

Migrant workers, largely from Burma, Cambodia and Laos, are still struggling to escape inundated areas of Thailand.

There are no reliable estimates of how many people are stranded in the scores of flooded communities in Bangkok and areas north. Aid workers say that among the millions affected in Thailand, as many as 600,000 migrant workers, largely from Burma, are stranded in worsening conditions.

Plight of migrants

Trapped in apartments without electricity, food or drinking water, many are forced to pay exorbitant fees to be transported to dry areas.

Despite the situation, many government shelters have not reached capacity as residents stay with relatives or remain in their flooded homes to protect their possessions.

Human Rights and Development Foundation consultant Andy Hall says the plight of the migrant workers remains difficult.

“Why are the migrant [workers] staying there? They are staying there because maybe they do not understand the situation, maybe they are scared because they do not have documents, maybe they are being coerced to stay in their communities there are mafia [style] organizations in those areas who want to prevent undocumented workers coming in contact with authorities,” said Hall.

Thai industries are estimated to employ more than two-million migrant workers. Many of these workers are employed in construction and industrial estates in the provinces near the capital, Bangkok, where flooding has been concentrated.

Discrimination

Mekong Migration Network spokesperson Jackie Pollock says many migrant workers, especially from Burma, face ‘neglectful discrimination’ due to language barriers with Thai aid organizations.

“The relief services have got to reach the migrants,” she said. “So I would think it is getting

interpreters together with the most organized coordinated relief services, maybe the Thai Red Cross, the organizations which can get out there and really reach people taking these interpreters with them. The Thai Red Cross they are very happy to get to the migrants, they just cannot reach them.”

Those migrants who are officially registered with the government are wary to return home, because their work permits are void once they leave the country.

Documentation

But thousands of Burmese migrant workers have fled to the Thai border town of Mae Sot to return to Burma. Thai authorities are reported to have been detaining many because they failed to have adequate documentation.

Aid workers say Thai and Burmese authorities have moved to stop guards at border checkpoints from demanding bribes from the fleeing workers. But locals report that Burmese immigration authorities are allowing only 150 people to pass into Burma each day, leaving a massive backlog.

Human Rights and Development Foundation’s Hall says the plight of the migrant workers remains a crisis the government should address.

“The ministry of labor should be responsible, but it seems to be that because of the politics involved in this nobody is raising the issue of migrant protection and we see once again that the migrants at a time of crisis are being left behind and they are being shifted to brokers who are exploiting them and also the law enforcement agencies,” added Hall.

The Mekong Migration Network says Thailand must allow registered migrant workers to temporarily leave Thailand and return once the crisis passes without any penalties to assist in the economic recovery.

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