don’t have overtime and I’m like, no, no, we’re talking about 8 hours a day whether they worked or not so they have to pay for two hours.

   (Male, recruitment agency)

4. **Regular employment** – insecure subcontracted employment relationships with zero-hour contracts, part-time or highly irregular hours are common, especially in the cleaning sector.
5. **Subcontracting** – there is widespread use of labour subcontracting arrangements and third-party providers across all sectors and geographies. This creates complexity in the employment relationships and uncertainty about workers’ rights. One interviewee explained the difficulty in subcontracting in more detail:

> Fewer and fewer companies are willing to directly hire all the needs. They’re outsourcing it to other organizations. And there are different ways in which they outsource. One is they give it to a specialized subcontractor. [...] Then you have the other one where most of the exploitation happens, which is in manpower supply companies.

(Female, NGO/migrant advocacy group)

She further explained that such labour supply companies do not focus on recruiting migrant workers for specific jobs, but rather hire them to put them on different projects. When no such project becomes available, the workers find themselves in vulnerable positions without the option to generate an income. As also underlined by other respondents, this is problematic because the more layers are involved, the less control there is, with due diligence procedures generally being rather fragmented throughout the supply chain.

6. **Occupational safety and health** – inadequate training and provision of protective clothing, as well as lack of access to first aid are common risk issues for workers in the catering and cleaning sectors. As an interviewee explained, this was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic:

> Mostly for low-skilled workers, especially for sanitation workers we have received much anecdotal information from the migrants themselves at the beginning of the pandemic – for example, they were not provided with protective equipment as they did their work, as they continued to do their work while a lot of people were working from home. And they were forced to work longer hours even during the pandemic.

(Female, NGO/migrant advocacy group)
The fact that working in these sectors, as well as in logistics, requires being physically present on the worksites, often outside of normal working hours, means that workers are also usually less visible to regular monitoring programmes. These risks were also confirmed in the interviews.

One interviewee also emphasized that a mismatch between skills and training and actual jobs often takes place:

> Very few workers have a degree of agency and choice when it comes to specific work authorization they are signing up for. It’s part of the deceptive recruitment landscape that migrant workers operate in. So, it’s very common to see that someone is actually a trained electrician, but then they end up being a construction helper or you know they are a logistician, but end up being a warehouse packer, and a lot of that is just a result of recruitment industries that incentivize subagents to exploit workers rather than being honest with them.

(Male, recruitment agency)

This perspective highlights the complex consequences that these recruitment arrangements may cause, and cautions recruitment agencies, as well as employers, to pay more attention to the matching of skills and jobs.

The following subsections will discuss the identified risks and vulnerabilities experienced by migrant workers in the three focus sectors in more detail.
3. KEY LABOUR AND HUMAN RIGHTS RISKS TO MIGRANT WORKERS FROM ASIAN NATIONS IN THE CLEANING SERVICES, LOGISTICS AND PRIVATE SECURITY SECTORS

3.1. CLEANING SERVICES

Cleaning has always been a form of low-skilled and low-paid employment, and nowadays, a high share of those who work as cleaners are migrants whose opportunities for employment in countries of destination may be hampered by lack of (language) skills and contacts, immigration status, or limited educational and professional qualifications (Abbasian and Hellgren, 2012). At the same time, the demands for cost effectiveness have led to increased competition, outsourcing and subcontracting in the cleaning industry. This forced a shift from mostly permanent employment to increasingly flexible, irregular and temporary jobs. Moreover, the increased competition resulted in some employers attempting to cut costs through infringements of the rights of workers. Wills (2009) explains that such practices proliferate because migrant workers are usually dependent on their job for subsistence, and in many cases for their right to stay in the host country, which makes it difficult for them to object. In addition, interviewees noted that there is a large gender disparity in the sector, with women being overrepresented. In some cases, this has led to more awareness and better (living) conditions, but this is not the case for all destination countries (Ollus, 2016).

Panikkar et al. (2015) interviewed immigrant women workers in the United States doing informal low-wage work, including cleaning, and outline the risks, as summarized in Table 3. In addition, limited knowledge and access to health-care systems, as well as language and cultural barriers, significantly increase the vulnerabilities faced by migrant cleaning workers (Abbasian and Hellgren, 2012).
Table 3: Overview of risks faced by migrant workers in the cleaning sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work organization</td>
<td>• Work routine&lt;br&gt;• Cleaning work activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational health hazards</td>
<td>• Chemical exposures in cleaning&lt;br&gt;• Other unhygienic exposures due to cleaning&lt;br&gt;• Musculoskeletal risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social hazards</td>
<td>• Work disparity&lt;br&gt;• Wage inequality&lt;br&gt;• Lack of breaks&lt;br&gt;• Work pressure&lt;br&gt;• Threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational health services</td>
<td>• Inadequate work and health and safety training&lt;br&gt;• Inconsistent use of personal protective equipment&lt;br&gt;• No access to health care&lt;br&gt;• No knowledge of workers’ compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health problems</td>
<td>• Health problems due to chemical exposures&lt;br&gt;• Skin problems and allergies&lt;br&gt;• Psychological problems&lt;br&gt;• Accidents and injuries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Panikkar et al. (2015).

Interviewees also discussed the fact that in many cases the hospitality space has outsourced cleaning services. In these cases, the hospitality companies then say that they do not have enough leverage to enforce policies with their suppliers. A further issue brought up is that individuals who come with a visa for the cleaning sector often go to households, which of course then makes them a domestic worker rather than a cleaner. Especially in Saudi Arabia, domestic help is very expensive, so families opt for this method. However, this has an impact on social protection for the individual. Under laws governing the protection and rights of domestic workers, this type of worker specifically is granted rights and access to protection mechanisms. These are not equally accessible when they are working for a cleaning company. In the case of Qatar, for example, there is Law No. 15 on Service Workers in the Home,
which was adopted in 2017. It regulates the relationship between domestic workers and their employers and grants them rights that were not previously specified, such as working conditions and hours and the right to change employers (Aboueldahab, 2021). In terms of enforcement, there are loopholes, however, as one interviewee explained:

“Where workers are brought on as general cleaners, but they’re put to work in households as well, not just in establishments. Now, it’s very clear that if you’re working in a household, you come on a domestic worker visa you have social protection, so in fact the Philippines Embassy in Qatar at one point stopped all job orders for cleaning companies because they said this is a grey area. Like you cannot bring in someone on a general cleaner visa and then make them do household work. So the Philippines office actually highlighted that, they have a policy saying how exploitative that could be.”

(Female, NGO/migrant advocacy group)

In addition, there are mega agencies that employ large numbers of cleaners and then send them to businesses and private houses for cleaning, which adds another layer of complexity to the recruitment and employment arrangements of migrant workers in the cleaning sector.

The term “mega recruiters” was used by many respondents to refer to companies that carry out bulk hiring of migrant workers, mainly in Saudi Arabia. Licensing mega recruitment companies was part of immigration procedure reforms that aimed at regulating informal recruitment practices, which resulted in a shift in migration policies towards stronger structural authority of the State over businesses and recruitment regulations in Saudi Arabia (Thiollet, 2021). The policies related to the recruitment of foreign workers imply that the establishment of “mega companies” was for the purpose of mass recruiting overseas workers; consequently, mega recruitment companies have become key actors in the recruitment of foreign workers (Ruhunage, 2014). Although the exact number of mega recruitment companies in operation is not clear, the International Labour Organization’s Decent Work Across Borders Migration Notes reported that 16 large companies have been enrolled under the mega recruitment company concept. These companies procure the services of recruitment agencies in migrant-sending countries like the Philippines, facilitate the provision of working visas by sponsoring migrant workers, and are in charge of worksite placement, salary, accommodation and welfare monitoring of migrant workers (ibid.). The establishment of mega recruitment companies in Saudi Arabia furthermore promises to progressively limit the informal recruitment practices of individual sponsors (Tayah, 2016) and positively impact the current kafala system (the sponsorship arrangement that regulates the relationship between the employer and the migrant worker), which is believed by many to be unfair for the migrant workers (Ruhunage, 2014).
3.2. PRIVATE SECURITY SERVICES

Working in the private security sector is by nature a high-risk occupation. Like the other focus sectors, it is characterized by low wages and long hours. The sector is also by definition more secretive than other sectors. As in many sectors, there are also reports of migrants working as security guards receiving much less pay than they were promised by recruiters (deceptive recruitment), for example in Malaysia (Amnesty International, 2010). In addition, workers reported that they often find themselves housed in cramped and squalid dorms, working long shifts with few days off and having to stand for hours in searing temperatures (Pattisson, 2020).

The main finding regarding private security services, however, relates to the fact that in the GCC the sector has changed over the last few years. Interviewees noted that in recent years, more migrant workers were typically hired from East African countries rather than from Asia to work in security services. It was also highlighted that this increases the risk for discrimination in the sector, as one interviewee stated:

“The security sector you are usually talking to an Egyptian business owner, recruiting a Ugandan worker. And there is huge discrimination there. So even the way that discussions go is different, because of discrimination. So when we talk about rights of workers, if you’re talking to a Filipino about the rights of workers of a Filipino, it’s different than talking to an Egyptian about the rights of a Ugandan worker.”

(Female, civil society organization)
Furthermore, the business model of the private security sector, particularly in the Gulf countries, is different from that of other sectors. As one interviewee explained:

“Security companies, especially in the Gulf, they are a lot of the time part of these big holding groups, so it’s one mega corporation that has business from (poultry) to jewellery and passing through security services. So it’s very difficult to narrow down who the actual company is. Usually, you’re talking to a company from so and so group, but that’s not actually the name of the security company.

(Female, civil society organization)

This situation, paired with the lax regulation and weak oversight that defines the sector, makes it difficult for migrant workers to determine whom to address in case of grievances and makes it easier to hide other shady practices.
3.3. LOGISTICS

The increase of global trade, immigration and flexible production has, in turn, led to the growth of flexible and increasingly insecure labour practices in the global logistics industry (Appelbaum and Lichtenstein, 2006). Jaffee and Bensman (2016), in a study on the logistics sector in the United States, highlight that outsourcing and temporary work lead to precarious working conditions in the logistics sector. As competition increases, there are concerns that international norms on working hours, rest breaks and overtime pay are not respected in the transport and logistics sector, sometimes due to local norms.

Ciscel et al. (2003) also report that migrant workers in the logistics industry are usually not entitled to fringe benefits such as health insurance and pensions, as well as more customary benefits such as sick leave and paid vacations.

In Singapore, one of the world’s biggest and busiest logistics hubs, Jamieson (2020) writes of the disparity between citizens and foreign workers in terms of rights:

Low-wage migrant workers are unable to vote and are not allowed to collectively organise for better working conditions. They are excluded from the Employment Act, covered instead under the Employment of Foreign Manpower, and owing to the lack of any fixed minimum wage in Singapore, are paid far lower than their Singaporean counterparts... Workers seeking adequate compensation for workplace injuries and abuses are stymied by labyrinthine layers of bureaucracy which insulate contractors from subcontractors and often take years to rectify.
During the interviews, the stakeholders further highlighted the issue of there being a lack of salary standardization, with new employees often earning more than those who have been employed longer. This then leads to grievances, and more standardization and transparency would be desired.

At the moment, logistics is also often still overlooked by large brands as an area for potential concerns. As one interviewee noted:

“We know the big global brands are concerned about what goes on in their factories and are adhering to various codes of conduct and then what happens the minute it leaves the factory gates? And then gets shipped to the UK or the US, or wherever else and then freight forwarded and what goes on in the warehouse and stuff like that. We know that not all of these places will be where migrant workers are working and these are wage jobs as well, you know so that makes workers even more vulnerable, most of them will be workers on varying degrees on contract and stuff like that.”

(Male, civil society organization)
3.4. FACTORS INCREASING MIGRANT WORKER VULNERABILITIES

Being a migrant worker is not automatically the equivalent of being vulnerable; however, there are certain factors that do make migrant workers more vulnerable to abuse. There are factors throughout the whole migration trajectory that exacerbate the risks faced by migrant workers. Prior to departure, migrants sometimes have to bear high costs in order to migrate. They have to contend with unethical recruitment practices, including excessive recruitment fees or unscrupulous work contracts and permits. Deployment and arrival in the country of destination might expose migrant workers to further risks and vulnerabilities, including document retention, contract substitution, reduced or unpaid wages, substandard working and living conditions, and restrictions on movement and association (Arcury et al., 2013; Clark, 2013; Moyce and Schenker, 2018). In addition, migrant workers often leave their family and support networks behind and experience social isolation in the country of destination. They also face language and/or cultural barriers, and at times, outright racism and discrimination (Abbasian and Hellgren, 2012).

Compared with citizens, migrant workers are often afforded limited rights and social and legal protections (see Section 5). As many migrant workers come from low-income economic backgrounds, the dire need for employment and fear of deportation prevents them from speaking out and reporting human rights violations (Moyce and Schenker, 2018). Many migrant workers are also not aware of their rights or how to lodge a complaint, and, as explained by the interviewees, even when they are aware, they may not receive adequate remediation or compensation due to ineffective implementation of regulations and complaint mechanisms, where these do exist in the first place. Recourse to justice mechanisms is usually very limited and bureaucratically complicated, and as such, legal remedies even when available are often ineffective in deterring further abuses.

In addition to the factors outlined above, there are institutional or structural issues that reinforce the vulnerabilities of migrant workers. A lack of adequate protective legislation in both origin and destination countries is a primary structural factor that exacerbates migrant worker vulnerabilities. As the Walk Free Initiative points out, many countries are yet to criminalize human trafficking, while those that have done so are often compromised by weak enforcement (ILO and Walk Free Foundation, 2017).

RestRICTIVE immigration policies are another factor. Migrant workers experiencing abuse may be reluctant to report a grievance and more likely simply to put up with the situation, especially when their right of residence in the destination country is tied to their employment status. Employer-sponsored permits severely limit the options of migrant workers and prevent them from leaving an abusive or exploitative employer. Despite often insecure work contracts and inadequate social protection in destination countries, migrant workers tend to accept risky conditions to avoid unemployment or deportation (Fasani and Mazza, 2020).

A third factor is racism and discrimination. In Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, for example, Wongsamuth (2019) reports that most of the citizens have negative attitudes towards migrant workers. These three countries are typical destination countries for Asian migrants, and a survey conducted by the ILO and United Nations Women reveals that the public does not support proposals for migrants to receive
the same salaries and benefits as local workers. The belief that migrant workers are draining social, economic and political resources continues to persist and fuel racism, xenophobia and hate towards migrant workers.

Finally, migrant worker recruitment and employment models are often designed in a way that leaves workers vulnerable and protects the employers’ interests instead. With regard to security, cleaning and other ancillary services, for example, Sedex (2020:1) calls attention to the workforce structure and notes the following:

Typically, the sector is labour-intensive and relies on low-skilled workers, often migrants, recruited by agencies or other third-party labour providers and/or employed by contractors. This creates complexity in the employment relationships and uncertainty about rights, as well as specific risks such as inadequate training. Workers may be employed on part-time, temporary, or variable hours contracts, contributing to increased job insecurity and vulnerability. Legal regulations and rights may be different for some groups of contracted workers compared to regular workers.

Many recruitment agencies recoup their operating expenses from the workers rather than the employers, and the costs for migrant workers are compounded when there are several (sub)agencies and brokers involved in the recruitment process. In addition, the complex and multilayered recruitment system makes it challenging to identify responsibility and monitor compliance. The IOM CREST case studies, illustrating how ethical recruitment considerations can be integrated within the procurement of labour recruiters’ services, address this issue in more detail. Other migrants are forced into bonded labour or debt bondage, one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery, in which migrant workers are forced to work for an extended period for little or no wages to repay debts contracted previously.
4. COVID-19 AND RISKS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS
As discussed above, the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered living and working conditions for migrant workers, not just in the focus sectors, but in general. This section will discuss this in more detail, by first explaining the COVID-19 related risks for migrant workers in general and then specifically within the three focus sectors of this report.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated many of the risks and vulnerabilities that migrant workers face. As the United Nations points out, the effects of the pandemic are indeed “harshest” for those already in vulnerable situations pre-pandemic (United Nations, 2020:2). While undocumented migrant workers are especially vulnerable, a combination of factors poses challenges for all migrant workers during the pandemic. They experience the compounding effect of job loss or reduced wages while at the same time having to deal with a fast-spreading virus and potentially additional health-care costs and having limited access to social welfare and benefits (Siegel, 2020). This has far-reaching consequences. The “pandemic precarity” (Perry et al., 2021:1) also leads to reductions in their capability to send remittances, which in turn negatively impacts the material welfare of their families and the community, as well as the broader economy in the country of origin (Siegel, 2020).

Crowded accommodation, lockdown measures and lack of access to adequate health care has also put many migrant workers at a greater risk of COVID-19 infection (Interviews; Karasapan, 2020). The interviews highlighted that undocumented workers especially were often afraid to report symptoms, because they were afraid of being detained. Importantly, regular migrant workers also became undocumented during the pandemic when they could not leave the country due to travel bans and visas not being extended.

The pandemic has also caused a global economic recession, which for many migrant workers translates into massive unemployment, unpaid wages through failing businesses or wage theft, arbitrary detentions or deportations as residence and work permits expire, and a growing need for basic necessities. Many migrant workers have also been stranded due to travel bans or unaffordable tickets.

Table 4 gives an overview of the main risks to migrant workers that have been highlighted in the academic and grey literatures. These were also confirmed during the interviews conducted for this report.
The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected global supply and value chains across all industries. It has shifted supply and demand and many businesses have been forced to slow or stop production and lay off workers (Voss, 2020). An IOM (2021) study on the impact of COVID-19 on returned Filipino overseas workers showed that 19 per cent of all overseas Filipino workers reported that their contracts had been terminated early, 59 per cent never received their compensation or separation pay, and 17 per cent did not receive their final wage payment. The study also shows that women were more affected than men.
Migrant workers, especially women and primary family caregivers, are often employed at the lower end of the supply chains:

> These workers, integral to the global economy, are largely part of the hidden workforce of global production and already face poverty wages, dangerous and unsafe working conditions and very few if no social protections. Migrant workers in supply chains also face unique risks, as a result of inadequate and crowded living conditions, harsh containment measures and discrimination (BHRRC, 2021, para. 1).

A joint publication by the Asian Development Bank et al., (2021) also underscores the deficits in decent work and exclusion from protection of migrant workers in the lower segments of the global supply chain. While the pandemic reduced the deployment of labour migrants in Asia, informality, non-standard forms of employment and the use of intermediaries is still very much the common practice, and migrant workers in many global supply chains remain vulnerable to various forms of discrimination and are afforded limited or no legal protection. In Singapore, which is a typical migration destination country, Sen (2020) reports within the COVID-19 context that cleaners, security workers and others on the front line against the pandemic receive wages that are not commensurate with the actual value of the services they provide to society during the global public health crisis.

The economic squeeze of the pandemic has also led to an oversupply of labour, which then potentially leads to contracts not being honoured and workers not being paid regularly (Voss, 2020). Interviews also highlighted that the pandemic led not only to many migrant workers losing their employment, but also to their repatriation, often without receiving back pay, essentially suffering wage theft. In addition, migrant workers often have fewer avenues to file complaints against abuses, as many official places, such as, for example labour courts, were closed for certain periods of time which led to large backlogs.

Meanwhile, in cases of job shortages, the possibility of exploitation increases for jobseekers and those who are able to secure employment (ibid.). Dickson and Warren (2020) note that this is particularly true for migrants who are reliant on recruitment agencies and brokers that take advantage of difficult economic situations. They may levy higher than usual fees, and migrants in dire need of employment may be forced to downplay risks and put up with exploitative employment conditions for lack of better options.

The same economic hardships have also increased the risks of human trafficking for the most vulnerable migrants, not only because workers are desperate to find employment, but also because the attention of government is focused on the health and economic emergency situation, which often lets employers’ practices go unnoticed (Fellows and Chong, 2020). The pandemic has also significantly disrupted the ability and capacity of antislavery organizations to fight modern slavery, with governments and donors shifting priorities from social and environmental considerations to economic recovery, and public attention to the risks of modern slavery being overshadowed by the COVID-19 crisis (Lucas and Landman, 2021).
As Christ and Burritt (2021:1485) argue, “desperation and exploitation are inherently connected”, and as such, the pandemic is expected to result in an increased number of desperate and vulnerable workers who may ultimately become trapped in modern slavery (see also Section 4.4).

The spread of COVID-19 increases the risk of vulnerability to modern slavery as states struggle to provide appropriate protections, private businesses seek ever cheaper forms of labour, and criminal organizations exploit the crisis for illegal gain (Lucas and Landman, 2021:315).

The interviews and literature also both highlight that those involved in elementary jobs, including migrant workers in the cleaning, logistics and private security sectors, face the greatest risk in terms of occupational safety and health for three main reasons:

1. The jobs they perform are deemed as essential services and can typically not be done remotely;

2. The pandemic has led to a sharp rise in activity and therefore, increased workloads and longer working hours; and

3. Many stay in worker accommodations where physical distancing is not possible.

Moreover, the pandemic has highlighted how migrant workers in ancillary services are essential, yet for the most part they are excluded from protective measures. Interviewees also drew the attention to the fact that while migrant workers in these sectors were often “glorified” as essential workers, they did not receive any of the benefits that should come with this. In particular, they often did not receive the appropriate protective equipment.

Many businesses struggle to identify the right balance of measures and safeguards to protect workers from being exposed or spreading the virus, including through limiting physical interaction of work, the introduction of enhanced sanitary measures and encouraging teleworking, while keeping essential services going. For companies in key sectors such as health care, security or food production, the crisis may lead to a sharp rise in activity, thereby causing workers to have to work under unsafe conditions and/or overtime, which may impact their wellbeing, health and family life. Women may be particularly affected, as they form a large proportion of the work force in exposed sectors such as food retail and health care, while often at the same time having to manage child care during school closures (OECD, 2020:3).
4. COVID-19 AND RISKS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

The OECD also notes that those sectors with large shares of migrant workers doing elementary jobs are facing a range of knock-on effects, as housing arrangements put these workers at greater risk of contracting and spreading the virus further. Citing Singapore as an example, Koh (2020) argues that matters related to unsatisfactory housing and social overcrowding have significantly heightened the vulnerability of migrant workers during the pandemic. As the virus spread, it became apparent that it was impossible for 15 to 20 migrant workers sharing a room, toilet, kitchen and dining areas to socially distance. It is no wonder that in August 2020, 90 per cent of infections were traced to migrant workers’ dormitories (ILO, 2021c).

Finally, the interviews also highlight the expectation that COVID-19 will lead to a steep increase in costs for migrant workers, as they are required to pay for additional measures, such as vaccinations, health certificates and quarantines, and sometimes even have to provide their own personal protective equipment (PPE). As the restrictions on movements ease and the global economy begins to recover, the deployment of migrant workers has restarted, yet challenges remain. ILO survey respondents indicated that in Asian countries, where the processing of work visas halted for a time, recruiters responded by deploying workers on tourist visas. This is concerning as workers are then migrating irregularly, do not have access to certain services and social protection benefits, and are at risk of detention and deportation. As noted by migrant workers in countries of origin that plan to remigrate, COVID-19 has increased the costs of recruitment and deployment. The governments of Nepal and Indonesia have responded by making it a requirement that foreign employers or placement agencies pay the additional costs of deployment caused by COVID-19, such as testing, quarantine or vaccination. However, they do not have the jurisdiction to enforce this in the country of destination. The ILO specifically reports that Nepal’s attempts to require this of Malaysian employers has been unsuccessful (Jones et al., 2021).

The following subsections will discuss COVID-related risks in the three focus sectors in more detail. Note should be taken that while many of these issues are not new, the pandemic has brought (renewed) attention to them.

4.1. CLEANING SERVICES

Cleaning is an essential service and workers can generally not work from home, including since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Increased exposure to COVID-19, inadequate PPE, increased workload, fatigue and stress are some of the COVID-induced risks for migrant workers in this sector specifically (WorkSafe Victoria, 2021). The pandemic has increased demand for cleaning workers, particularly also in the health-care sectors (Sahai et al., 2021), and for many of them, jobs have become more focused on quantity over quality. They work in high traffic environments, in close contact with other people, and they frequently touch potentially contaminated surfaces or handle infectious waste. Particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, there was also a shortage of PPE. When workers do not contract COVID, they suffer from skin and eye irritations from industrial-grade disinfectants.
4. COVID-19 AND RISKS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Confirming this, *Occupational Health & Safety* (2020) calls attention to the particular vulnerabilities of migrant cleaning workers:

*Cleaning workers—many of whom are lower-income, immigrant workers, statistically speaking—are at a uniquely vulnerable place in this crisis. Not only do they work directly with pathogens and infectious germs, but they often struggle to gain access to medical care and public health information in their own language and lack the financial resources to stock up on food and medicines.*

This was also corroborated by the interviewees for this study:

> Within that [the COVID-19 pandemic] we also saw a particular spike comparatively in cases involving health and safety violations, poor living conditions and access to food. And I think that was really very very stark.
> (Female, civil society organization)

Other concerns about employers’ treatment of workers also came to light. While larger companies compensated their entire workforce, low-skilled migrant workers placed by subcontractors often had no work or pay arrangements and, as a consequence, did not receive compensation even when they fell ill with COVID-19. Many simply lost their jobs without any access to income support schemes. As there is high demand for cleaning jobs, recruitment agencies and subcontractors found it easy to replace workers, taking advantage of the economic hardships many are facing and perpetuating the vicious cycle of abuse and exploitation (*Occupational Health & Safety*, 2020).

4.2. PRIVATE SECURITY SERVICES

The DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, which has member States from the Asia-Pacific region, observes that while the pandemic has not fundamentally changed the private security industry, it has exacerbated existing challenges and gaps, particularly those related to the training of staff and employee working conditions (Schnabel et al., 2021).

Overall, the COVID-induced risks for migrant workers in private security services are not very different from those in the cleaning sector. It has also been categorized as an essential service or critical occupation that does not easily lend itself to a remote mode of working. Security officers have also been on the front lines against COVID-19, in hospitals, in vaccine and testing centres, keeping food chains...
going, in warehouses and premises. Reports, however, indicate that security guards have some of the highest COVID-19 mortality rates compared with other occupations, not only because they generally work in close proximity with others, but also because following data from the United Kingdom, most of them are typically low-paid, and a high number of security guards are migrants or from ethnic minority groups who are found to have a higher risk to die from COVID compared with white people. As MacLeod (2020) explains:

Private security contractors are moving into new public spaces as a direct consequence of COVID-19 by positioning themselves as humanitarian actors and, for example, carrying out public health testing, and tracking and tracing services… In many countries there are almost certainly links with additional high-risk duties, low pay, poor health, and other inequalities for countless workers in the sector, coupled with weak oversight and monitoring by States.

In Singapore, an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the security industry underscores the same phenomenon:

With enhanced nationwide regulations aimed at mitigating the spread of the virus announced nearly every week, security personnel have found their job responsibilities growing and changing at every turn. Since the early stages of the outbreak till now, they have to take on additional roles such as temperature screening and recording for contact tracing purposes, filling in of health and travel declaration forms, and conducting stricter access and crowd control at shopping malls (The Security Times, 2020).

Because of this, there has also been an upsurge in the demand for private security and contracting and licensing procedures to be expedited. The Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS) and UNI Europa (2020) warn of “bad contracting practices” including forcing contractors to lower rates and deploying workers in substandard working conditions.

4.3. LOGISTICS

During the pandemic, the logistics sector has been among those that were hit hardest, while at the same time being recognized as essential (BSR, 2020). In most countries, logistics services are essential in the social and economic context of the country in terms of supplying essential goods and production materials. During the pandemic, medical supplies needed to be distributed, and the importance of keeping supermarket shelves stocked and the role of truck drivers and other logistics workers in this process was fundamental. Furthermore, many countries implemented border restrictions, or in some cases even closures, for road freight
transportation. In addition, measures such as social distancing, lockdowns and closures of non-essential businesses affected workers in this sector adversely (Arab Trade Union et al., 2020).

As with the other two focus sectors, many workers in the logistics sector cannot work from home due to the nature of the work and must continue to interact with workers and other persons in their workplaces, which are usually poorly ventilated warehouses. This means that they have continuous exposure to the virus through contact with contaminated objects and co-workers alike (Safe Work Australia, 2020).

Sedex (2020) reports that the main challenge for the industry is managing surges in demand. The industry has experienced a boom during the pandemic, as it is vital in ensuring an adequate supply of critical goods. However, this means that drivers have been working longer hours and the risk of fatigued driving has substantially increased. Hippold (2020) adds that closed rest stops and increased waiting times at checkpoints or borders are also putting immense pressure on transportation workers globally.

4.4. COVID-19 AND THE INCIDENCE OF FORCED LABOUR, TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

In 2017, the Walk Free Initiative together with the ILO and in partnership with IOM estimated that 40 million people were victims of modern slavery, which includes forced labour, forced marriage, human trafficking, debt bondage and other slavery-like practices. Of these, 24.9 million are people in forced labour, meaning that they are being forced to work under threat or coercion, often hidden in plain sight. The majority are linked to the private economy and global supply chains, which means that many forced labourers play a role in the production of some of the food we eat and the clothes we wear. They have cleaned or guarded the buildings in which many of us live or work. They have worked in the fulfilment centres or warehouses of our favourite online stores or driven transport and delivery vehicles with our parcels. About half of these forced labourers are trapped due to debt (ILO and Walk Free Foundation, 2017).

Almost 25 per cent of the global 24.9 million of victims of forced labour are migrant workers. Many migrants use recruitment agencies that charge high brokerage fees, resulting in personal debts that must be repaid through deductions from wages; and since many labour brokerage practices remain informal with no contracts of employment, debt bondage usually leads to a considerable risk of further abuse (ILO, 2017). In addition to conditions and practices akin to modern slavery, migrant workers face various kinds of risks, both physical and psychological. Economic difficulties may compel migrant workers to take on hazardous jobs or tolerate difficult conditions. Occupational hazards, exposure to dangerous substances and conditions, working in locations with low safety standards, low wages, long hours of work, verbal and physical abuse and harassment, and psychological stress are just some of the risks migrant workers have to deal with constantly (Moyce and Schenker, 2018).
While this situation is generally known, determining whether there has been an increase or decrease in the incidence of forced labour, trafficking and exploitation (modern slavery in general) due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the focus sectors, or with low-skilled migrant work in general, is a challenging task. This is in part due to the general challenges associated with producing such statistics and also because COVID-19 introduced further challenges for data collection. However, based on the information available, the rate of exploitation of low-skilled migrant workers appears to have increased. As a result of restrictions of movement to decrease transmission of COVID-19, in-person survey interviewing was suspended in a number of countries. As organizations such as the ILO attempted to adopt remote surveying techniques, they faced challenges such as inaccurate phone numbers for survey participants (Walsh and Discenza, 2021). Therefore, the following information comes from a variety of sources including surveys, self-reported data and tracking media publications. While calculating the impact of COVID-19 on the trafficking and exploitation of migrant workers is challenging, a number of reports suggest an increase in the rate of labour rights abuses against migrant workers as a result of COVID-19. Identifying information specific to the focus sectors is not possible, but it can safely be assumed that most of the trends described below include or also apply to these workers.

4.4.1. Trafficking risks

According to the United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report 2021, the number of victims of trafficking has increased from 85,613 in 2018 to 109,216 in 2021. The report highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in the number of people experiencing economic and social vulnerability due to new regulations, including travel restrictions and a decrease in economic activities. As a result, the report finds that the number of individuals vulnerable to human trafficking has increased during the pandemic (U.S. Department of State, 2021). The poorest members of each community will be the most vulnerable as they are more willing to take risks to improve their situation.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) found that traffickers took advantage of the follow pre-existing factors, represented as a percentage of trafficking in persons cases:

- 51 per cent economic need;
- 20 per cent child with a dysfunctional family;
- 13 per cent intimate partner as trafficker;
- 10 per cent mental or behavioural or neurological disorder;
- 10 per cent immigration status;
- 9 per cent child deprived of parental care;
- 6 per cent limited education or knowledge of foreign language;
- 3 per cent physical disability.

Economic need was the most frequently cited pre-existing factor. As COVID-19 impacts migrant workers’ financial situations through termination of contract, wage theft, or return to country of origin, workers with economic needs face a higher risk of human trafficking. During COVID-19, thousands of migrant workers were repatriated. Many of these workers are suspected to be in debt, as they still need to repay the debt they accumulated to pay recruitment fees, linking back to the vulnerabilities caused by the typical recruitment arrangements described above. Additionally, employers may have taken advantage of mass repatriation to avoid paying workers their due compensation before termination and
4. COVID-19 AND RISKS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

repatriation (Migrant Forum in Asia, 2021a). An IOM study on returned overseas Filipino workers found that 17 per cent of the respondents did not receive their salary before they returned (IOM, 2021).

Furthermore, an ILO survey found that almost 75 per cent of recruiters in the Philippines and Nepal reported delaying the deployment of workers during the pandemic. For workers who had already paid recruitment fees, this was problematic. They rarely had their fees reimbursed and had often taken a loan to pay the fee, placing them in financial hardship (Jones et al., 2021). Overall, these various situations brought on by COVID-19 have increased financial difficulties for many migrant workers and therefore increased their risk of being trafficked. Furthermore, research shows that even migrants with regular status tend to prefer jobs with a higher risk of exploitation if the pay is higher than the alternatives. This may be because of multiple structural disadvantages that make them willing to take bigger risks (UNODC, 2021).

4.4.2. Labour abuses in South and South-East Asia

As mentioned above, migrant workers are overrepresented among those infected with COVID-19 in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. This is likely a result of crowded living spaces and migrant workers’ lack of access to health care, as reported by several organizations. The campaign group Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) points out for example that in Singapore, foreign workers are usually housed 12 to 20 people per room in double-deck beds (TWC2, 2020). Migrant workers in this city State account for 38 per cent of the workforce; however, they constituted more than 90 per cent of Singapore’s COVID-19 cases (ILO, 2021c). Migrant workers in Malaysia account for 15 per cent of the workforce, while foreigners accounted for 30 per cent of Malaysia’s COVID-19 cases (Asian Development Bank et al., 2021). These numbers further highlight the vulnerable situations migrant workers face.

Besides infection, several other trends can be observed in terms of impacts of the COVID-19 on migrant workers and the conditions under which they work in the region. In Malaysia, for example, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) provides assistance to migrant workers experiencing labour abuse. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Government of Malaysia instituted a Movement Control Order (MCO) in hopes of minimizing the spread of COVID-19. The order allowed only essential workers to continue working. The MTUC “received some 300 complaints about employees who had been retrenched or told to go on unpaid leave during the MCO, or who had had their salaries cut” (FMT, 2020). From the start of the pandemic to mid-April 2020, the most common violations reported by the MTUC were:

- Unfair termination;
- Unpaid wages;
- Poor living conditions;
- Employers requiring workers to continue working in jobs that are non-essential;
- Uncertainty about employment status due to limited contact with employers.
IOM Bangladesh conducted a rapid assessment of returned migrant workers between July and September 2020. The study reported that 21 per cent had not received their last wages, while nearly half of these respondents stated that they did not anticipate receiving their due wages in the near future. Furthermore, 42 per cent stated “they would be paid once they returned to work for the same employer who owed them said wage” (Migrant Forum in Asia, 2021a:10).

Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA) opened an online platform to collect information on wage theft during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cases could be registered by migrant workers still in their destination country or those in their country of origin, the latter often being those who sought the help of MFA members. From November 2019 until January 2021, there were over 1,000 cases reported, including the number of individuals reported in group cases. This total also includes cases in the focus sectors: 52 of the cases filed were in transportation, which includes logistics transport as well as taxi drivers and such, while 29 of the cases filed were in sanitation, including those with contractual cleaning duties, many of which cases included working overtime without pay. From January 2021 to May 2021, 1,113 new cases were reported on the website. During this period, 12 cases were reported in the transportation sector and 25 were reported in the sanitation sector. The destination countries with the highest number of cases were the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Migrant Forum in Asia, 2021b).

Many destination countries have laws requiring employers to deposit a worker’s salary directly into their bank account as a means of preventing wage theft, but these policies have often proved to be insufficient. On the MFA online platform, workers reported, among other complaints, being paid cash after a significant wage cut, as well as being forced to sign waivers on pending wage claims or statements saying they received all their wages. Additional complaints were related to forcing workers to withdraw money from their account to pay back recruiters and being threatened when they questioned their wages (Migrant Forum in Asia, 2021a).

Further information comes from a rapid assessment of migrant workers’ situations in ASEAN conducted by the ILO at the beginning of the pandemic and through a follow-up survey between mid-October and December 2020. Respondents included those in countries of destination and countries of origin. The respondents primarily came from Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Bangladesh. A smaller number of respondents came from Nepal, China, Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and other countries. In the first rapid assessment survey, 32 per cent of the respondents stated that they faced challenges or abuses related to COVID-19. In the follow-up survey, 64 per cent reported challenges or abuses related to COVID-19 (Jones et al., 2021). The following table summarizes the main findings.
## Table 5: Migrant worker vulnerabilities in ILO rapid assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In countries of destination</th>
<th>In countries of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% of men and 69% of women were still employed.</td>
<td>51% voluntarily left their employment; 9% had contracts end early and received compensation; 28% had their contract end early and did not receive compensation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About half of the employed workers had their wages decrease due to the pandemic.</td>
<td>88% did not receive any assistance from the host government or their country of origin’s embassy before they returned home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59% of working respondents said their employer provided PPE, 35% said they had to buy PPE for themselves.</td>
<td>49% of returnees paid for their return journey themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About 79% of those working stated they had enough physical space at work to practise social distancing, and about half had enough space in their accommodation to do so.</td>
<td>Of those who desire to remigrate foremployment, 83% stated they believe the costs of migrating are now higher; 61% stated they would seek a loan to cover the migration costs and 37% said they would have the costs deducted from future wages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of the unemployed migrant workers, 52% had their contract terminated early without compensation.</td>
<td>Almost half of those with plans to remigrate were experiencing delays and 79% stated that those delays were related to COVID-19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those unemployed, 43% received social security, unemployment benefits, or funds from a government emergency support scheme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of the remaining 57% who were unemployed and receiving no assistance, the majority stated they had no savings to meet their basic needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, 17% reported their accommodation was crowded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jones et al. (2021).
4. COVID-19 AND RISKS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

4.4.3. Labour abuses in the Gulf Cooperation Council

The interviews for this study revealed that many migrant workers from traditional countries of origin like the Philippines are deployed to the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Upon consultation with IOM, a decision was therefore made to expand the geographical focus of the study to include these GCC countries as countries of destination.

Since 2016, the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) has been tracking “publicly reported allegations of labour rights abuse against migrant workers in the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE” (BHRRC, n.d.b:1). BHRRC only tracks alleged abuses by corporate entities, therefore these data exclude domestic workers. The information is collected by monitoring the media and tracking 20 indicators of labour abuse.

Between April and August 2020, BHRRC recorded 80 reports of labour abuse; this constitutes a 275 per cent increase from the same period in 2019. Furthermore, workers in 95 per cent of the cases reported COVID-19 as a key or worsening factor in their situation (Archer and McMullan, 2020). Per usual, the most common labour abuse reported was non-payment of wages. Non-payment of wages was reported in 81 per cent of the cases reported, amounting to a 240 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2019. Health and safety concerns were reported in 33 per cent of the cases. This represents a 520 per cent rise in these cases compared with the same period in 2019. More specifically, in 24 per cent of cases, “[w]orkers stated they lacked access to adequate medical care or insurance” (ibid.). Furthermore, inadequate or inhumane living conditions were reported in 52 per cent of the cases, most frequently due to cramped living spaces. In one report, 72 workers were sharing one bathroom. This amounts to a 380 per cent rise compared with the same period in 2019. Insufficient access to food was reported in 39 per cent of cases, amounting to a 220 per cent rise in these cases compared with the same period in 2019. About two thirds of these reports came from workers in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, even though the governments mandated employers to provide food to employees.

Reviewing the cases reported for the logistics, security and cleaning sectors from 2019 to October 2021 demonstrates a clear increase in the focus sectors in the number of alleged abuses during 2020. The number of cases then decreased again in 2021, however remaining slightly higher than 2019 rates. More specifically, 17 of the 70 reported cases were from the cleaning, logistics and security sectors in 2019. The reported cases ranged from one to 3,000 affected workers. In 2020, 52 of the 227 reported cases were from the cleaning, logistics and security sectors. The reported cases ranged from one to 2,000 affected workers. Finally, 24 of the 99 reported cases were from the cleaning, logistics, and security sectors from January through October 2021. The reported cases ranged from one to 4,000 affected workers (BHRRC, n.d.a).
5. SOCIAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES AVAILABLE TO MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE FOCUS SECTORS
Social protection can be defined as “the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle.” (ILO, 2017:1). Going by international standards, countries of destination are supposed to include migrant workers within their general social protection mechanisms, based on the principle of equal treatment. In reality, migrant workers face significant challenges in this regard in many countries, especially when it comes to those working in lower-skilled sectors, such as the focus sectors of this study. This is the case both long term, but also specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. National governments have a large role to play in social protection policies for migrant workers, on the side of both countries of destination and of origin. At the same time, companies, associations and civil society can also institute social protection initiatives. In the case of migrant workers, these policies and initiatives focus on information sharing, advocacy and commitments to ethical business practices.

5. SOCIAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES AVAILABLE TO MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE FOCUS SECTORS

5.1. LONG-TERM GOVERNMENT SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICIES FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Governments of both migrant workers’ origin country and country of destination play an important role in ensuring the safe and healthy employment of migrant workers. Migrant sending and receiving countries may develop bilateral agreements or memoranda of understanding that specify policies and procedures for employing migrant workers. Despite these agreements, labour abuses still occur; and crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted and increased risks of exploitation and forced labour. Both countries of origin and destination have introduced new programmes or expanded existing social protection schemes to assist migrant workers since the beginning of the pandemic. In countries of origin, COVID-specific assistance is primarily targeted towards returned migrants who are unemployed. In destination countries, on the other hand, migrant workers were not always included in the COVID-19 social protection schemes. COVID-19 provides an opportunity for governments to re-evaluate their social protection policies as they relate to migrant workers to create stronger long-term protections.

5.1.1. Origin countries’ social protection measures for migrant workers

The options for origin countries to provide social protection to their nationals working abroad are diverse and include the provision of information, overseas workers’ welfare funds, extension of national social protection schemes to migrant workers and the portability of social security benefits.

Another key source of protection for migrant workers in the country of origin is the regulation and monitoring of recruitment agencies. As discussed above, recruitment in the focus sectors can significantly increase the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers, and regulation and monitoring can contribute significantly to the protection of migrant workers. Recruitment agencies are regulated in Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

In Bangladesh, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training regulates recruitment agencies and processes labour migration applications (Rashid and Ashraf, 2018). District Employment and Manpower Offices have also partnered with IOM and the United Nations to open Migration Resource Centres...
to promote information about safe migration. Nonetheless, in Bangladesh many migrants still depend on informal agents and social networks for information on migration, over state institutions or formal recruiters, thereby increasing their risk of exploitative fees and practices (ibid.).

In 2017, Indonesia passed the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers law, which revised the previous law regulating the protection of migrant workers (Husni et al., 2020). The new law greatly reduced the role of the private sector by creating one-stop government offices to handle all the paperwork and documentation related to applications for migrant visas. The private sector’s role was diminished to being only involved in migrant worker placement. The law aimed to reduce exorbitant fees charged by the previous recruitment and placement agencies, which put migrants at risk of bonded labour and other exploitation. The law also gave a larger role in protecting migrant workers to local and central governments, from the pre-departure phase all the way through return from work abroad (ibid.).

The 2017 Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers law brought significant amendments to the previous laws, yet the implementation has encountered various challenges that need to be addressed in order to protect migrant workers’ rights strictly (Khairazi, 2021). According to the law, only workers who acquire the needed competence and meet the requirements are allowed to work abroad. In addition, national and local governments are responsible to provide and facilitate the training of potential Indonesian
migrant workers. Moreover, the supervision will be carried out through One-Roof Integrated Service Offices (LTSA) by the local government. The problem here is that the number of LTSA in different regions is limited, and there is a lack of coordination among regional and national governments that weakens the supervision quality. Another challenge is that potential migrant workers can be attracted to good opportunities abroad in light of the new law, while lacking knowledge about their rights and duties. This can lead to cases of exploitation by employers. In addition, migrant workers do not receive proper pre-departure training for the work they are hired for, thus they might fail to carry out their work obligations. Furthermore, these workers do not receive education on their rights to protection, rights to work based on the provisions of contracts, or rights to additional salaries, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation as well. Therefore, additional revision of the laws and regulations related to migrant workers can be considered essential (ibid).

In the Philippines, the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995 requires recruitment agencies to receive certification from the State as a means of regulating agencies and preventing human trafficking (Debonneville, 2021). The State also emphasizes pre-departure training for migrants to understand their rights. The government has also attempted to reduce the costs of recruitment and placement agencies; however, their efforts have not yet had the desired effect. In an effort to protect migrant domestic workers from accumulating high costs, the Philippines has banned placement fees. In response, recruitment agencies began charging processing fees to cover administrative expenses related to obtaining visas and organizing travel. The processing fees vary greatly depending on the country of destination, with Western European and North American countries costing more than ASEAN countries (ibid.). More recently (30 December 2021), the president of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte signed Republic Act 11641, a law creating a new national ministerial office to improve coordination among agencies concerned with overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and OFW affairs. To be known as the Department of Migrant Workers, one of its core mandates is to regulate the recruitment, employment and deployment of OFWs (Ranada, 2021). However, it is not expected to commence activities before 2023 (Patinio, 2022).
The National Assembly of Viet Nam has revised the Law on Contract-Based Vietnamese Overseas Workers to increase regulation of recruitment agencies (ILO, 2021b). The revision process began prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the law was approved on 13 November 2020. The revised law bans certain recruitment fees and sets maximum limits for others. High recruitment costs put migrants at risk of debt bondage and other forms of exploitation, therefore decreasing such costs will decrease migrant workers’ risk. The revised law includes the following and went into effect on 1 January 2022:

► “[T]he removal of the obligation for migrant workers to pay brokerage commissions and an explicit prohibition on recruitment agencies passing these costs on to workers” (ibid.).

► “Removal of the obligation for migrant workers to pay service fees in addition to brokerage commission to public employment services” (ibid.).

► Migrant workers will be able to end contracts unilaterally “in situations of threats, sexual harassment, maltreatment or forced labour” (ibid.).

► Provision of legal assistance for migrant workers in instances of abuse, violence, or discrimination.

► Recruitment agencies that provide false information, promises, or advertising or collect illegal fees, may have their recruitment agency licence revoked.

► Requirements for pre-departure training to include information on “forced labour, trafficking in persons prevention, gender equality, sexual abuse, gender-based violence and prevention skills” (ILO, 2021b).

Another common requirement for migrant workers is pre-departure training. The training typically informs migrant workers of their rights and responsibilities while abroad. Such training is currently mandated in Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines (HRWG, 2020). In addition to the pre-departure training, Indonesia requires all potential migrants to undertake a physical and mental health screening prior to their departure. Once in the destination country, Indonesian migrant workers must present themselves at the Representative of Indonesia and are once again informed of their rights (Asian Migrant Centre, 2016).

Countries of origin have also instituted compulsory or voluntary social insurance schemes. In Indonesia, there is a mandatory social insurance scheme for migrant workers abroad. While the recruitment agency must pay the premium, neither the agency nor the employer is responsible for paying the insurance fees and the costs are often recouped from the employee’s salary. The insurance covers pre-departure, during placement abroad, and after return for a specified time. While abroad, the insurance covers: death; illness and disability; accidents inside and outside of working hours; termination of employment; unpaid wages; legal issues; problematic deportations; physical violence; rape/sexual harassment; insanity; transfer of migrant worker to another workplace not in accordance with contract; and failed placement through no fault of the migrant worker (Olivier, 2018).
In the Philippines, mandatory insurance schemes are paid by the recruitment agency and cover accidental death, permanent total disablement, medical evacuation and repatriation, and subsistence allowance during cases of litigation in the destination country. In addition, overseas Filipino workers may voluntarily contribute to the same social security scheme as those working in the Philippines. However, overseas Filipino workers must pay both the employer and employee portion, which amounts to 11 per cent of gross monthly earnings. Overseas Filipino Workers may also voluntarily contribute to a supplemental pension savings plan specifically set up for overseas workers (ibid.).

Vietnamese social insurance law covers workers abroad and provides retirement and death benefits. In addition, the Overseas Employment Assistance Fund provides assistance to Vietnamese workers “when they are at risk” (Olivier, 2018:99). Examples include the case of “death, occupational accidents, and other objective risks such as loss of employment” (ibid.).

From December 2019, the Bangladesh Government required overseas workers to have health insurance. Migrant workers abroad could choose between two plans and the government subsidizes 500 Tk of the premium for each plan (Bhuyan, 2019).

5.1.2. Destination countries’ social protection measures for migrant workers
Destination countries have also enacted social protection policies to protect migrant workers. However, these policies may treat migrant workers differently than citizens. In Malaysia, for example, all migrant workers have had health insurance coverage since 2011. However, migrants pay higher medical fees than citizens (Olivier, 2018). Additionally, social protection policies sometimes exclude certain professions (often domestic workers), or types of migrant workers (such as temporary or seasonal workers). Migrant workers in Malaysia are provided sick leave and maternity benefits, apart from domestic workers, who are explicitly excluded in the law. Malaysia also provides migrant workers the opportunity to voluntarily contribute to a social security scheme and the workers may withdraw their contributions upon leaving Malaysia (ibid.).
In Thailand, migrant workers are included in the existing social security scheme and receive injury or sickness benefits, maternity benefits, invalidity benefits, death benefits, child benefits, old-age benefits and unemployment benefits. If migrant workers leave Thailand, they can receive their contributions to old-age benefits in a lump sum. However, various occupations as well as temporary and seasonal workers are excluded from this social security programme. On the other hand, all workers in Thailand, except informal workers and those explicitly excluded in the law such as domestic workers, are entitled to temporary disability benefits, permanent disability benefits, medical benefits and survivor benefits. Furthermore, in 2017 the Thai government adopted measures to further protect migrant workers, including “greater flexibility for migrant workers to change employers”, “enhancing workers’ awareness on their rights”, government shelters for victims of human trafficking and protection from deportation for victims of human trafficking (Olivier, 2018:92).

In Hong Kong SAR, China, labour laws limit placement agencies from charging more than 10 per cent of the first month’s salary. However, in practice migrant workers report being charged 25 times that amount (Cheung, 2017). Labour laws also set a minimum wage for migrant workers, but this minimum is lower than that for Hong Kong citizens. Specifically, in 2015, the migrant worker minimum wage was equivalent to USD 3.30, while the minimum wage for Hong Kong citizens was equivalent to USD 3.86 (ibid). Finally, in instances where an employer’s business is doing poorly or closes altogether, the Hong Kong Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund supports workers’ wages. This fund is employer-funded through annual contributions by those companies with business registration certificates (Asian Development Bank et al., 2021; Authorities of Hong Kong SAR, China, 2021).

5.2. LONG-TERM PRIVATE AND INDUSTRY-BASED SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

As mentioned above, other actors besides governments of countries of destination and origin might also provide social protection mechanisms to migrant workers. One long-term social protection policy comes from the commitment of companies to do business ethically. The Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment consists of companies and organizations that aim to create ethical recruitment in their supply chains (IHRB and Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment, 2019). Company members include, but are not limited to, Unilever, Walmart, Target, Nestlé and Hewlett Packard (IHRB, 2021). Members of the group have committed to paying recruitment fees on behalf of their employees to shift the burden of such fees from employee to employer. In addition, they advocate for simplified and transparent recruitment practices, simplified visa processes, and government enforcement of migrant worker regulations (IHRB and Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment, 2019).

Similarly, Teyseer Security in Qatar scored highly on ethical recruitment and accommodation in an audit by the ethical trade consultancy Impactt (Building and Wood Workers’ International, 2021). All employees have medical, life and disability insurance. In addition, the company has agreements with several clinics that provide their employees with doctor consultations and medication free of charge. Finally, “annual return air travel expenses” are assured through a monthly allowance (Building and Wood Workers’ International, 2021:13). Teyseer Security Services is providing security services for the Supreme
Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), the committee in charge of overseeing the construction of infrastructure for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. While Teyseer Security has received a positive review, it is worth noting that the treatment of migrant workers in relation to the construction of World Cup infrastructure has received a lot of criticism.

Other social protection measures include informing migrant workers of their rights. The National Trade Unions Congress (NTUC) in Singapore consists of many unions, including the National Transport Workers Union and Supply Chain Employees Union. The NTUC operates Migrant Workers’ Centres where they provide advice to migrant workers on employment matters, workplace issues and more. The NTUC also has legal clinics where union members can receive free legal advice on employment issues and get to know their rights (NTUC, 2021).

When it comes to information provision and protection mechanisms, civil society also plays a crucial role. As indicated by the interviewees, NGOs and CSOs are trusted by the communities they support, and that trust is an important factor. A specific example of an organization where abuse can be reported is Migrant Forum in Asia’s Justice for Wage Theft platform (Migrant Forum in Asia, 2021c).

Trade unions and associations create guidance memos for their members and advocate for better business practices. The Workplace Safety and Health Guidelines for the Private Security Industry, jointly published by the Union of Security Employees and Security Association Singapore, provides recommendations for the private security industry. Beyond general recommendations to assess risks and maintain a safe work environment, the guidance also recommends that employers provide proper equipment for security personnel, which may include body cameras, proper footwear and reflective vests. The guidelines state that security personnel should only perform the duties they were hired and trained to do. They should not assist with building maintenance or other tasks beyond their job duties. Finally, the guidelines also address fatigue and mental illness, and how employers can support employees with these issues by providing rest areas and breaks, encouraging healthy diets and exercise, checking in with employees, and maintaining clear communication (Security Association Singapore, 2021b).

Finally, the potential role of technology is also important to mention in this context. Technology is and can be of great use in assessing and analysing migrant workers’ conditions and therefore contributing to their protection. An example of this is Apprise, which was developed as a tool to support front-line responders in identifying victims of forced labour and human trafficking. The application is downloaded on front-line responders’ phones, but is ultimately a tool in the hands of potential victims. A broad cross section of stakeholders worked together to design an app that is user-friendly and appropriate for use with State and civil society actors. Screening questionnaires were developed for different sectors and translated in the most common languages among migrant workers’ communities. Apprise is currently used in the fishing and seafood processing sector and the entertainment industry. Further exploring how this tool and technology more generally could contribute to the social protection of migrant workers, including those in the focus sectors, would be worthwhile (Interviews; Apprise, 2020).

---

2 Available at https://cs.unu.edu/research/migrant-tech-apprise.
Overall long-term social protection policies by private actors focus on ethical business (in recruitment and treatment of workers), information sharing and advocating for better business practices. Beyond what is described above, based on the work done for this study it was not possible to identify initiatives specifically in the focus sectors.

5.3. SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR MIGRANT WORKERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

5.3.1. Origin countries’ COVID-19 social protection policies
The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in mass unemployment and border closures around the world in early 2020. Many migrant workers returned to their country of origin because their contracts had ended, their contract was terminated, or they wanted to return home before borders closed. Countries of origin rolled out responses to assist both repatriated migrant workers and those who remained abroad.

The Philippines provided a one-time cash transfer equivalent to USD 200 to Filipino migrant workers experiencing job displacement related to the pandemic and who were not receiving aid from their previous employer or the country where they worked. Migrant workers were eligible if they were physically present in either the Philippines or the country where they work and were not receiving any other compensation or support (Government of the Philippines, 2020).

The Indonesian Government assisted in the repatriation of those who wanted to return and distributed food packages to Indonesians abroad. They distributed 451,325 food packages in Malaysia, which is the country that hosts the most Indonesian migrant workers (House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

Bangladesh helped repatriate workers and provided the equivalent of USD 58 to returned migrant workers. Returned migrants were also eligible for a loan to assist them during these difficult times (IOM, 2020).

Viet Nam reimbursed migrant workers’ broker fees if they were forced to return due to the pandemic; and labour recruiters were only allowed to charge a service fee for the number of months the migrant worker was employed abroad. Additionally, the Overseas Employment Support Fund provided overseas workers a one-time payment of 5 million Vietnamese đồng (around USD 215. ibid.).

5.3.2. Destination countries’ COVID-19 social protection policies
When looking at social protection for migrant workers in countries of destination during the pandemic, it is important first to mention, as done by the interviewees, that in many countries temporary migrant workers were excluded from general protection mechanisms. In some cases, there were also efforts to provide information to migrant workers in their own languages on safety measures to stay healthy during the pandemic, though, as discussed below, the protection of migrant workers was compromised when this was not undertaken.
An ILO survey of migrant workers in the ASEAN region discovered that 89 per cent of migrant workers that had remained in the destination country during the COVID-19 pandemic were still employed. However, of those who were unemployed in their destination country, 97 per cent did not receive social security support (ILO, 2020a). Additionally, “in countries of destination, 32 per cent of currently employed respondents said they faced employment challenges or abuses related to COVID-19” (ILO, 2020a:5), such as early contract termination, lack of protective equipment and missing back-pay (see Section 4.4 for more information). The survey demonstrated the challenges facing the migrant worker population, particularly those who remained in destination countries.

Social protection responses that benefited migrant workers in destination countries either aimed at assisting employers and businesses by reducing their costs, or directly assisting migrant workers. However, similarly to migrant workers often being excluded from standard social protection schemes in normal times, they were often excluded from COVID-19 specific measures as well. For example, Malaysia installed a wage subsidy programme to prevent job loss that excluded migrant workers (HRWG, 2020). Migrant workers were excluded from a one-time cash transfer in Thailand. Hong Kong SAR, China, announced a one-time cash transfer of USD 1,290 for all permanent residents aged 18 and up in March 2020. In August, they announced a one-time cash transfer of the same amount for newly arrived non-permanent residents, aged 18 and up, with a low income. However, this was not available to temporary migrant workers (ibid).

Several short-term responses to the crisis aimed to alleviate the financial costs of companies to keep business open and employees on payroll. In April 2020, the Malaysian government reduced costs for employers by reducing the levy fee for employing migrant workers by 25 per cent for migrant workers whose work permits were to expire between April and December 2020 (ibid). However, as the costs of hiring a migrant worker are high, employers may have chosen to hire undocumented migrants rather than extending contracts of current employees, to avoid paying the fee altogether. Similarly, Thailand and Malaysia both temporarily reduced employer and employee contributions to social security to relieve financial pressure (ILO et al., 2020). Hong Kong SAR, China, provided a subsidy to employers to cover half the costs of their employees’ salaries for six months, in two rounds of three months each from June to November 2020. To qualify, employers had to have contributed to the mandatory provident fund (a requirement of all registered companies) and have the same number of employees as they did in March 2020 (Authorities of Hong Kong SAR, China).

Regarding policies that directly impacted migrant workers, a common response of destination countries around the world was to automatically extend migrant visas for those about to expire. In South-East Asia, Thailand temporarily extended all visas, whereas Hong Kong SAR, China, gave employers permission to extend the visas of domestic workers (HRWG, 2020). Hong Kong SAR, China’s extension policy was employer-centric as it failed to support migrant domestic workers whose employers did not want to extend their employment. As most migrant workers’ status is tied to their employment, fired migrant workers are often required to leave the country. In Hong Kong SAR, China, migrant domestic workers whose contracts ended or were terminated, and who were unable to leave the country due to border closures, were held in migration detention facilities (ibid.). Therefore, while visa extensions were generally viewed as helpful for migrant workers, at times their implementation failed to fully protect migrant workers.
One response for those who lost employment was the extension or increase of unemployment benefits. In Thailand, unemployment benefits were extended to migrant workers who had contributed to social security. While the inclusiveness is commendable, its application limited the benefits for migrant workers for several reasons. First, migrants had to be physically present in Thailand to receive the benefits, and the programme was announced after the borders had closed and many migrant workers had returned home. Second, the application was only available in Thai, creating a language barrier for some. Finally, employers had to assist in the application process, and misinformed employers believed it was only available to Thai citizens (ibid).

During this time, destination countries also extended medical benefits to previously uncovered migrants. Thailand made medical treatment for COVID-19 free of charge to all residents by extending Universal Coverage for Emergency Patients to all patients with COVID-19 (ILO et al., 2020). The Vietnamese government took on the costs associated with testing, treatment and providing individuals in quarantine with a food subsidy. When borders reopened, Thailand required new and returning migrant workers to quarantine and be tested for COVID-19. Associated costs were the employer’s responsibility (ibid).

One long-term response to the crisis came from Malaysia, which implemented “new regulations on workers’ housing and amenities at the end of August 2020” (Asian Development Bank et al., 2021:53) after cramped living quarters became an issue with the spread of COVID-19 around the world. Malaysia now requires one bathroom and one toilet for every 15 people, and 3.6 square metres of sleeping space per person (ibid).

It should also be noted that among the efforts made by destination countries, several challenges emerged. While governments created materials, such as websites, to provide the public with up-to-date information on the virus and regulations, in Hong Kong SAR, China and Malaysia this information was rarely translated beyond the native language in a timely manner, making it inaccessible for many migrants. In addition, in Hong Kong SAR, China, most migrants receive their news from social media, and the government did not post translations of their official information on social media. Several NGOs took it upon themselves to translate and share the information instead (HRWG, 2020).

Another challenge was scaling up social protection programmes in a timely manner. With regards to cash transfers and similar payments, those already receiving similar social benefits were able to receive payments quickly. However, in cases where the system needed to be built up or include many new people, payments were delayed. In Hong Kong SAR, China which announced a cash transfer for permanent residents in February 2020, payments were only expected to start in July (ILO et al., 2020).

Another challenge faced by migrant workers during the pandemic was increased discrimination. Statements targeting migrants as carriers of COVID-19 spread through the media. In Thailand, comments by government officials exacerbated the issue. A survey of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong SAR, China found that four in five experienced increased discrimination during the pandemic. Some migrant workers reported being fired after falling ill and 80 per cent were unaware that they could file complaints with the Equal Opportunities Commission (HRWG, 2020).
5.3.3 Private and industry-based social protection for migrant workers

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic a number of short-term social protection initiatives by other actors also emerged. The NTUC in Singapore provided support to union members through one-time cash transfers “of up to $300 to eligible union members who are facing hardship due to COVID-19” (NTUC, 2021). Eligibility included having a 30 per cent or more drop in income, cancelled jobs for self-employed workers, or workers losing their job “due to retrenchment or termination/non-renewal of contract” (ibid.).

More commonly, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, industry associations published guidance for their members. For example, Security Association Singapore published recommendations on screening for high temperatures and visible symptoms of respiratory illness at entrances to premises in May 2021 (Security Association Singapore, 2021a). In addition to describing the proper procedures security guards should take, the circular states “Security Agencies and Service Buyers are jointly responsible for providing the officers deployed to health screening duties with the necessary Personal Protective Equipment”, security officers should be trained in dealing with non-cooperative individuals, and “there must be a clear process for the escalation of situations” (Security Association Singapore, 2021a:5).

The aforementioned Workplace Safety and Health Guidelines for the Private Security Industry also provided recommendations specific to working during a pandemic. In regard to a pandemic, the guidelines stated that health and safety measures include social distancing where possible, staggering work and break hours, provision of PPE, monitoring and declaration of employees’ health, and encouraging good personal hygiene. It states that employers should provide regular information updates to their staff, move to remote supervision, and take advantage of technology where possible, for example with thermal imaging (Security Association Singapore, 2021b).

Another response that addressed the COVID-19 pandemic with the long term in mind was granting paid leave to employees when they received the vaccine. When the Authorities of Hong Kong SAR, China, announced a campaign to provide the COVID-19 vaccine for the public, the Federation of Hong Kong Industries encouraged all staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and granted employees up to two days of paid leave to facilitate receiving the vaccine. Those who received the vaccine earlier will still receive an additional two days of paid leave (Federation of Hong Kong Industries, 2021).

In summary, short-term social protection policies varied from providing material assistance, informing workers of their rights, encouraging best practices, and providing time off in case of illness and in order to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.
5.4. GAPS IN SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

To summarize the above, it can be said that private and industry-based social protection mechanisms are less focused on providing material assistance than are government social protection policies. Private and industry-based initiatives more often concern informing migrant workers of their rights and advocating for best practices. These social protection policies are a starting point; however, there are some shortcomings, and the social protection for migrant workers, especially temporary ones, can still be improved. This includes those migrants working in the focus sectors and their specific vulnerabilities described in the previous section.

First, not all social protection policies consider migrant workers specifically and some fail to meet the specific needs of migrant workers. An example of this is the Tripartite Alliance Limited in Singapore, which consists of the Ministry of Manpower, National Trades Union Congress and Singapore National Employers Federation. Their mission is to be an “effective mediator, committed partner and advocate for great work practices” (Tripartite Alliance, 2021). The Tripartite Cluster for Cleaners suggested increasing the minimum wage of Singaporean and permanent resident cleaners from 2023 to 2028, and the Singaporean government later passed the resolution (Ang, 2021). Distinctively, however, temporary migrant workers were excluded from this mandatory wage increase. The NTUC assistant director-general stated the recommendation is that companies pay migrant workers the same wages as citizens and permanent residents, yet it is problematic that they are not obliged to do so (ibid.).
Second, while bilateral labour agreements, where they do exist, aim to increase the protection of migrant workers by facilitating labour migration and the portability of social security and health insurance benefits across countries, there are, in practice, several challenges. These schemes tend to favour highly skilled labour by including permanent residency requirements that neglect low-skilled, seasonal, or temporary labour. Further, the majority of bilateral labour agreements are between high-income countries, followed by agreements between Northern and Southern countries, and least of all between Southern countries (Hennebry, 2017). Besides bilateral labour agreements, many agreements also take the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between a country of origin and a country of destination. The ILO notes that an issue with such MoUs and bilateral agreements more generally is that they lead to differences in protection for migrant workers from different countries, based on the details of the respective agreement applicable to them. In Malaysia, for example, Filipino workers are considered to be the most protected due to a strong MOU negotiated by their government. A more comprehensive and stronger protection system for migrant workers would therefore apply sector-wide or to all migrant workers and should not be based on the nationality of the worker (Olivier, 2018).

Moreover, it is important to expand legal migration pathways, particularly to address clear demands of the labour markets in countries of destination. Including migrants in social service programmes is essential, as is the creation of immigration policies that recognize the value of low-skilled workers by going beyond a skills classification immigration system (Kumar et al., 2021).

Additionally, several international organizations came together to analyse social protection responses in ASEAN related to COVID-19 and proposed suggestions for long-term enhancement of social protection systems based on gaps that were identified (FAO et al., 2020). First, short-term measures should be transformed into long-term programmes that provide social protection. This includes, for example, expanding social assistance programmes, employment programmes to assist jobseekers, and the provision of free nutritious school meals. Further, ASEAN countries should invest in their operational systems of social protection programmes. This includes digitalization of the social protection delivery chain (especially digital payments); “identifying and integrating broader vulnerabilities, such as climate related shocks”; creating pre-agreed funding mechanisms to allow for a quick reaction to various risks; and strengthening the coordination of “social protection, health, disaster management, livelihoods, and climate change sectors to increase efficiency” (FAO et al., 2020:6). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought considerable attention to government social protection policies and provides an opportunity for countries to re-evaluate policies to better address migrant workers’ rights and needs in the recovery from the pandemic and beyond. In this light, the ILO calls upon developing countries to “[s]eize the opportunity provided by the COVID-19 wake-up call to accelerate building universal social protection systems” (ILO, 2020b:1), which would contribute significantly to the protection of (regular and irregular) migrant workers.
6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The present study provides first insights into the specific risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrants from Asian nations in the cleaning, logistics and private security sectors. In doing so, both the longer-term and the specific context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic were looked at. What can be said is that risks and vulnerabilities, as in many other lower skilled sectors, arise, on the one hand, due to the recruitment and employment arrangements common in these sectors and, on the other hand, due to weak social protection frameworks and insufficient enforcement of regulations in countries of destination and origin. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the mixed-methods approach used, consisting of desk review and semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders, it remains unclear how representative these findings are of the experiences of migrant workers in the focus sectors more broadly, especially as these might also differ across different countries of destination.

The main findings of the report can be summarized as follows. First, it became clear both during the desk review and the interviews that migrant workers in the focus sectors face many of the same risks and vulnerabilities commonly cited in the existing literature when it comes to other low-skilled sectors. This includes issues related to recruitment practices, such as the widespread use of subcontracting and deceptive recruitment practices, which increase risks of exposure to forced labour. In addition, wage delays, wage theft and unpaid overtime are common issues, as well as challenges with regard to occupational safety and health. It can also be said that, while information is scattered and not comprehensive, the rate of exploitation of low-skilled migrant workers appears to have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially workers in the focus sectors, whose occupations were all deemed essential during the pandemic and where working from home is not possible, were exposed to increased risks of contracting the virus in the workplace or in their accommodation, while also often having to work longer hours.

However, there are also some sector-specific risks that very much relate to the recruitment and employment arrangements common in the focus sectors, along with the fact that work in these sectors can be classed as essential, which especially increased the vulnerabilities experienced by workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. When it comes to the cleaning sector, demands for cost effectiveness have led to increased competition, outsourcing and subcontracting. In turn, outsourcing of cleaning services by the hospitality industry, for example, has resulted in less oversight over working conditions and infringements of the rights of workers. During the pandemic, an increased exposure to COVID-19, inadequate PPE, increased workload, fatigue and stress are some of the risks cited for migrant workers in this sector. Private security services are by nature a high-risk occupation. In this case, the business model is slightly different. While outsourcing is a bit less common, these services are often part of big holding companies. In these cases, it is unclear who is responsible for oversight. While the pandemic has not fundamentally changed the work in the private security sector, it has exacerbated existing challenges, and the classification as essential workers during the pandemic exposed these workers to similar risks as those in the cleaning sector. Finally, in the logistics sector, difficult multilayered supply chains equally lead to lack of oversight and consequential risks and vulnerabilities for migrant workers in this sector. Workers often work in poorly ventilated warehouses, where continuous exposure to the virus during the pandemic through contact with contaminated objects and co-workers is common. Furthermore, the surge in demand as a result of the pandemic and the need to supply critical goods meant that drivers have been working longer hours and the risk of fatigued driving has substantially increased.
6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Keeping in mind these findings, as well as the limitations explained above, the following recommendations can be put forward for different stakeholders. First, however, an overall recommendation is to ensure that workers in the cleaning, logistics and private security sectors are considered essential workers both during the pandemic as well as beyond. However, this has to go hand-in-hand with ensuring that classifying migrant workers as essential does not add to their vulnerability. This is the case, for example, when limits on overtime are lifted when a worker is “essential”, as is the case in Singapore. Further recommendations are grouped by the main stakeholder group to which they are addressed, though some also encourage cooperation among different stakeholders.
Governments of countries of origin (CoO) and destination (CoD)

- Inclusion of essential workers in social protection mechanisms and enabling access to health-care services. (CoD)
- Migrants regardless of their immigration status, especially those in essential jobs, should be included in vaccination strategies, including outreach to migrant communities to raise awareness. (CoD)
- Working with CSOs in terms of the outreach to migrant communities as they already work with the communities and often have their trust. (CoD and CoO)
- Provision of information on access to social protection mechanisms in migrant worker languages or in easily accessible formats such as pictures and infographics. (CoD)
- Allow migrant workers to search for a new job while in the country of destination, including provisions that allow them to stay after their contract expires to find a new opportunity. (CoD)
- Better gear pre-departure training and information towards the recipients, including repeat migrants, and recognize that this is only efficient in combination with other protection mechanisms in place and effective ways to assert their rights. (CoD and CoO)
- Introducing or strengthening information exchange systems through which migrant workers can easily communicate complaints is important, and awareness of these platforms needs to be raised among migrant workers. (CoD and CoO)
- Support for migrant workers in the focus sectors upon return needs to be ensured, including access to existing assistance. (CoO)
- Criminalize human trafficking and strengthen enforcement of existing legislation aimed at the protection of migrant workers. (CoO and CoD)
- Increased cooperation between countries of origin and destination across a range of components, such as examining the coherence and complementariness of legal provisions in both countries, emphasizing proper implementation of these provisions, and also increasing transparency and communication. (CoD and CoO)
- Expand legal migration pathways, particularly to address clear demands of the labour markets in countries of destination. This includes including migrants in social service programmes and creating immigration policies that recognize the value of low-skilled workers by going beyond a skills classification-based immigration system. (CoD and CoO)
Governments should ensure that data are collected on all of these sectors, e.g. when collecting census data. Only by making visible the people who work in these sectors can programmes be designed appropriately. (CoD and CoO)

Increasing pressure on companies to focus on using ethical recruitment agencies (see IOM CREST report on ethical recruitment). (CoD and CoO)

Making information for migrant workers, particularly low-skilled workers, more accessible and working with international organizations and non-governmental organizations on compiling and disseminating information. (CoD and CoO)

Recruitment agencies

- Provide clear, transparent and accurate information on important aspects of the recruitment process, including their rights, to migrant workers.

- Carry out due diligence checks on employers and accommodation of migrant workers to ensure that the conditions match the details in migrant worker contracts. This requires having agreements in place with the employers that allow regular checks of this kind.

- More focus should be placed on matching skills and jobs to avoid deskilling on the one hand, but also to ensure that people have the necessary skills, especially in sectors like private security, where the job is risky if people do not have the right skills and experience.

Employers

- Increased engagement of the private sector with governments, for example on labour mobility opportunities or the costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Employers should pay the costs of quarantine and the costs of testing for workers newly deployed during the pandemic, as well as PPE and other protection measures for current migrant workers that are necessary to protect their health at the workplace and in their accommodation.

- Look at the entire supply chain to ensure ethical recruitment standards are met not only at the production facilities, but also in other parts of the operations such as cleaning, logistics and security.
Implement wage guarantee mechanisms to address wage arrears resulting from a sharp business downturn or collapse. There are a number of wage and humanitarian support funds in Asia and the GCC, for example the Singapore Migrant Workers Assistance Fund and the United Arab Emirates Wage Insurance Scheme, which are usually industry or employer financed, at least partially, and which should be considered more widely in the region.

In the private security sector, more transparency of business models would be important to enable monitoring and for workers to address the right department of the company for litigation.

In the logistics sector, there is a need for salary standardization and transparency. When demand increases and new workers earn more than old, transparency would allow workers to be aware of their rights to fair wages.

**NGOs and CSOs**

Continued and improved provision of information to migrant workers in the focus sectors about their rights, including cooperation with governments of countries of destination and origin in this regard.

As mentioned in the report, the role of technology in increasing the protection of migrant workers deserves attention, and tools like Apprise are useful to undertake sentinel surveillance to detect changing patterns of exploitation in order to identify these practices earlier and then be able to respond, which could prevent a lot of abuse and decrease risks for other migrant workers.

**IOM**

Develop a deeper understanding on the role of subagents, which was not possible within the framework of the present study, but is important more generally to understand fully the complex, multilayered recruitment systems in the focus sectors and others.

Recognize that the risks and vulnerabilities are to a large extent more related to the country of destination than is the sector in which the migrant worker is active. More country-specific research would therefore be important to understand fully some aspects, for example the cleaning sector in some GCC countries, where the line between domestic workers and cleaning companies is blurring increasingly.
7. ANNEXES
ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

IOM CREST Sector-specific Risks Research Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company/ Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview introduction

Thank you very much for accepting to speak with us. We are Lalaine and Mohammad and we are researchers from Maastricht University/UNU-MERIT in the Netherlands.

As we mentioned in the concept note and invitation we shared with you, we have been commissioned by the International Organization for Migration to conduct a research study on the risks associated with migrant workers in the sectors of cleaning, logistics and private security.

The goal of the project is to investigate what the common risks are and how these may have been affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The information you provide will contribute to understanding risks that exist in each sector, the factors that lead to these risks as well as the consequences of the pandemic in this context.

I would like to assure you that the information obtained will be used exclusively for scientific purposes and is treated with strict confidentiality.

This means that anything you say during the interview and any comments you make will not be linked to your name. When we report on findings from interviews, selective quotes may be used, but they will not be linked to you personally.

Please let us know if you are not comfortable with answering any of the questions that will be asked later on.

For better data security, we are not going to use Zoom’s built-in online recording function. We will use instead “old-fashioned” offline voice recorders.
Do we have the permission to record the interview? The audio file will be shared only within the research team to ensure that we represent your views accurately.

Can you please confirm that you give your consent to participate in this study and to have this interview voice recorded? And would you be okay if we mention your name and organization in the report, or would rather that we don’t and keep it confidential?

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

Note: Questions were selected based on profile of interview partner

Section 1: Profiling

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself?
   • What is your current position?
   • How long have you been in this position?
   • What are the responsibilities attached to your position?

2. Can you talk about your experience engaging with migrant workers?

3. In your experience and engagements with migrant workers, can you describe their process or experience in adjusting to a foreign country?

4. Are you aware of the most common factors why migrant workers decide to work…
   • In the [cleaning, logistics, or private security] sector?
   • In [insert country of destination]?

Section 2: Migrant workers and recruitment

1. Do you have any experience in recruiting and deploying workers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?
   • In which countries are they usually deployed?
   • How many migrant workers do you generally recruit for work in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?\(^3\)
   • How many men/women?
   • Can you describe the general profile of the migrant workers you recruit in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]? (Educational background, skill level, age range, communication abilities in the local language)

---

\(^3\) The use of brackets indicates that the question will be adjusted according to the particular sector(s) in which the stakeholder is active.
2. How do you receive the job orders? Do you actively solicit them or do companies (overseas principals) or foreign recruitment agencies come to you directly?

3. Who exactly do you deal with overseas? Who is your primary point of contact and which other entities are involved in the employment of migrant workers? [How do you find the overseas principals?]

4. What are the most common criteria that migrant workers have to meet to get a job in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?

5. Can you walk us through the common process for the recruitment of migrant workers?
   a. If there is anything you could change to improve your current recruitment process for migrant workers, what changes would you recommend?

6. Can you talk about the most common arrangements you have with employers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?
   a. What type of services do you offer?
   b. What type of services are most commonly requested by the employers?

7. Can you talk about the most common arrangements you have with migrant workers looking for jobs in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?
   a. What type of services do you offer?
   b. What type of services are most commonly requested by migrant workers?

8. What kind of fees do (a) migrant workers and (b) employers have to pay for your services? How high are they?
   • [Make sure to clarify who pays which part]

**Section 3: Employment arrangements and conditions**

1. How do you monitor the living and working conditions of the migrant workers you recruit and deploy?

2. What kind of employment contract is generally provided to migrant workers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?
   • Are the contracts with you or directly with the employer?
   • Full-time or part-time?
   • Duration? Renewal options?
3. What kind of information do you provide to (potential) migrant workers before and during the recruitment process?
   a. Employment conditions
   b. Contract duration
   c. Other

4. Who pays migrant workers’ salaries?
   • When and at what frequency are migrant workers paid?
   • How are they paid (cash, check, bank transfer)?

5. What are the common challenges that migrant workers face in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?

6. What are the typical issues or concerns migrant workers report to you and how do you address them?

7. How would you describe the living situation of migrant workers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?
   • To what extent do they live in dormitories?
   • If so, what are the conditions there?
   • If so, is this a requirement by the employer or could they live wherever they want?

8. As far as you know, are there differences in the experiences of migrant workers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)] based on their gender?

9. Based on your experience and the feedback gained from the workers you help recruit, do their expectations of the job match with their current employment conditions?

Section 4: COVID-19

1. How did the pandemic affect your business operations?

2. From your perspective, what have been the impacts of COVID-19 on the working conditions of migrant workers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?

3. Has the pandemic affected the labour and living conditions for the migrant workers you recruit and deploy? Are there differences in the kinds of issues they raise now and before the pandemic?

4. From your perspective, what have been the impacts of COVID-19 been on the housing conditions of migrant workers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?
5. From your perspective, what other impacts has the COVID-19 pandemic had on migrant workers in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?

6. Do you expect that the COVID-19 pandemic will have any long-term effects on migrant workers and their working conditions in the [cleaning, logistics and/or private security sector(s)]?

**Section 5: Protection of migrant workers**

1. What are the protection mechanisms you have in place for the migrant workers you recruit and deploy?
   a. Can you talk about how you inform workers of your available protection mechanisms?
   b. Are you aware of any social protection mechanisms provided by the government or NGOs of [insert country of destination] to migrant workers?
   c. Which actors are you aware of that are working on this issue?

2. Have there been any specific protection mechanisms for migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
   a. Who provides these services?
   b. Are you aware of how information on these protection mechanisms is disseminated?

3. To what extent do migrant workers make use of these protection mechanisms?
   a. What do you think are reasons behind your answer?
   b. What are common challenges that they bring forward?

4. In terms of protection mechanisms for migrant workers, can you please share some of your best practices? What is your key to success?

5. What else could be done to (further) strengthen protection mechanisms for migrant workers? Is there anything else that can be done to promote the ethical recruitment of migrant workers?

**Section 6: Closing**

1. Is there anything else you would like to mention regarding your experience running a recruitment agency and deploying cleaning, security, and logistics workers?

2. May we please get in touch with you again by email perhaps should we have follow-up questions?

3. Can you please connect us with your recruitment personnel? [in case the interview doesn’t cover the recruitment process]

4. Would you be willing to introduce us to some of the migrant workers you have recruited/your partner RAs overseas/the facility owners or companies you work with? [for snowballing, select as applicable]
8. REFERENCES
REFERENCES

Abbasian, S. and C. Hellgren

Aboueldahab, N.

Amnesty International

Ang, J.
2021 Cleaners in S’pore to see wages increase over 6 years from 2023 under progressive wage model. Straits Times, 7 June. Available at www.straitstimes.com/singapore/cleaners-to-see-wages-increase-over-6-years-from-2023-under-progressive-wage-model.

Appelbaum, R. and N. Lichtenstein

Apprise

Arab Trade Union, International Transport Workers’ Federation and Danish Trade Union

Archer, I. and D. McMullan

Asian Development Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Labour Organization

Asian Migrant Centre

Authorities of Hong Kong SAR, China

Bhuyan, O.U.

Building and Wood Workers’ International

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC)

Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)

Cheung, I.

Christ, K.L. and R.L. Burritt
Ciscel, D.H., B.E. Smith and M. Mendoza

Clark, N.

Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS) and UNI Europa

Debonneville, J.

Dickson, M. and H. Warren

Fasani, F. and J. Mazza

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), German Red Cross, European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Federation of Hong Kong Industries

Fellows, J. and M.D. Chong
Free Malaysia Today (FMT)  

Government of the Philippines  

Guadagno, L.  

Hennebry, J.  

Hennebry, J. and H. KC  

Hippold, S.  

House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia  

Human Rights Working Group (HRWG)  

Husni, L., R. Cahyowati and Mansur  

Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB)  
IHRB and Leadership Group for Responsible Recruitment

International Labour Organization (ILO)


International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

8. REFERENCES

Jaffee, D. and D. Bensman

Jamieson, W.

Jones, K., S. Mudaliar and N. Piper

Karasapan, O.

Khairazi, R.

Koh, D.

Kumar, C., E. Oommen, F. Fragapane and M. Foresti

Lucas, B. and T. Landman

MacLeod, S.

Migrant Forum in Asia

Moyce, S.C. and M. Schenker

National Trades Union Council (NTUC)

Occupational Health & Safety

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Olivier, M.

Ollus, N.

Panikkar, B., D. Brugge, D.M. Gute and R.R. Hyatt

Patinio, F.

Pattisson, P.

Perry, B.L., B. Aronson and B.A. Pescosolido


Ruhunage, L. 2014. Review of country specific regulatory and policy framework related to international recruitment industry and identifying best policy options and mechanisms to ensure exemplary behavior of recruitment agencies—A Desk Review. *Decent Work Across Borders Migration Notes*. ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.


Sedex  

Sen, N.J.  

Siegel, M.  

Tayah, M.-J.  

The Security Times  

Thiollet, H.  

Tripartite Alliance  

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)  

United Nations  

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)  
U.S. Department of State

Voss, H.

Walsh, K. and A. Discenza

Wills, J.

Wongsamuth, N.

WorkSafe Victoria