Health of Migrants in Singapore

Kai Hong Phua, Rachel Hui, Marie Nodzenski and Nicole Bacolod
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
National University of Singapore
Overview: Migration in Asia

The size and nature of the problem

- Growing intra-regional migration
  
  *Rapid development of Asian countries which have become more attractive to migrant workers*
  
  *2010: 4 million migrants within ASEAN - 1/3 of total ASEAN migration (12.8 million)* World Bank

- Temporary, low-skilled and irregular migration
  
  *Restrictive immigration policies to prevent settlement of migrant workers have offered little protection to migrant workers*
  
  *Large flows of irregular migrants (estimates of 1.5 to 2 million irregular migrants in the region) due to restrictive immigration policies and management of migration flows by private actors*

- Health issues faced by migrant workers
  
  *Migrants exposed to health risks at all stages of migration (origin, transit, destination, return)*
  
  *Health risks for migrants compounded by the role played by the complex migration industry (agencies, employers, etc) – inability/reluctance of governments to deal with migration flows*
  
  *The temporary nature of migration impacts on the health of migrant workers*
Migration Trends in ASEAN

 Labour-sending countries versus labour-receiving countries

3 countries host 90% of ASEAN migrants - Malaysia (35%), Thailand (35%), Singapore (21%) Maloni, 2011
Malaysia and Thailand are both sending and receiving countries
Singapore and Brunei are only receiving countries

How does Singapore compare to other labour-receiving countries?

SECTORS - Migrant workers mainly in Construction, Manufacturing, Domestic Work and Services

SKILLS - Mainly low-skilled – Malaysia: 93% semi- or unskilled - 63% primary education or less ADB;
Singapore: 870,000 foreign workers low skilled - 46% Work Permit Holders National Population Talent Division

NATIONALITIES: Spore- Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines; Malaysia - Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand;
Thailand - Myanmar, Lao PDR, Cambodia DRC Migration 2007, Version 4

IMMIGRATION POLICIES: Singapore - use of quotas, levies, security bonds, recruitment through private agencies mainly; Malaysia - approved nationals for specific sectors, use of levies and quotas, recruitment through private agencies mainly; Thailand - recruitment through bilateral agreements with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, large flows of irregular migrants - regularization processes.
Migrant Population of Singapore, 2012

Total Population: 5.31m
- Citizens: 3.29m
- PRs: 0.53m
- Non-Residents: 1.49m

Residents: 3.82m
- Employment Pass Holders
- S Pass Holders
- Work Permit Holders (Excluding Foreign Domestic Workers)
- Students
- Dependents of Citizens/PRs/Work Pass Holders
- Foreign Domestic Workers

Data as of June 2012
Source: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Manpower
Documented migrant workers in Singapore

- Total foreign workforce make up close to 40% of Singapore’s total workforce (2012)
- Workers under 3 types of work passes: Employment Pass, S Pass and Work Permit
- 931,200 Work Permit holders comprise 75% of the total foreign workforce
- “Foreign Workers” – Work Permit holders who are low-wage migrant workers in low or semi-skilled manual jobs, including women employed as live-in domestic workers

Foreign Workforce Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment Pass (EP)</td>
<td>99,200</td>
<td>113,400</td>
<td>114,300</td>
<td>143,300</td>
<td>175,400</td>
<td>174,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Pass</td>
<td>44,500</td>
<td>74,300</td>
<td>82,800</td>
<td>98,700</td>
<td>113,900</td>
<td>128,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Permit (Total)</td>
<td>757,100</td>
<td>870,000</td>
<td>856,300</td>
<td>871,200</td>
<td>908,600</td>
<td>931,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work Permit (Foreign Domestic Worker)</td>
<td>183,200</td>
<td>191,400</td>
<td>196,000</td>
<td>201,400</td>
<td>206,300</td>
<td>208,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work Permit (Construction)</td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td>229,900</td>
<td>245,700</td>
<td>248,100</td>
<td>264,500</td>
<td>277,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Foreign Workforce</td>
<td>900,800</td>
<td>1,057,700</td>
<td>1,053,500</td>
<td>1,113,200</td>
<td>1,197,900</td>
<td>1,234,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Foreign Workforce (excluding Foreign Domestic Workers)</td>
<td>717,600</td>
<td>866,300</td>
<td>857,400</td>
<td>911,800</td>
<td>991,600</td>
<td>1,025,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data may not add up to the total due to rounding.

Source: Singapore Ministry of Manpower
Undocumented migrant workers in Singapore

- “Undocumented” migrant labour in the Singapore context are typically “over-stayers” who enter on a tourist visa and stay on to work illegally.

- Government was reported to have arrested 3760 such undocumented migrants in 2009, compared to 12,000 in 1990s.

- Singapore becoming an increasingly attractive place for undocumented migrant work.
Profile of Work Permit holders

- Employed in sectors “shunned” by Singaporeans (Dirty, Dangerous and Demanding), bridging the gap between high demand and limited pool of local labour.

- Typically in construction, low-skilled manufacturing, maritime and service industries, including domestic work, healthcare, retail, entertainment and hospitality. Mainly from Malaysia, People’s Republic of China, Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Philippines and Myanmar.

- Live-in foreign domestic workers (FDWs or “maids”) come mainly from Indonesia, Philippines and Sri Lanka. Smaller numbers come from India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand, Nepal and Pakistan. One in five families in Singapore currently hire one.

- Work Permit holders are subject to the following restrictions:
  a) They may not bring family members with them
  b) They need approval from the Ministry of Manpower before marriage to a Singapore citizen or permanent resident
  c) They are not allowed to become pregnant and give birth in Singapore.

Source: Adapted from ‘Joint Submission by members of Solidarity for Migrant Workers for the 11th Session of the Universal Periodic Review, May 2011"
Policy dilemmas over foreign labour

- Policy dilemmas regarding immigration and foreign labour underscored by major domestic headlines over the last two years

- Hot-button political topic in the 2011 General Election

- Public discontentment due to overcrowding and pressure on public goods and services due to influx of foreign labour into Singapore from 2007 onwards, political pressure to tighten foreign labour supply

- Government has vowed no U-turn on tightening the foreign labour policy: limited quotas for companies hiring foreign labour and increased levies

- Recent paper published by National Population and Talent Division projects that more foreigners will be needed to fill jobs required by Singapore’s increasingly ageing society requiring more healthcare services, construction to ramp up supply of housing, transport, healthcare and public infrastructure

- Increasing outcry among local small and medium businesses as well as multinationals jittery about government’s labour policy
Projection of foreign manpower demand for healthcare sector, construction workers, and foreign domestic workers

Recent paper released by National Population and Talent Division, Singapore, projecting that by 2030, Singapore may need some 150,000 more foreign workers in these sectors:

### Healthcare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Foreigners</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>91,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Construction

- 2011: 250,000
- 2030: 250,000 to 300,000

### Maids

- 2011: 198,000
- 2030: 300,000

Source: NATIONAL POPULATION AND TALENT DIVISION

Source: The Straits Times, 13 Nov 2012
Policies governing migrant labour in Singapore

General framework

• To dampen rising demand on foreign labour, stringent legislation put in place to restrict number and ensure short-term migration status, also to govern their employment
• Quota based on “dependency ceilings” by sectors: Stringent allocation of foreign workers to companies based on sector-specific ratio of local to foreign workers
• Foreign worker levies: Employers have to pay a levy to the government per month for hiring foreign workers on Work Permits or S Passes in addition to monthly salary. Levy amount determined by workers’ qualifications and company’s dependency ceiling. Levies raised every 6 months between July 2011 and July 2013. Current levy for construction workers: S$250 - S$500 per worker per month; current levy for FDWs: S$295 per month
• Levy concessions: available for families demonstrating specific need for FDWs: - having young children, aged family members, family members with special needs
• Security bond for Work Permit holders: $5000 forfeited if conditions of Work Permit are violated (including if FDWs become pregnant), or if workers fail to be repatriated after work permits end or are cancelled

Recent changes to Employment of Foreign Manpower Act

• Introduction of policies to expedite enforcement / mete out harsher penalties against errant companies and syndicates exploiting foreign workers and denying Singaporeans jobs by circumventing existing regulations using means such as:
  - declaring higher salaries than paid to their foreign workers
  - illegally passing on the cost of the foreign worker levy and insurance premiums to them
  - hiring “phantom” local workers to meet the required local to foreigner staff ratios.
Legislation on migrant workers’ health

- **Mandatory medical examination:** Work Permits only issued if migrant worker passes a mandatory medical exam including for TB, HIV, syphilis, malaria by a registered doctor within 14 days of arrival; Employers are able to obtain report direct from the doctor without worker’s consent. (Joint report to UPR, MOM website). FDWs are additionally required to go for a six-monthly medical examination to screen for infectious diseases and pregnancies. Pregnancy would be a legitimate reason for termination of work and immediate repatriation.

- **Mandatory medical insurance / personal accident policy:** Employers are required to purchase and maintain a minimum medical insurance coverage of S$15,000 per year for each Work Permit holder for inpatient care and day surgery, including hospital bills for conditions that may not be work-related. In addition, employers of FDWs must purchase personal accident policy with minimum sum assured of S$40,000.

- **Provisions for well-being and medical care of foreign workers:** Employers are responsible for bearing the costs of their workers’ “upkeep and maintenance” in Singapore, including the provision of medical treatment. Employers are expected to ensure that their workers are provided with adequate food, acceptable accommodation and safe working conditions.

- **Exclusion of FDWs in legislation:** FDWs are not covered under the Employment Act, which specifies minimum rest days, hours of work, overtime entitlements, medical leave: nature of job as “personal contract”, “too impractical to impose standard terms and conditions of service”. They are also excluded from Work Injury Compensation Act, compulsory medical insurance in event of accident provides less favourable extent of coverage and benefits
The Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA) provides injured employees with a low-cost and expeditious alternative to common law to settle compensation claims. To claim under WICA, the employee only needs to prove that he was injured in an accident or suffered a disease due to his work. Engaging a lawyer is not required to file a WICA claim. Under WICA, the employer (or employer’s insurer) is liable to pay the compensation regardless of who caused the accident/disease, and even after the employment has ceased or the Work Pass (of a foreign worker) has been cancelled. Compensation amount is computed based on a fixed formula and is subject to caps. Dependents of deceased employees are also eligible to claim Work Injury Compensation. Alternatively, the employee can file a civil suit against the negligent party under common law for damages. However, to succeed, he and his lawyer will need to prove that the employer or a third party had caused his injury. He will also need to substantiate the amount of damages before the Courts, and damages are not capped.

An injured employee can claim from either WICA or common law, but not from both.
Changes to Work Injury Compensation Limits

2. The changes will take effect on 1 June 2012. The key changes are as follows:

a) Updating Compensation limits

As part of MOM’s regular review of WICA compensation, the limits will be increased to account for the change in nominal median wages and healthcare costs since the limits were last set in 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Limits</th>
<th>Existing Limit</th>
<th>New Limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>$47,000</td>
<td>$57,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>$140,000</td>
<td>$170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Permanent Incapacity*</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td>$73,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
<td>$218,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td>Up to $25,000 or 1 year from date of accident, whichever is reached first</td>
<td>Up to $30,000 or 1 year from date of accident, whichever is reached first</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This excludes the additional 25% compensation that is paid to workers with total permanent incapacity to offset the cost of care for the injured worker.

Source: Singapore Ministry of Manpower
Changes to legislation: Work Injury Compensation

b) Disallowing compensation for work-related fights

c) Expanding scope of compensable diseases

d) Disallowing work-related exclusion clauses

e) Clarifying the liability of employer’s insurer to pay when there are multiple insurance policies

f) Clarifying the timeframe for filing a claim if one wishes to claim under WICA after having filed a common law claim earlier
Recent changes to legislation affecting foreign labour

- Mandatory weekly rest day for Foreign Domestic Workers introduced in March 2012, for all new and renewed Work Permits effective Jan 2013 (with option of compensation in-lieu)

  According to research done by the Singapore Committee for UN Women in 2011, key findings revealed that maids work an average of 14 hours per day and only 12 per cent have at least one day off per week.
  
  Source: “Maids to get weekly rest days,” AsiaOne, 5 March 2012

- Tighter regulations on lorry safety introduced in 2011 to protect workers travelling in the back of lorries:

  Lorries must be retrofitted with canopies and higher side railings, with a minimum deck area of 8 sq ft for each worker. Lorry owners could be fined $1000 or jailed maximum of three months for not complying.
Snapshot of occupational safety (Total Singapore workforce)

2011 Workplace Injuries, Total: 10,121
- Others: 56%
- Manufacturing: 23%
- Construction: 18%
- Marine: 3%

2011 Occupational Diseases, Total: 839
- Noise Induced Deafness: 741
- Occupational Skin Diseases: 52
- Excessive Absorption of Chemicals: 10
- Occupational Lung Diseases: 10
- Others: 26

2011 Workplace Injuries, Total: 10,121
- Others: 5,629
- Manufacturing: 2,284
- Construction: 1,872
- Marine: 336

2011 Workplace Fatalities, Total: 61
- Construction: 22
- Others: 16
- Manufacturing: 13
- Marine: 10

Source: 2011 Annual Report, Occupational Safety and Health Division, Singapore Ministry of Manpower
Policy gaps in health and medical provisions

- **Foreign Workers left income-less during the WICA Claim Process:** Full course of medical treatment and compensation assessment can last from a few months to over two years. Workers are entitled to medical leave wages during this time but many receive none. Employers routinely cancel injured workers’ work permits – they are issued a “Special Pass” to facilitate legal stay in Singapore but may not seek employment. Many incur debts for daily expenses and costly medical treatment.

- **Dependence on Employer’s Letter for Medical Treatment force Foreign Workers to bear costs:** Workers depend on “Letter of Guarantee” furnished by employer/company in order to receive a waiver of upfront medical fees. Employers are responsible under the law for this letter and the costs of any necessary medical treatment (including conditions not work-related) but many shirk their responsibilities, forcing workers to either bear the costs themselves or forgo/postpone treatment.

- **Medical Expenses over $30,000 ("No-man’s Land"):** Removal of health care subsidies for non-residents result in high medical charges for migrant workers. Medical expenses for seriously injured workers can thus quickly breach the S$30,000 ceiling. Responsibility towards any medical expenses exceeding S$30,000 cap under WICA relies on goodwill, rather than legal obligations of employers, in the absence of a medical emergency fund for foreign workers.
Major health issues identified by the Joint Report submitted in May 2011

- **Lack of access to medical/health services:** Due to the removal of subsidized medical care for migrant workers since 2007, many are denied medical insurance/treatment by errant employers, contrary to official policy, and due to inconsistent enforcement. In worst cases, workers seeking potentially costly medical treatment due to serious injury are repatriated by errant employers.

- **Living conditions:** Some workers are housed in cramped, poorly equipped and ventilated and/or unhygienic living quarters, with inadequate nutrition.

- **Long hours:** It is not uncommon for many construction, marine and service sector workers to work 12 – 16 hours a day, breaching legislation on maximum hours of work.

- **Psycho-social health of FDWs:** Well-being violations include inadequate food or accommodation (43%), psychological abuse (30%) and non-payment of salary (14%) (HOME, 2009).

Source: Joint Submission by Members of Solidarity for Migrant Workers for the 11th Session of the Universal Periodic Review, May 2011
Estimating the Social Costs of Migrants’ Health in Singapore: A Preliminary Study

Methodology:

• Literature review of regional migration and health studies
• Referrals and visits to major voluntary organizations providing social and health-related services (medical clinics, financial aid, legal assistance, shelters and meal programs) to migrant workers:
  1) Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2)
  2) Humanitarian Organization for Migrant Economics (HOME)
  3) Healthserve
• Case interviews of selected migrant workers with health issues, using a structured questionnaire to elicit social and related costs
• Use of native languages (Tamil, Bengali, Tagalog and Bahasa)
• Extrapolation of direct and indirect costs from case studies to estimate possible ranges in social costs of migrants’ health
## Social and Medical Costing Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of case</th>
<th>Indirect Costs</th>
<th>Direct Costs</th>
<th>Intangible Costs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>Loss of productivity = No. of months without work X average monthly salary</td>
<td>Medical (Hospital and doctor’s fees, medicines, aids, rehabilitation, etc)</td>
<td>Pain and suffering Stigma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transaction costs</td>
<td>- Housing</td>
<td>Stress and anxiety Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative costs</td>
<td>- Transport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community/voluntary contributions?</td>
<td>- Food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Miscellaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample:** >2000 cases over 2-year period from Jun 2010 – May 2012; 1300 injury cases

Average monthly salary for Indian/Bangladeshi/Sri Lankan foreign workers on Work Permit in construction and shipyard manual jobs: SGD $450 – $600
## Estimated Loss of Economic Productivity

| NAME                        | Special Pass No. | Issue Date  | Injury date | 1-MOM; 2-Injury; 3-ICA; 4-other | 0-Jun | 0-Jul | 0-Aug | 0-Sep | 0-Oct | 0-Nov | 0-Dec | 1-Jan | 1-Feb | 1-Mar | 1-Apr | 1-May | 1-Jun | 1-Jul | 1-Aug | 1-Sep | 1-Oct | 1-Nov | No of months without work | $450 | $600 |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------------------|------|------|
| Naranyana Samy Ramasamy     | AD041337         | 2 Jun 2, 10 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 9     | 4,050 | 5,400 |
| Nakka Rama Krisna           |                  | 2 Jun 3, 10 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 6     | 2,700 | 3,600 |
| Monir Hossain Rehan Uddin   | AD028510         | 2 Jun 7, 10 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 6     | 2,700 | 3,600 |
| Rafiqul Isalm Asraf Ali Shek| AD389958         | 2 Jun 7, 10 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 15    | 6,750 | 9,000 |
| Veerasamy Suthakar          |                  | 2 Jun 7, 10 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 2     | 900   | 1,200 |
| Md Asaduzzaman Biswas Asad Ali Hajh AJB | 2 May 3, 11 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 5     | 2,250 | 3,000 |
| Ruman Mridha Late Barek Mridha |                  | 2 May 3, 11 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 13    | 5,850 | 7,800 |
| Yeasin Abdul Karim          | AD365808         | 2 May 6, 11 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 12    | 5,400 | 7,200 |
| Moorthy Elavarasan          | AD343037         | 2 May 9, 11 | 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 6     | 2,700 | 3,600 |
| Sayful Islam Yousuf Khan     | AD310818         | 2 May 10, 11| 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 3     | 1,350 | 1,800 |
| Eman Hossain Sarkar Ali     |                  | 2 May 14, 12| 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 13    | 5,850 | 7,800 |
| Morshed Alam Saiful Islam   |                  | 2 May 14, 12| 0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 | 13    | 5,850 | 7,800 |

**Legend:**
- Pink / blue boxes indicate non-attendance / attendance at food programme run by TWC2 (NGO providing migrant workers’ assistance)
- Yellow: Long gap in attendance (approx .1 year) indicate worker may have returned to home country in the interim
- No. of months without work: inclusive of months in between Injury date and first date of attendance at food programme