

Chair's Summary
Regional Workshop on Migrants' Health
27th-28th August 2015, Bangkok, Thailand

The Regional Workshop on Migrants' Health was held on 27th August 2015, in Bangkok, Thailand, followed by a study visit to Samut Sakhon Province on 28th August 2015. The meeting was jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The workshop successfully served as an important opportunity for the various stakeholders from 23 countries from Asia, Europe, Americas, and Australia, including international development partners and civil societies to raise and address salient issues related to migration and their health challenges.

The objective of this workshop is to share experiences and good practices in exploring ways to strengthen access to and ensure sustainable and inclusive health services for migrants. The Workshop began with introductory remarks by Mrs. Kanchana Patarachoke, Deputy Director General, Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, and was officially opened by Mr. Piriya Khempon, Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, followed by a keynote speech by Dr. Suriya Wongkongkathep, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, reiterating the significance of migrant health protection. Some examples from Thailand, which extends the universal health coverage to migrants and dependants, were noted.

Participants heard from Mr. Promboon Panitchpakdi, Raks Thai foundation, about the role of non state actors in filling the gaps in migrant health services. Then, Ms. Mon Mon, a migrant worker in Thailand, shared the experience of her family with Thai health care system.

The first panel discussion was moderated by Mrs. Rabab Fatima from IOM. Panelists offered insights into the regional and global trends and challenges of migrants' health situation while stressing the urgency for collective and sustainable solutions to the problem. In detail, Dr. Davide Mosca from IOM highlighted the critical importance of inclusion of migration health within multiple agendas at the nexus of health and development, the operationalization of the 2008 WHA61.17 Resolution on Health of Migrants, and migrant-inclusive universal health coverage and portability of health care, requiring a strong commitment from all multi-sector partners. Mr. Mohammad Harun Al Rashid from CARAM Asia Berhad also reiterated the gaps between policy formulation and implementation. Ms. Jintana Sriwongsa from the ASEAN secretariat pinpointed the progress made within ASEAN and highlighted that migrant health has been identified as one of the health priorities for ASEAN Post – 2015 Health Development Agenda to be endorsed by the 12th ASEAN Health Ministers Meetings, September 2015. Dr. Nima Asgari from the World Health Organization (WHO) presented experiences and lessons learnt from managing migrant health insurance in certain member states in ASEAN, as well as the cooperation among WHO, ASEAN member states and other partners.

The second panel discussion was moderated by Ambassador Krerkan Roekchamnon, Deputy Permanent Representative Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva. Discussants elaborated on policy designs and practices of

both sending and receiving countries. Some effective mechanisms were discussed, for instance; how the Sri Lankan government incorporated migrant health issues into its national political agenda; good practices from the Philippines that protect health benefits of overseas Filipino migrants; how the Spanish government successfully provided essential health care for undocumented migrants under certain conditions; and how the Swiss government engages the private sector to take part in providing health insurances for migrants regardless of their immigration status.

After that participants had an opportunity to engage in two group discussions, which explored in more detail the issues of (1) access to inclusive health services and (2) sustainable financing of health system for migrants.

During the entire workshop, participants actively discussed possible ways forward to promote health and well being of migrants and their dependants throughout the migration path as follows:

THE WAY FORWARD

At the national level:

1. Strongly encourage the operationalization of the 2008 World Health Assembly Resolution on Health of Migrants (WHA61.17) by mainstreaming migrant health into national and sectoral policies and thereby promote better coherence amongst health and non-health policies that may affect migrants' health and their ability to access a continuum of preventive and health care services throughout the migration cycle;
2. Increase active engagement of relevant domestic and international health and non-health agencies, civil society, private sector, migrants, as well as other beneficiaries of migration, in the policy formulation and implementation processes of inclusive policies, national strategies and action plans, which aim to protect the health and well being of migrants and their dependents;
3. Strengthen existing mechanisms and collaboration amongst various government agencies that protect the right to health of both inbound and outbound migrants with sufficient budget and supportive measures, as well as identifying a national focal point to facilitate the implementation of the policies;
4. Encourage the provision of medical assessments at both pre-departure and upon arrival while ensuring compliance with international standards with proper consideration to confidentiality and counseling;
5. Provide health education for migrants and dependants through relevant government and non-government agencies to ensure the proper implementation of public health measures;
6. Promote inclusive health coverage for migrants and dependants with acceptable standard of care and essential benefit packages at all levels of care, in particular primary and emergency health care;
7. Develop a national standard within the primary health care system that includes migrant sensitive services to address cultural and language barriers;
8. Promote better understanding of migrant health concerns, including barriers to accessing health services throughout the migration path and migration related health challenges, amongst all stakeholders;
9. Promote an effective monitoring system which adequately and accurately records important migrant profiles, while ensuring confidentiality and proper use of the data;

10. Explore ways to assist irregular migrants and dependants to enter the regularization mechanism;

At the bilateral, regional, and international levels:

11. Encourage bilateral agreements that ensure social protection for migrants and portability of health insurance throughout the entire migration path;
12. Promote multi-sectoral collaboration between health and non-health networks to establish inclusive health policies for migrants;
13. Encourage legal channels of migration and ensure that health of migrants and their dependants are protected through health insurance schemes that provide essential benefit packages without causing catastrophic expenditure on migrants and their dependants;
14. Maximize the use of existing regional mechanisms, such as the Colombo Process, Abu Dhabi Dialogue, ASEAN, SAARC, Joint UN Initiative on Migration, HIV and Health in Asia (JUNIMA) among others, to address migrant health issues in a collaborative manner;
15. Explore regional information-sharing mechanisms that can be accessed by member states in order to identify and share good practices of health services for migrants and their dependants;
16. Support multi-country partnerships to facilitate uninterrupted management for conditions necessitating long-term/continuing treatment; and
17. Encourage the inclusion of health of migrants in the broader international agenda, inter alia, at the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), under the theme "Strengthening Partnerships: Human Mobility for Sustainable Development" in Istanbul in October 2015, and maintain the momentum throughout the 2016 GFMD under the theme, "Migration that Works for Sustainable Development for All".

CONCLUSION

The participants expressed their appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, and IOM for taking the key initiative to organize the Regional Workshop on Migrants' Health, which served as a platform for information and experience sharing. Outputs of this workshop will contribute to the discussion of the upcoming 8th GFMD as well as other regional and global forums such as the Colombo Process, Global Health and Foreign Policy Agenda, Human Security Network among others. Of note is that regular dialogues are needed to promote better understanding and strengthen collaboration on migrant health issues.