



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
UNITED NATIONS | GENEVA

PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

5 June 2020

Mr Felipe Gonzalez Morales
Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants

Dear Mr Gonzalez,

I refer to the Joint Guidance Note on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Human Rights of Migrants, which was jointly issued on 26 May 2020 by your office and the UN Committee on Migrant Workers. I would like to express my appreciation for this timely initiative. This guidance note presents a useful framework for Member States to refer to and benchmark their actions against during these uncertain times. On this note, I would like to take the opportunity to share some measures that Singapore has taken to address the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers in Singapore.

Migrant workers are an important part of Singapore's workforce and their well-being during this period has been a priority for Singapore since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak. As part of our national effort to care for the health and safety of all Singapore residents, the Singapore Government has put in place measures in line with the Guidance Note to ensure the well-being of our migrant workers. An Inter-Agency Taskforce was set up in April 2020 to focus on ensuring the well-being of migrant workers in dormitories. The Taskforce has worked steadily to make progress on our two key priorities:

- a. **First, to ensure the health and safety of all our migrant workers and minimise the number of infections, the number of severe cases and COVID-19 related deaths.**

The Singapore Government has borne the full costs of COVID-19 testing and treatment for all migrant workers, no different from our citizens, since the first confirmed case. On-site medical facilities at migrant worker dormitories have also been established, putting in place a full range of medical support to detect and treat infections. These facilities serve around 265,000 workers. There are also measures, such as free shuttle services between the dormitories and the medical facilities, to reduce the risk of cross-infection. To facilitate the safe recovery of migrant workers who are COVID-19 positive, on-site Community Care Facilities have been set up within certain dormitories. These facilities house COVID-19 positive patients who are clinically well or display mild symptoms. Post-recovery care will also be provided within the dormitories to minimise the risks of recurring transmissions, with the aim of helping the migrant workers stay healthy and return to work once their employers resume business.

We are encouraged that most of our migrant workers have mild symptoms and are on the path to recovery, even as we continue the extensive and rigorous testing of our migrant worker population within dormitories. We continue to monitor the health conditions of our migrant workers and are committed to taking prompt action, where necessary.

- b. **Second, to ensure the well-being of, and protect the livelihoods of our migrant workers, including ensuring that they continue to be paid their salaries.**

Singapore's Ministry of Manpower has been engaging employers to ensure that migrant workers continue to receive their salaries on time. The Ministry actively tracks and engages employers that owe their workers' salaries to ensure that these sums are paid out. The Ministry also works with various remittance agents to provide options for migrant workers, and remittance services, both physical and digital, continue to be accessible. Employers have also been encouraged to conduct remittances on behalf of their workers. These measures aim to blunt the economic impact of the pandemic on these migrant workers and their families.

Additionally, in line with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) guidance to include migrant workers in national policy responses to COVID-19, Singapore has waived levies for migrant workers and provided their employers with levy rebates, to help employers retain their migrant workers despite the current situation.

Employers of migrant workers who cannot go to work must continue to be responsible for their maintenance and upkeep, and work out mutually agreed salary and leave arrangements with the unions and employees that are fair and responsible. Under our laws, for migrant workers whose work passes have been cancelled, employers are still responsible for their upkeep, including the provision of their accommodation, until they are able to return home. Irresponsible employers who do not fulfil their obligations to their workers, and who put their workers on extended no-pay leave or other cost saving measures without seeking the consent of their workers will be taken to task.

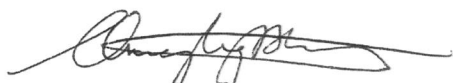
Singapore also continues to provide for and address immediate basic needs of migrant workers living in dormitories. This includes: (a) food and basic amenities; (b) disseminating materials in the migrant workers' native languages encouraging them to adopt safe distancing practices; (c) establishing effective safe distancing regimes within dormitories; (d) distributing care packs, face masks, hand sanitisers, thermometers and pulse oximeters to migrant workers; (e) improving sanitation and cleanliness of the dormitories; and (f) ensuring access to the internet so that the workers can keep in touch with friends and family.

Singapore has also worked together with employers and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to provide emotional support and counselling services to the workers, as we do our best to take care of their health, livelihood and welfare. Migrant workers also have access to religious teachers and free counselling sessions to promote their mental well-being. Special arrangements to celebrate major festivals like the Tamil and Bengali New Year, as well as Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr were also made.

I hope that this overview gives a sense of Singapore's efforts as we strive to overcome this unprecedented challenge. Singapore is committed to ensuring that the health, welfare and livelihood of our migrant workers are protected during these difficult times, and that no one is left behind in our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. I would be happy to have further discussions with you and to clarify any questions you may have.

Once again, thank you for your efforts and I look forward to the presentation of your upcoming report at the 44th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Umej Bhatia', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

UMEJ BHATIA

Ambassador and Permanent Representative