



HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION ECONOMICS (H.O.M.E)

COVID-19 IMPACT Report 2020

DECEMBER 2020



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	3
Background.....	3
KEY BENEFICIARIES.....	4
EFFECTS OF COVID-19 AND PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES ON MIGRANT WORKERS.....	6
THE ISSUES.....	13
DOMESTIC AND NON DOMESTIC WORKERS REPORT.....	17
WHAT HOME HAS DONE.....	24 - 31
Humanitarian Assistance.	
Case Management.	
Advocacy	
Administration	
Outreach	
Welfare	
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	32-35
OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORT.....	36
RESOURCES AND ANNEX OF HOME ACTIVITY.....	37

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HOME would like to thank the community for their abundant support and contributions to our organization during the exceptionally challenging year of 2020!

We would also like to acknowledge our contributors, donors, partners and volunteers who made this report, and the rest of the work that we do, possible.

We look forward to working with government agencies, civic groups, corporations, and other regional and local partners to meet the goals of our three pillars: Welfare, Empowerment and Advocacy and to continue providing assistance to our migrant community in Singapore

ABSTRACT

Introduction

We are facing unprecedented times as the world adapts to and battles with the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak. Covid-19 has disproportionately affected low-wage migrant workers in Singapore, and has highlighted pre-existing issues that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. This report addresses the direct impact Covid-19 has on low-wage migrant workers that HOME has encountered, including migrant domestic workers (MDWs) and migrant workers (MWs) working in construction, marine and manufacturing industries and services, which include both work permit and S-Pass holders.

At HOME, we have been responding to the many challenges this pandemic has brought to our migrant worker community. These workers earn the lowest of wages in Singapore, which can be as low as SGD300 - 400 a month. The effects of Covid-19 on these workers, which include termination, loss of salary, and lack of access to shelter and medical care, have been catastrophic, and long-lasting.

The “circuit-breaker” measures introduced in April 2020 have also reduced access to welfare assistance with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) paring down their services. Most non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also have to cease or cut operations drastically as operations have had to be moved remotely.

Throughout the Covid-19 period, HOME continued to have access to migrant workers and responded to their urgent needs through our shelter, helplines, and by providing food, medical supplies and casework support.

HOME ran a fundraiser to assist migrant workers during this time. Your donations from HOME's fundraiser have helped our shelter residents and other migrant workers get prompt medical treatment, find alternative housing and financial assistance. We are deeply grateful to all donors for the support we have received.



HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION ECONOMICS (H.O.M.E)

495 Geylang Road, #02-01, Singapore 389453

<http://www.home.org.sg/>

contact@home.org.sg

(+65) 63440224

Singapore 389453

KEY BENEFICIARIES

Migrant Domestic Workers (MDWs)

More than 260,000 migrant workers, mostly women, are employed as MDWs in Singapore. They carry out household and caregiving duties and ensure that our society and economy continue to function. However, their work remains largely invisible and unregulated. The plight of MDWs is often invisible in the private sphere of their employers' households. After the onset of the circuit-breaker regulations on 7 April 2020, HOME saw a 25% increase in the number of calls to our helpline. In this report, we have set out some of the issues that MDWs have been facing at this time. Many of these issues have existed before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of the circuit-breakers measures; they have been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic.

In summary, HOME has seen the following:

- Increase in MDWs requiring emergency accommodation and protection assistance due to abuse or unexpected loss of employment
- Increased workload for MDWs who have additional household and caregiving duties as a result of circuit breaker measures. Many MDWs now work during their rest days as their employers are at home
- Increased surveillance of MDWs by their employers and restrictions in communication and mobile phone usage
- Loss of employment or substantial wage decreases due to change in employers circumstances
- Heavy restrictions, costs or inability of the MDW to travel back to their countries of origin after the loss of their employment

- Increase in abuse cases of MDW, those requiring crisis intervention and mediation services
- Many MDW on Temporary Job Scheme (TJS) unable to find work or on Special Pass who are required to remain in-country to support investigations and legally not permitted to work
- Increased workplace stress due to domestic workers being isolated with their employers for increased periods of time.

Non-Domestic Migrant Workers (NDWs)

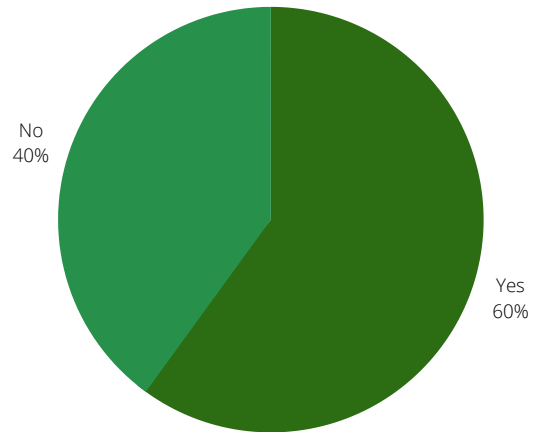
The vast majority of Covid-19 cases in Singapore have come from our migrant worker population. Singapore's purpose-built dormitories (PBDs) have been affected, along with many smaller factory-converted dormitories (FCDs), were gazetted isolation zones, due to their high infection rates. Low-wage work permit holders living outside dormitories (in shophouses and other forms of accommodation) have not been spared either. We raised these concerns prior to the first migrant worker cases, highlighting that [the welfare of MWS should not be secondary](#) to worries regarding the cost of improving dormitory standards.

The needs of NDWs during the pandemic include:

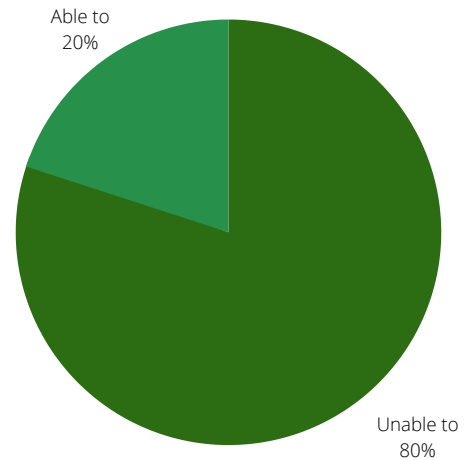
- Emergency housing / financial assistance and food aid
- Loss of income/employment and employers refusing to pay for upkeep
- Impossible to implement social distancing and hygiene practices in cramped crowded settings
- Increased stress due to uncertainty about their jobs, anxiety about home / onsite quarantining and vulnerability to infection due to congested dormitory living and sometimes

- Unsanitary living conditions, along with worries about families back home
- Inequitable access to support for migrant workers on SHN who live outside PBDs, who may be unable to access basic human fundamental needs such as food and medical care if employers do not provide them
- Lack of access to medical care, some for critical illnesses or workplace injuries
- Heavy restrictions, costs or inability to travel back to country of origin after loss of employment
- [Mental health issues](#) from extreme isolation, living in very close quarters for long periods of time with very few liberties, where tensions, tempers and anxieties arise. Increased psychological stress due to uncertainty about their jobs quarantining and anxiety about families back home.

In April 2020, HOME and CARE conducted a [survey](#) of 100 workers living in the dormitories. More than 60% of those interviewed said that their rooms are cramped, and 80% said that it was difficult to do social distancing. Some migrant workers shared that after they tested positive for Covid-19, they faced delays in being removed from their crowded rooms to receive medical attention. Our reluctance to reduce the density of the dormitories implied that we were prepared to let migrant workers get infected as long as it does not spread to the rest of the population: this approach only reinforces discrimination and exclusion of the migrant worker community.



Cramped Living Conditions



Unable to practice social distancing within dormitories

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 AND PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES ON MIGRANT WORKERS

NON-DOMESTIC MIGRANT WORKERS

The first migrant worker infected with Covid19 was diagnosed on 8 February 2020. Through February and March, public health measures relating to migrant workers continued to focus on placing workers returning from Covid-affected regions on Stay-Home Notice (SHN) in their own accommodation including all dormitories. Only those coming from Hubei province in China were quarantined. The approach was to enforce SHN with harsh punishments such as work pass revocations and bans from future employment in Singapore.



Dormitory operators were “encouraged” to “minimise contact between...SHN [recipients] and other occupants”. But there was no official acknowledgement of the cramped, crowded conditions, poor ventilation and mass-sharing of basic amenities in many dormitories that made safe distancing and segregation impossible.

By early April, outbreaks in the dormitories were increasing faster than contact tracing could keep pace with.

Key timeline of Covid-19 in NDW dormitories

April	5	—Dorms start to be gazetted as isolation areas —Strict enforcement at ungazetted dorms, with work pass revocations and employment bans for workers outside their accommodation
	20	—Blanket Stay-Home Notice for all construction workers til 18 May
May		— Late May: strictly enforcement safe distancing, occupancy limits in non-dorm migrant workers’ accommodation, leaving some workers homeless
June	2	—Legislative amendments to confine workers in their accommodation — Multiple preconditions and criteria introduced for each employer, project and individual migrant worker to be cleared for resuming work
July		— Levy rebate halved to \$375; many employers further slashed support for workers — End July: reported wave of suicides and suicide attempts in dorms
August	18	—Rostered Routine Testing announced: migrant workers in construction, marine or process industries, or living in dorms must undergo fortnightly Covid-19 testing — End August: pilot trials of Exit Pass scheme for workers to apply for 3-hr exits from their dormitory to designated Recreation Centres
September	14	—Further legislative amendments to Regulations confining workers in their accommodation
October	31	—Exit Pass scheme extended to all dormitories

The humanitarian crisis: dorm lockdown & SHN

On 5 April 2020, the first dorms were locked down, gazetted as “isolation areas”. Essential migrant workers, such as those in environmental services, key infrastructure or critical supply chains, were “decanted” to alternative accommodation. Over the following weeks, such gazetting was progressively extended to all the massive purpose-built dormitories (PBDs, each housing up to 25,000 workers) and many of the smaller factory-converted dormitories (FCDs). At the PBDs, food and primary medical care were provided, albeit with teething issues and delays that affected many workers who suddenly found themselves under lockdown with insufficient notice to prepare or stockpile items they needed.

But while the on-site medical system in the gazetted dormitories, geared towards infectious disease, may have sufficed for emergency response, it did not meet the needs of workers who had suffered previous traumatic injuries, for specialist care and follow-up. Their relatively stable condition did not qualify them for emergency ambulance evacuation, which was then their only means of egress from the dormitories. Consequently, some missed several hospital appointments, compromising their care and rehabilitation. Trips to the hospital required repeated appeals to the authorities and intervention from HOME.



Besides the formally gazetted isolation areas, all other migrant workers' quarters were also effectively locked down. The “circuit breaker” that the rest of Singapore was under, through April and May, was severely enforced even at ungazetted dormitories. Workers who said they had gone out to buy food or to remit money home were still faced with work pass revocations and bans from future employment. In many ways, this group of workers was worse off than those in PBDs. They were without recourse in the event of emergency needs,

because the smaller FCDs did not have the government taskforce teams constantly stationed.

Workers reported that they were unable to get a response through MOM's hotline. In both PBDs and FCDs, workers reported being unattended in their rooms for days after reporting symptoms or even testing Covid-positive, exposing their roommates to infection.

At the same time, there was a dearth of timely, accessible communication to update the workers on developments in their own immediate environment. Many reported the anxiety and fear caused by seeing ambulances in and out of their dormitory compound several times daily, conveying fellow residents to the hospital—but without knowing exactly where the infection clusters were and how seriously the infected residents were ill.

Workers staying in “private accommodation” outside the dormitories—who are actually about double the dormitories' population—were not spared. From 20 April to 18 May, all construction sector Work Permit and S Pass workers (those not already in isolation zones) were put under a blanket SHN. This created a humanitarian crisis, with many workers left without adequate housing, food, essential supplies, and access to medical care. With no work in the circuit breaker, they had no income, or at best, some meagre allowance insufficient for their accommodation. Their very low salaries, most of which they would normally have remitted to their families, left them without savings to cushion them. Moreover, many such workers had ongoing issues such as unpaid wages or work injuries since before the pandemic and had already gone without income for months.

Their employers were either unable or unwilling to provide food and upkeep, despite the government support. These workers were overlooked in the Government provided for the dormitories. Much of HOME's efforts and resources during the circuit breaker were directed towards serving these workers outside the dormitories.

When the blanket SHN was announced, HOME started outreach, snowballing from our existing cases. Volunteers and donors were organised to provide and deliver both groceries and meals. By late May, we were serving around 350 workers in almost 50 locations: with emergency housing financial assistance and food aid, in addition to casework for legal, employment, workplace injury and repatriation issues.

In May, housing issues worsened for the workers in private accommodation when the authorities started strictly enforcing safe distancing and occupancy limits. Many reported that they were ordered to vacate with only one day's grace period. These workers sometimes scrambled all over the neighbourhood in the middle of the night looking for another place to stay. Some ended up on the street for days, at the mercy of landlords who seized the opportunity for profiteering—rents jumping about 20%.

CASE STUDY: RAFI

After Rafi (not his real name) suffered a work injury in December 2019, his employer stopped providing meals, and did not pay for his ongoing hospital treatment or reimburse medical expenses. They also refused to pay his medical leave wages. Desperate, Rafi fled the employer's dormitory to stay with friends, workers in private accommodation, who at least shared food with him. HOME met Rafi during our circuit breaker



outreach and helped with food aid and housing financial assistance, while we engaged MOM to enforce his employer's responsibilities.

In July, Rafi was evicted. HOME appealed to MOM to get his employer to provide his upkeep. Finally, in end October, they let him sleep in their office premises. But food was not provided, and he got only \$220 in total for all those months of food and upkeep necessities, with medical leave wages delayed for almost a year.

Sadly, Rafi's case is not unique.

Loss of income & employment

HOME met hundreds of workers whose employment was summarily terminated during or before the circuit breaker, as industry came to a standstill. On the other hand, estate conservancy workers reported getting the same or a minimal increment despite the extra workload during the circuit breaker.

From mid June onwards, the construction, marine and process industries, heavily reliant on low-wage migrant labour, were gradually allowed to resume work with Covid-“cleared” workers. But this re-opening was slow. The construction industry had to overcome its inherent susceptibility to infectious cross-transmission with manpower deployment across different work sites and accommodations. Low-wage migrant workers, always seen as disposable and fungible, have been treated as “ballast” to be shed.

In April, the Government had announced waiver of the foreign workers' levy plus rebates of \$750/month per head for April, May and June. The stated purpose of these rebates was to support the upkeep and wages of furloughed low-wage migrant workers, but they were paid to employers with no mechanism to ensure that the money actually went to the workers. Many workers were not formally terminated (perhaps due to this rebate), but were left on indefinite unpaid leave, without even upkeep allowance. Desperately clinging to the hope of keeping their jobs, many kept silent, unable and fearful to complain to the authorities.

From July, the Government began scaling back support for migrant workers and their employers. The rebate was halved to \$375. Around the same time, repatriation flights to the workers' home countries gradually increased in frequency. Workers who had already been laid off were sent home, and many others had their termination formalised.

CASE STUDY: KARTHI

Karthi (not his real name) stays in an FCD run by another construction company. He was caught on CCTV spitting into a dustbin, which he wasn't aware was against the rules. The dormitory management demanded he pay a \$100 fine. His employer also got involved, saying the fine would be docked from his wages. They threatened to report him to MOM, whereupon his WP would be revoked. He is very fearful of losing his job and the prospect of being banned from employment in Singapore, but cannot afford the fine. During the lockdown, he was paid 75% of his already low salary of \$477. Karthi's plight illustrates how new regulations, which adjure workers to "keep [the] living space...clean and tidy" as part of the WP conditions, are enabling dormitory operators and employers to further exploit and intimidate workers.



The mental health impact

By late July, many of the workers had been locked in their dormitories for almost 4 months. Some had not been outside their rooms except for short, staggered "yard time" slots. The workers' lengthy isolation, the stress and fear of being confined in ground zero of an epidemic, prolonged lack of income and their anxiety for the families dependent on them, caused unimaginable distress.

All this was tolerated during the circuit breaker, when the workers knew that the rest of Singapore was also under restrictions, and there was an end-date to look forward to. But several weeks after the circuit breaker, they still saw no end in sight while the Singapore community was returning to normal. Plans and timeframes for resumption of work were not communicated to them. Many had spent the previous months either cooped up in their dormitory rooms or herded from one isolation facility to another without explanations or even much more than a few hours' notice. Their sense of helplessness and desperation to regain some sense of autonomy was palpable in the thousands of phone calls and text messages HOME received.

Through July and August, HOME saw a huge spike in distress calls from workers locked up in dormitories and other isolation facilities: desperate to go home. But with air travel restrictions, tickets were prohibitively expensive (if available at all), and repatriation was complicated by different destinations' medical clearance criteria. Under those circumstances, many employers refused to pay for tickets and pre-departure swab tests. The authorities seemed to take a light-touch approach to enforcement.

The greatest source of distress, which came through in many calls on HOME's NDW hotline, was that they could not tell their families when they would be able to start remitting money home again. The last week of July saw a wave of suicide attempts and deaths in PBDs. These victims were only the tip of the iceberg. Besides the victims reported in the media, workers told HOME of other attempts in the dormitories. Photos and video surfaced of victims' bodies being carried out of the dormitories.

I spent 2 hours watching the birds today; it feels so good.

A worker, restricted to dormitory isolation facilities & worksite from March to November, describing self-care on his rest days



Being on employer-sponsored visas, Work Permit holders are ordinarily barred from re-employment without first exiting Singapore. Only construction workers have a limited 19-day window to transfer towards the end of their visa; outside of which their current employer's written consent is needed. MOM announced some relaxation of this in March 2020: granting other sectors' workers leeway to transfer employment, albeit still requiring the current employer's consent. During the circuit breaker and subsequent weeks of dormitory lockdown, this was largely a moot point since there was no work. When construction, marine and process sector work

resumed, the workers who had been terminated, or whose employers could no longer pay them, began job-hunting. Initially, there were some successful transfers. But from August onwards, HOME observed many more workers unable to do so. Having found new prospective employers by dint of great effort, and often more recruitment fees, they were obstructed by layers of red tape: most commonly, MOM requiring their former employers' written consent to their new employment—even if that former employer no longer wanted them and already cancelled the WP. Many such workers, unable to obtain this written consent, have been making no headway in their attempts to get their new WP applications approved or registered.

CASE STUDY: MANI

Pre-Covid, Mani (not his real name) worked long hours in a shipyard, 7am to midnight—sometimes til 3am. The long hard labour affected his health. When he took 2 days off, his employer forced him to sign a resignation—just before the circuit breaker. In April, Mani was infected with Covid-19. Moved between various quarantine/"decant" facilities over the next 3 months, he was desperate to resume work in July: having had no income during his ordeal. His wages averaged \$400–\$500, but he had incurred \$4000 in recruitment debt.

Despite being confined in the FCD, Mani found a new job. But his ex-employer refused to consent to the transfer, opting to repatriate him rather than allow him to work elsewhere. Upon HOME's appeal, MOM insisted that the ex-employer's consent was required to allow his new WP application. Mani was sent back to India.



Construction workers theoretically can apply for WPs under new employers without their current employers' consent during the 19-day window, which runs between 40 to 21 days before their WP expiry. As the construction industry picked up pace from October onwards, faced with pressing timeframes, projects ran into critical manpower shortages—due to the many thousands of workers sent back over the past several months. For many construction workers, who had been furloughed without wages or retained on a no-work no-pay basis, their need for more stable employment and income coincided with the industry's manpower need. Yet both the rigid work permit regime rules and the policies behind them are preventing a win-win outcome for men in need of work and projects in need of manpower.

For some outside the transfer window, their employers would rather repatriate them than grant written consent for them to transfer employment. But even for those whose WP expiry is approaching and may soon be within the transfer window, some employers, aware that the workers are seeking better opportunities, deliberately cancelled the WP and arrange repatriation just before the transfer window: depriving the workers the opportunity to transfer to their preferred company. Other employers present the workers with an ultimatum: either sign their written to consent to continue working for them, or they would be repatriated. These workers are sent back home with nothing, despite having already found employment.

Most are the sole breadwinners of their family, and would be returning to economic devastation caused by the pandemic, as well as by natural disasters like the extensive flooding in Bangladesh in late July. The WP regime policies concentrate the bargaining power in the employers' hands; perpetuating the imbalance of power that places workers at systemic disadvantage.

Restriction of movement

On 2 June, the Employment of Foreign Manpower (Work Passes) Regulations was amended to confine workers in their accommodation and to enable their employers and dormitory operators to prevent them leaving. Exceptions are only for medical and other essential appointments, or if explicitly and specifically permitted by the authorities on an individual case-by-case basis, or if directed to evacuate.

This applied to any premises housing 7 or more workers.

These amendments were unannounced. HOME chanced upon them, and with TWC2 subsequently issued a joint statement. MOM's position was that these amendments were to protect

against further waves of contagion after the circuit breaker. By late August, all migrant workers in dormitories had been "cleared": tested at least once either serologically or by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) swab testing, or sent to separate quarantine or isolation facilities.

But the workers are still being confined. On a daily basis, they are allowed out of the dormitories only to be transported to work and back. Employers were expressly cautioned not to allow the workers to make any detours on the way to and from work.

For other "essential errands" (medical appointments, passport renewal, employment-required skill certification courses and testing, national elections voting), the workers must seek their employers' help to submit a request to MOM to leave their accommodation. If approved, the workers may only exit the dormitory via transport provided by their employer: they may not travel independently.

Once a week, on staggered rest days determined by their employers, the workers are allowed (with permission electronically applied for in advance) to exit their accommodation for 3 hours: but only to fixed, designated "recreation centres", not to their preferred destinations. With the considerable travelling time between the workers' far-flung locations and their designated RCs, this has proved unfeasible. Highly restrictive, staggered slots at fixed RCs do not meet their basic human needs to socialise and relax with meaningful autonomy.

Amended Foreign Manpower Regulations
Workers must not leave their accommodation unless

- for medical treatment or help in emergencies
- ordered to evacuate
- for specified essential errands, individually applied & approved in advance by MOM
- for 3h 'Exit Passes' to fixed RCs, applied & approved in advance

Announcements of limited concessions to allow migrant workers back in the community, on an undefined future horizon, offer no clarity or assurance that their lives will resume to normality

Workers in various accommodation types and projects have told HOME that they have not been outside of their dormitory—worksite bubble for 8 to 9 months. Resilient though they are, this is certainly taking a toll.

This regime places all the power over the workers' movements in the hands of employers and dormitory operators. It is difficult enough for those on valid WP who are still employed, with a practical functioning relationship with their employers. Those whose employment has ended fare much worse.

Special Pass holders, whose WPs have been cancelled but remain in Singapore pending resolution of their cases like workplace injuries, unpaid wages or police investigations, have been largely overlooked in the measures taken to mitigate the Regulations' impact. Many such workers' former employers wash their hands of them: refusing to help with the administrative and transport arrangements for injured workers to even attend their hospital appointments, for example. HOME not only provided transport; we engaged with multiple parties and government agencies for approval to bring the workers out of their accommodation to their medical appointments.

Each such case faced obstacles that should never have been there for such a basic need as medical attention.

These amendments, regardless of what their intention was, emboldened unscrupulous employers to go even further in violating the workers' basic human rights.

The biggest concern is that the official figures show that both the community outside the dormitory and the dormitory workers have near 0 infections. While the lives of the Singapore community are almost back to normal, the workers in the dormitories are still being locked up.

CASE STUDY: PARAM

In late June, Param (not his real name) called HOME for help, sending us horrific video footage of his living conditions. Three men had been crammed into what was literally a cage: a converted shipping container covered with wire mesh. They could not even walk around the compound of the premises.

Like most migrant workers', their families depended heavily on them. When work stopped in the circuit breaker and their income was slashed, they became desperate. Param sneaked out to borrow cash from friends and remit it to his family.

To punish and prevent further excursions, the employer constructed a metal cage around the converted shipping container that the workers were housed in. They were locked in this cage for 6 weeks. Param was denied medical treatment while confined. Their employer also did not allow them out to MOM to complain of their unpaid wages. Giving employers the practical power over workers' movement creates these problems that the law on paper cannot resolve.

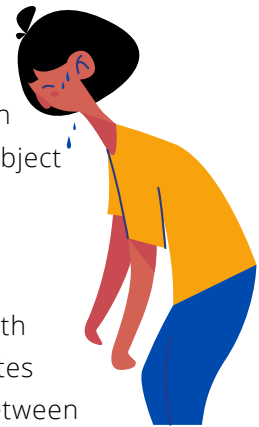


MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

The onset of the circuit-breaker regulations in April resulted in a 25% increase in the number of calls to our helpline. We set out below some of the issues that MDWs were facing, and continue to face, at this time. Many of these issues had existed before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of the circuit-breakers measures; they were exacerbated as MDWs are facing increased isolation.

Overwork, abuse, lack of rest

Some MDWs faced increased work hours as employers are home at almost all hours of the day, leading to more household and caregiving duties. MDWs are not covered under the Employment Act. Thus, they are not entitled to fixed working hours, or overtime pay. Under the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act, MDWs are to be given 'adequate' rest, a term which is not defined. As a result, their rest hours, which are subject to the generosity of individual employers, have become even more precarious than they already are.



MDWs also reported that they face increased workplace stress as they are isolated with their employers for longer periods of time. Complaints of verbal abuse rose, as disputes between employers and MDWs become more frequent due to increased proximity between employers and MDWs.

CASE STUDY: EMILY

Emily had to endure verbal abuse from her employer from the time she started working for her employers in January. She said it got worse during the circuit breaker period, with enforced and prolonged stay-home measures putting her under greater scrutiny.

She eventually reached a breaking point and ran away from her employer's home earlier this month. Her employer called her names, and she would get her meals late sometimes.

She called HOME, and we arranged for her employment agency to pick her up. She is now housed by her agency and awaits repatriation as she wishes to return home.



Restrictions in mobility

On April 11, MOM stated that all MDWs were to stay home on their rest days, except to buy meals or run essential errands. Given that many were already staying at home and minimising contact with outsiders, the announcement perpetuates unfair targeting of migrant workers.

Even though MDWs were subject to the same circuit breaker measures as their employers, some MDWs were prevented by their employers from leaving the house for essential errands like buying food, remitting money and for exercise. For some MDWs, their employers informed them that they will be reported to the authorities if they leave the house at all. This caused great stress to them, particularly to MDWs who are unable to send money home. Many MDWs are sole breadwinners for their families, who are themselves facing financial hardship due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since MDWs were working longer hours during the circuit-breaker, being unable to step outside for fresh air and exercise had adverse effects on their mental well-being. Notwithstanding the intent of the advisory to curb the spread of the virus, some employers were misusing this advisory to make MDWs work during their day off, without compensation

CASE STUDY: ANNA

Anna was barred from entering her former employer's HDB flat after she went out on her rest day in February because he was afraid she would bring the coronavirus home.

He told her to put herself up at a friend's or relative's place for 20 days before calling him to check if she could return. He did this after having given her the green light to go out that day.

She sought shelter at HOME's shelter on the advice of a friend two days later. After about a month at the shelter, she was hired by another employer.



MOM issued a similar advisory on 21 May 2020, that MDWs must stay at home during their rest days during Phase 1 of Singapore's community re-opening. While the advisory encouraged open communication between MDWs and their employers, urging the latter to provide the necessary support, this was not always the case. There were MDWs who were asked to work during their rest days since they were spending it at home. MDWs who do not have their own space within their employers' houses were especially susceptible to this, as they do not have a comfortable space to rest and therefore end up working on their rest days.

Upon the onset of Phase 2 of Singapore's community reopening, MOM issued another advisory stating that "FDWs who wish to spend their rest days outside should seek the consent of their employers to do so on a weekday when public spaces are less crowded". This advisory caused many employers to continue to prevent MDWs from going on their rest days, particularly on Sundays. While it was later clarified that MDWs can continue to take their rest days on weekends, HOME encountered MDWs whose employers continued to restrict their movements out of fear of contravening MOM advisories.

Restrictions in phone use and increased surveillance by employers

Many MDWs are unable to use their mobile phones during work hours. As work hours increased for some MDWs during the circuit breaker, they had less access to their phones. As they faced increased isolation during this time, it was important for them to have access to their mobile phones to be able to speak to their loved ones back home for assurance and comfort, or to their friends, whom they are unable to meet, and to keep up-to-date with accurate developments about the Covid-19 situation.

MDWs who had limited access to avenues of communication were unable to report instances of abuse that may manifest as a result of increased isolation. The inability to report abusive conditions is an issue relevant to all victims of domestic violence, and live-in MDWs have been recognised by the law as a vulnerable group who are more susceptible to abuse and exploitation. As employers were able to monitor the movements of their MDWs closely, some may not be able to leave their employers' houses to seek help. This led to some MDWs having to tolerate abusive or exploitative conditions, and be susceptible to forceful repatriation by their employers before a report of such conditions can be made. MDWs were also fearful of running away from their employers' houses for fear of breaching circuit breaker measures.

Salary issues

Some MDWs have faced delayed payment of salaries, been asked to take a pay cut as employers are facing financial difficulties (with no reduction in work), and some have been asked to go on no-pay leave with no assurance that their full salaries will be paid to them at a later date. More MDWs were asked to work on their rest days, with some unsure if they were being compensated at a later date.

CASE STUDY: YATI

Yati (not her real name) was asked to take a \$300 salary cut for a few months due to the Covid-19 situation. Her employer didn't commit to pay her the outstanding salary at a later date.

When Yati did not agree to these terms, the employer sought to terminate her employment and send her home.

HOME helped her negotiate with her employer to allow a transfer, as she desperately needed an income to support her family back home in these trying times.



Termination by employers and the inability to transfer

During the circuit-breaker period, we encountered MDWs who have been terminated by employers and are unable to go home due to travel restrictions imposed by countries in the region. After they have been asked to leave from their employer's houses, their circumstances remain uncertain as many countries in the region have implemented border control measures which have led to flights being cancelled, and have had to find their own accommodation, and maintain their own upkeep as they wait to be repatriated.

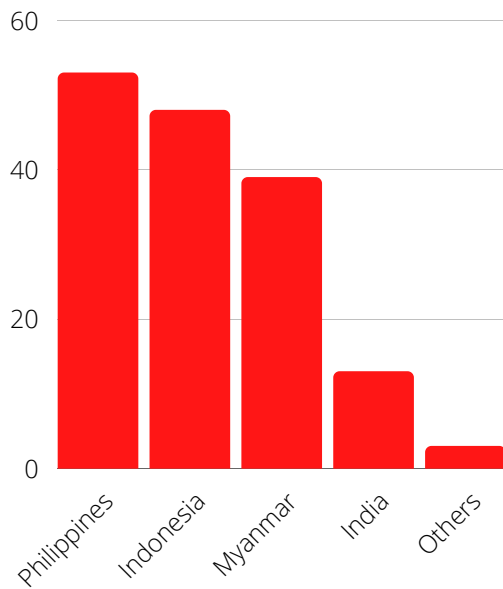
MOM amended the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act to allow employment agencies to take over the responsibility of an MDW whose employer wished to transfer her. This move was to encourage employers to transfer their MDWs without having to incur levy and other upkeep costs. However, the changes proposed by MOM retain the right for employers to terminate their MDWs, with no regard to the MDW's choice as to whether she wishes to leave the household or to give notice to the MDW.

Under the new rules, MDWs are also only given 14 days to secure a new employer, once the EA takes over the management of the MDW. However, in our experience, 14 days is too short a time period for MDWs to secure new employment. There may also be circumstances where an EA compels an MDW to take up employment that she does not wish to, so that the EA does not continue to incur upkeep costs.



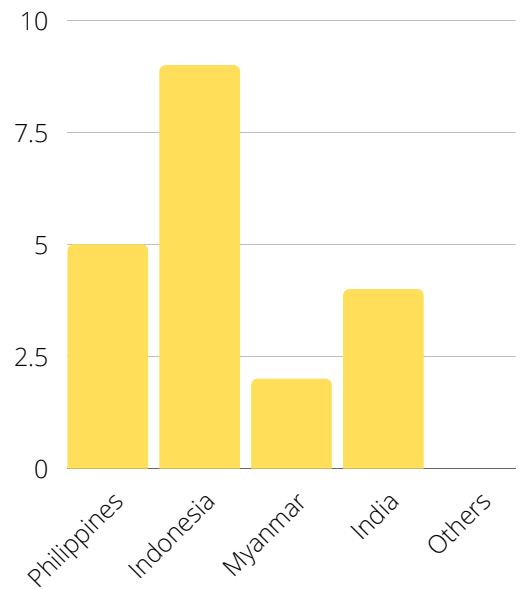
DOMESTIC WORKER REPORT

I. Breakdown by nationality



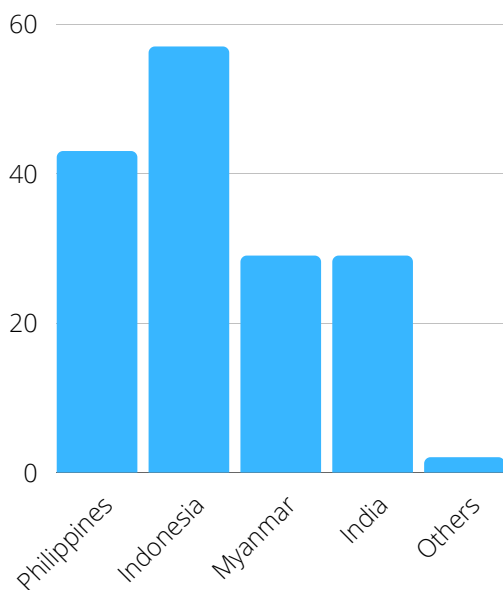
Q1 2020

Within the 1st quarter of 2020, the vast majority of the cases HOME encountered were from the Philippines (with around 50 cases during this time), followed closely by Indonesia and Myanmar.



Q2 2020

Within the 2nd quarter, the overall number of cases we encountered dropped dramatically due to the restrictions on the number of people we could shelter at our premises per the MOM & MOH guidelines. Majority of our residents then were from Indonesia followed by the Philippines and India.

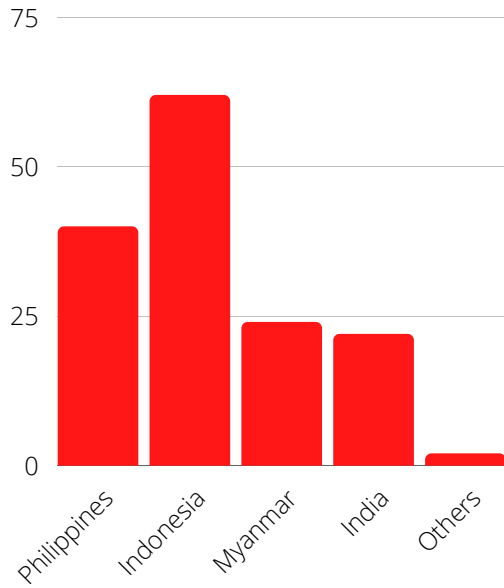


Q3 2020

Within the 3rd quarter, the overall number of cases rose once more, as we arranged for an alternate housing to manage the influx of cases and be able to provide assistance to those who needed the most. The majority of the cases encountered were still from Indonesia, with around 60 cases, followed by the Philippines. During this time, we also saw almost similar number of cases from both Myanmar and the Philippines.

DOMESTIC WORKER REPORT

I. Breakdown by nationality

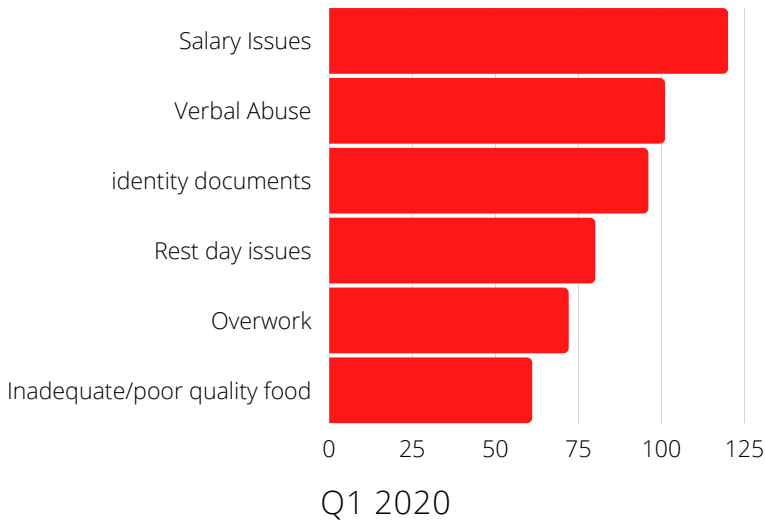


Q4 2020

In the last quarter of 2020, the vast majority of the cases HOME encountered were from the Indonesia (with around 60 cases during this time), followed closely by Phillipines, Myanmar and india.

DOMESTIC WORKER REPORT

II. Breakdown by issue



Approximately all of the workers who approached HOME during the 1st quarter had suffered some sort of salary issue, with around 120 reported instances. This was slightly higher than the 100 reported cases of verbal abuse, and closely followed by those related to identity documents and rest days.

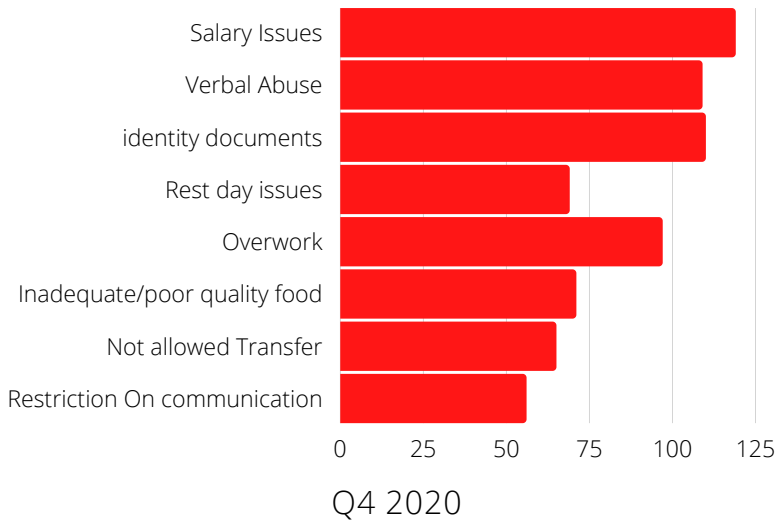
A similar distribution can be observed from the 2nd quarter of 2020, where a significant majority of the workers taken in by HOME suffered from salary issues.



Salary issues continued to make up the bulk of the issues suffered by migrant domestic workers within the 3rd quarter, and the proportion of identity document-related and overwork issues reported significantly increased.

DOMESTIC WORKER REPORT

II. Breakdown by issue

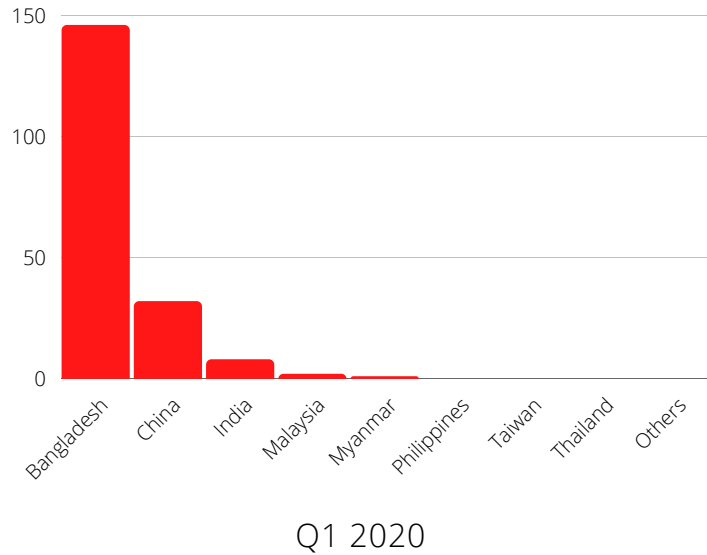


A large majority of the workers who approached HOME during the last quarter of the year had suffered some sort of salary issue, with around 119 reported instances. This was slightly higher than the 109 reported cases of verbal abuse, and confiscation of identity documents.

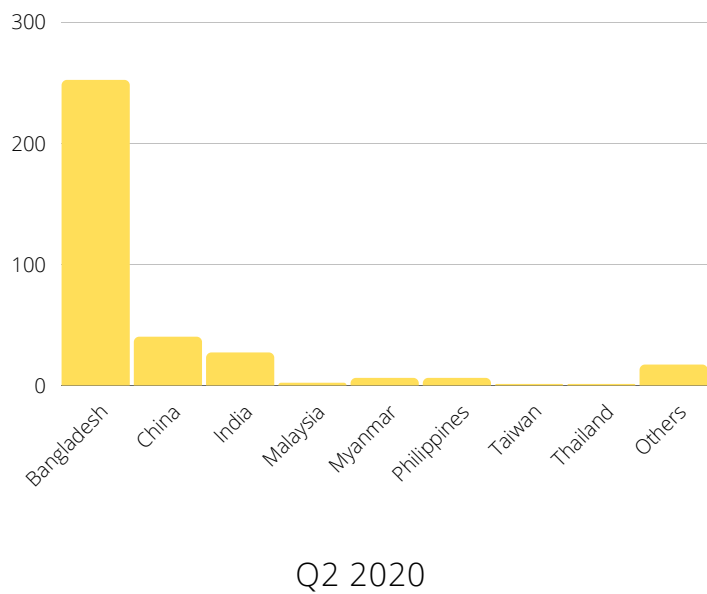
NON-DOMESTIC CASEWORK

I. Breakdown by nationality

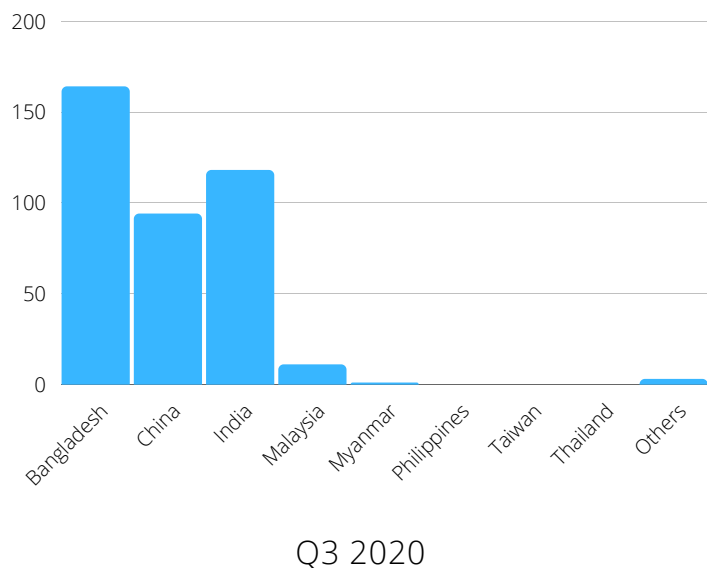
A significant majority of the cases encountered by the non-domestic side were from Bangladeshi workers, comprising of around 145 cases. This was followed by Chinese workers, and Indian workers.



The overall number of cases within the second quarter significantly increased. While Bangladeshi workers still made up most of the cases encountered, the number of cases increased to 250.



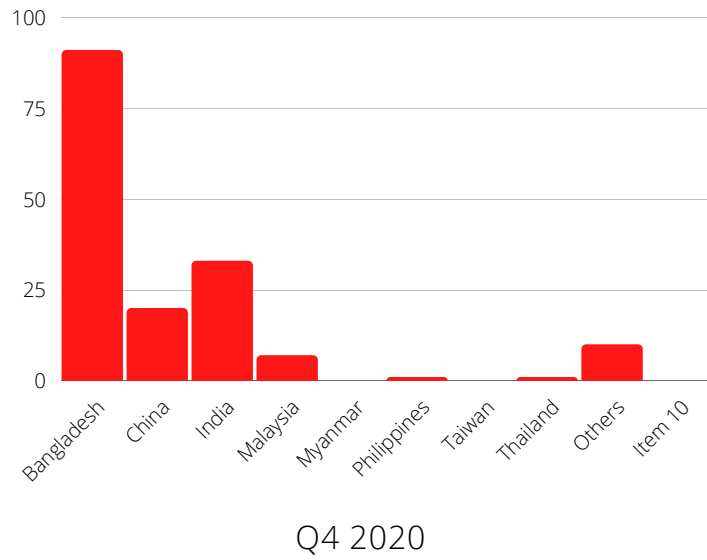
The 3rd quarter saw a significant increase in the number of Indian and Chinese workers approaching the organisation, with the number shooting up to around 120 cases and 90 cases respectively. Despite the reduced number of reported cases in comparison to the previous quarter, Bangladeshi workers continued to make up most of the cases.



NON-DOMESTIC CASEWORK

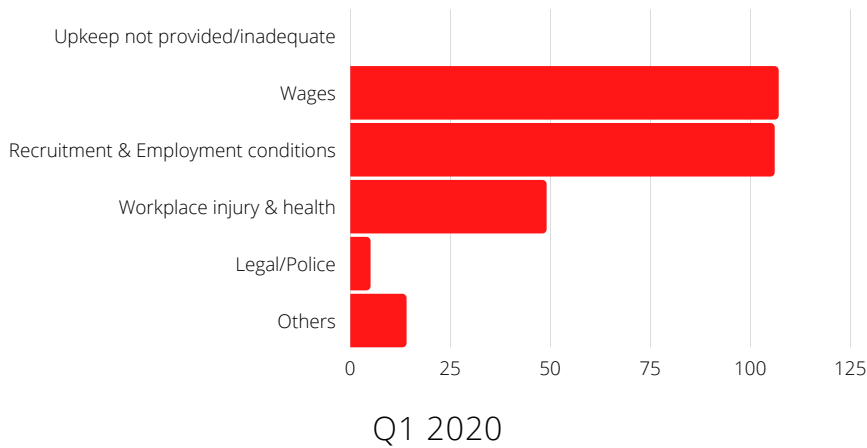
I. Breakdown by nationality

A significant majority of the cases encountered by the non-domestic side were from Bangladeshi workers, comprising of around 90 cases. This was followed by Indian workers, and chinese workers.

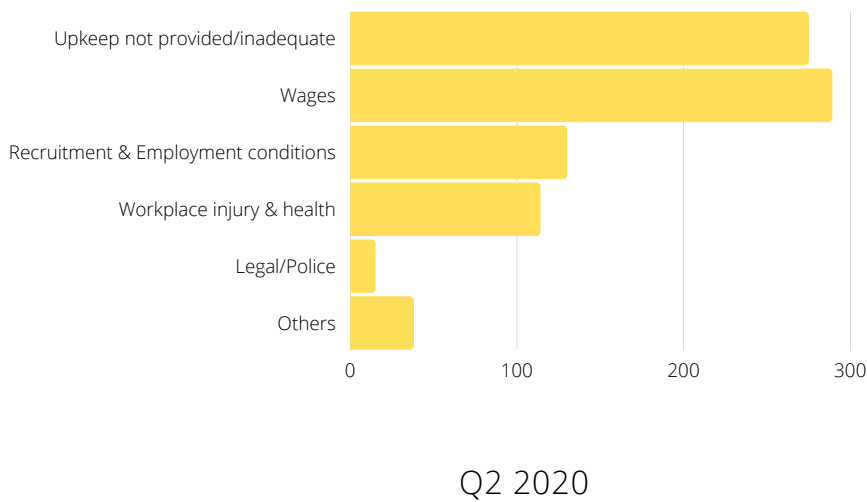


NON-DOMESTIC CASEWORK

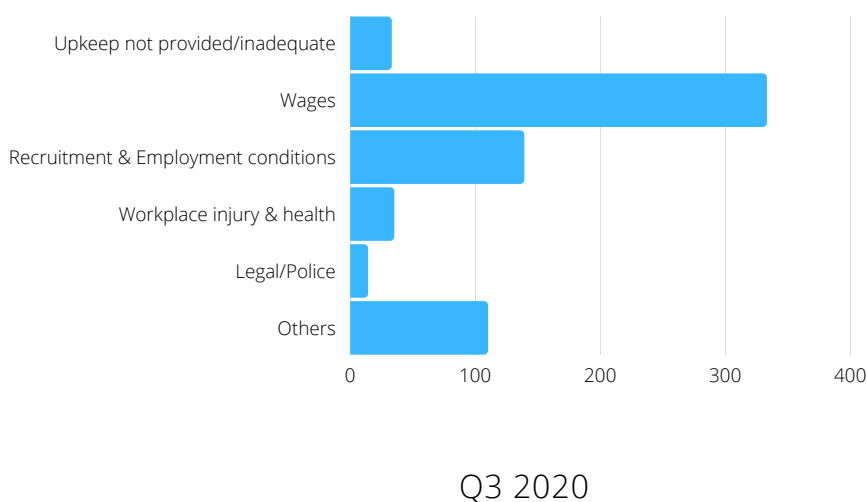
I. Top issues



Most of the issues seen in the 1st quarter reported some sort of problem-related to wages or recruitment and employment conditions.



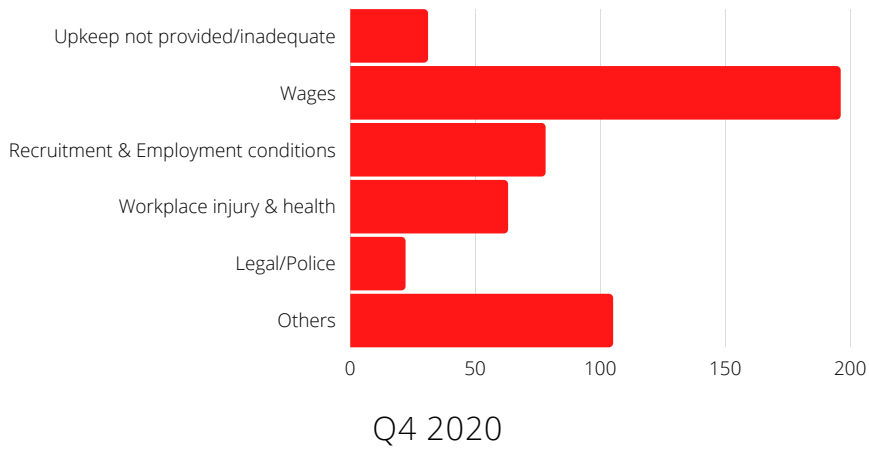
In the 2nd quarter, there was a dramatic increase in the number of reports made expressing upkeep issues, with around 270 reported cases. This followed closely behind the most reported issue: problems related to wages.



In the 3rd quarter, the proportion and number of cases reporting wage issues increased significantly, with around 330 reported cases.

NON-DOMESTIC CASEWORK

I. Top issues



Most of the issues seen in the last quarter reported some sort of problem-related to wages or recruitment and employment conditions.

WHAT HAS HOME DONE?

We are committed to serving the migrant worker community in Singapore. HOME has been doing the following through the course of the Covid-19 pandemic:

- **Humanitarian assistance**

We have provided financial assistance to most in need during this time reaching nearly 300 workers to cover for rent, food, phone top-ups and other emergency expenses. HOME continues to provide:

- Financial emergency [assistance](#) to migrant workers for immediate basic needs like food, shelter, medical or transport expenses and phone top-up. Workers who are no longer in employment are the most affected as their companies were already not providing for them even before the circuit breaker started. We have distributed food to approximately 350 workers in 50 locations.

- Additional medical and counselling assistance to shelter residents
- Outreach to workers living in smaller accommodations found on the open market and providing them supplies such as masks and sanitisers

- **Case Management**

From January to September 2020, we provided assistance to approximately 500 workers in areas outside of the isolated dormitories. Workers who have filed salary claims, work injury compensation claims or are assisting in investigations face additional barriers as Ministry of Manpower officials are busy carrying out enforcement action at the dormitories and have little time and resources for their complaints. With MOM Services Centre down having to cut down on their capacity, workers had to surface their issues through a single general hotline. Many workers reported difficulty getting in touch with MOM on the phone. HOME stepped in to provide assistance for these cases. These efforts include:

- Extending our existing essential telephone hotline to any migrant worker that reaches out for help and advice.



Outreach to workers during Covid-19 pandemic

- Providing advice, emotional support, financial assistance, mediation services and where necessary, and filing complaints at MOM on behalf of migrant workers who have reached out to us.
 - Providing complex case management to migrant workers .
 - Providing mediation services to MDWs for issues faced with their employers or agents.
- **Advocacy**
 - Responding to government and media requests for statements and information on migrant workers. Statements include:
 - A joint statement with HealthServe upon the announcement of DORSCON Orange to assure the public that we have put precautionary measures in place.
 - Highlighting the impact of Covid-19 measures on worker's rights.
 - Advocating for the infection numbers among the migrant community to be taken seriously, which was claimed in the Straits Times to not be of 'critical importance in terms of policy decisions' as workers in dormitories had at the time been isolated.
 - HOME called for more efforts to reduce the density of the number of men living in dormitories to allow for safe distancing, ensure food security and recognising their necessary presence within Singapore.
 - Highlighting concerns related to migrant workers during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, the spike among male migrant workers, the disproportionate revocation of work passes due to circuit-break violations, the strengthening of wage protection for migrant workers during the pandemic,
- the introduction of vulnerabilities due to the [stay-home notices introduced](#), migrant workers' worries about accommodation, access to sanitation and wages, urges to consider migrant workers as part of our community and the impact of circuit breaker measures on domestic workers.
- [Recognising](#) the lighter measures taken toward workers with their circumstances in view, in response to media attention drawn to the [obligations employees face](#) in reporting for work despite having been issued a Leave of Absence.
 - Questioning the harsh and disproportionate measures against work pass holders who have been permanently barred for allegedly flouting circuit breaker measures. Many workers have outstanding loans due to the high recruitment fees they pay to come here, and are sole breadwinners of their families, who are even more vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic. HOME understands the importance of the circuit breaker regulations, and have been doing our part to urge workers to comply with them. Breaches cannot be taken lightly, regardless of who they are by. However, it is important that the government's response is fair and proportionate to all who live here and have a shared social responsibility to contain this virus.
 - Calling for pre-emptive and proactive testing of residents in all workers' accommodation with confirmed infections. The high density and vulnerability of residents in mega dorms demand decisive pre-emptive action. Isolating residents with symptoms is insufficient for two reasons:(1) asymptomatic transmissibility of Covid-19; (2) population density in the dorms.

- Advocating for [strict enforcement of mandatory rest day](#) for migrant domestic workers (MDWs),
 - Advocating for [access to timely and reliable information](#): It is not easy for migrant workers to access information in a rapidly evolving situation, especially if they speak regional languages like Burmese, Thai etc.,
 - Advocating for [access to timely medical care](#) particularly where employers violate healthcare obligations to their workers and Punishment for employers' breach of measures e.g. in obtaining entry approval.
 - Calling for more empathetic treatment of MDWs by employers, and to find out if their MDWs were concerned about their families back home, while also making it easier for them to rest at home in the early stages of the pandemic when restrictions were introduced.
 - A study was released by the Centre for Culture Centered Approach To Research and Evaluation (CARE) and HOME released the findings of a study today to find out more about the challenges and issues facing migrant workers living in the locked down dormitories amidst the Covid-19 outbreak. This report included short-term and long-term recommendations for the improvement of preventive measures against Covid-19, accommodation issues, availability of soap and sanitisers, resolution of wage and salary issues, lack of voice and mental health issues among workers.
 - Conducting a study with AWARE of 25 domestic workers undertaking eldercare duties, highlighting the increased overwork and other well-being issues they faced during the circuit-breaker period.
 - [Reinforcing](#) the need to institute electronic payment for all migrant workers and providing a minimum wage of S\$1000 to make up for various salary deductions.
 - Proactively engaging in advocacy work with relevant authorities using our case work ,experience and data to strengthen legal systems and advocating for the rights of 1.2 million migrant workers in Singapore.
- **Administration**

Co-ordinating in-kind donations of masks, soap and sanitisers. Over the last two months, we have been involved in community outreach, distributing masks, providing financial assistance for housing, food and phone top ups for affected workers.

 - [Running fundraising campaigns to help](#) migrant Workers in anticipation that many workers would experience financial crises raised by COVID-19. HOME raised over \$800,000 during this fundraising effort. These funds have contributed to:
 - Providing financial assistance to pay for alternative accommodation for MWs who were told to move out when inspecting MOM officers concluded that their rooms are too cramped. These workers were unable to pay rental fees as they had stopped work at the time or because their employers were in financial difficulty. These rental issues were compounded by increased rental fees by landlords who sought to take advantage of those looking for a place to stay as a result of being asked to relocate by MOM.



- o Case management and provision of direct services and financial assistance has become critical, and will become even more so in the coming months. The well-being issues faced by migrant workers will be felt long after the immediate Covid-19 crisis is over. We foresee that an increasing number of migrant workers will be reaching out to us for assistance over the course of this year, as they seek redress for the problems that they are facing during this time.



- **Outreach**

We have been involved in outreach to over 30 different locations where workers are housed, and provided food, cash and supplies such as masks to approximately 150 workers. In the course of our work, we have met workers who have been turned out of their previous places of accommodation, are not supplied with adequate meals by their employers and do not have cash to purchase mobile phone credit to communicate with their friends and families. Some of them needed medical care and were unable to access it. Many lived in cramped rooms with poor ventilation.

We have also met workers who were told by the authorities to evacuate their existing accommodation spaces, which were deemed to be too crowded. While we agree that it is necessary to reduce congestion in the spaces where workers reside, more support should have been given for them to find alternative accommodation. Several workers we met ended up finding other spaces which were just as crowded, if not more so.

Workers who are on special passes, i.e. those whose work permits have been cancelled but are required to remain behind to assist in police or MOM investigations, are especially vulnerable. In these cases, the workers have filed claims against their employers and the relationship between the employer and the worker has soured. Their employers are no longer communicating with them and in some cases, the companies that they have worked for have closed down. The workers are thus left to fend for themselves. Enforcing the employer's obligations of upkeep and maintenance for this category of workers is especially challenging. It is also difficult to hold employers accountable during this time as the Ministry of Manpower's resources have been predominantly allocated to the well-being of workers in the purpose-built, and factory-converted dormitories, where the spread of Covid-19 has been rampant.

We believe the workers we have assisted so far represent a very small proportion of those who require assistance. There are many more workers living outside of purpose-built and factory-converted dormitories who require support for their employment troubles, and are in need of financial assistance, food, proper accommodation and access to medical care. Despite facing the stress of being confined to their living quarters, which are often cramped and do not make for comfortable living, many workers we met understand the necessity of the quarantine measures, and have shown great resilience. However, this also means that we need to double up on our efforts to provide care and support to them. More resources are required in order to meet the needs of this vulnerable group. We urge the government to allow more groups, especially non-governmental organisations who work closely with migrant workers, to be classified as providing essential services, so that the needs of more workers can be met.



Outreach to workers during Covid-19 pandemic

- **Welfare**

Online Classes

Activities at the shelter include online classes for MDWs that covered topics such as first aid, language lessons and nutrition. With HOME Academy classes being suspended due to Covid-19, the online classes held on Sundays proved to be a welcome respite for the domestic workers – not only did these classes enable them to relieve their stress and anxieties arising from such trying times, but the domestic workers were also able to meet their friends online. The online classes are hosted on Zoom and also live-stream on our Facebook page. Since July 5th, we have conducted 7 virtual classes and we have planned more classes for the upcoming months.

Legal workshops

We also conducted legal workshops to educate the residents on their employment rights and criminal law. The workshop was organised with the support of Hagar International, NUS Faculty of Law and Beacon Law Corporation.

International Domestic Workers' Day

On the 21st of June, HOME held an online celebration for International Domestic Workers' Day. This was a celebration of, for and by domestic workers in Singapore, to show our heartfelt appreciation for the essential labour that they do and simply to have a good time with our domestic workers community. Over a 100 domestic workers, HOME staff and board members came together virtually for a fun afternoon filled with performances, games and speeches. The speakers acknowledged and thanked domestic workers for all the sacrifices they have made, and highlighted the need for 'decent work' for domestic workers, in line with the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers. A step towards that would be the inclusion of domestic workers in the Employment Act. Amidst all the fun and games, a special video made in collaboration with Singapore Kindness Movement was also aired. This video (you can view here) features a beautiful performance by domestic workers and words of appreciation from supportive employers and to celebrate fairness and friendships.

Labour Day dinner

HOME organised a special Labour Day dinner for about 50 MDWs at our shelter to pay tribute to their work. In the midst of the pandemic, the women had a small celebration with food sponsored by a donor, music and decorations. These took place with safe distancing measures in place.

Activities

Singing, Zumba, dancing and card games keeping the residents occupied, they have not only forged strong friendships with their fellow residents, but also found their own unique ways of keeping up their spirits and staying positive. Similarly, the 'Relief Through Pottery' activity proved to be a hit among the residents as it enabled them to enhance their creativity while engaging in something meaningful. Our donors and partners have also donated groceries to the residents as well as items like masks and medication to ensure their well-being. HOME is immensely grateful and heartened by the generosity of our donors and is encouraged by their initiative to step up and offer their assistance especially in such trying times. Other activities include initiatives through HOME Academy and Suara Kita (see Annex).

Operational impact on HOME

As the Covid-19 crisis deepens, many charities including HOME have had to cease and/or cut back on

their physical operations, reducing support for a large number of vulnerable migrant workers. We have had to close our physical helpdesks, but we continue to support remotely through our hotlines and complex case management services. We implemented strict safe distancing measures in our shelter, in line with recommendations and advisories from MOM and the National Council of Social Services.

Our skills building classes with HOME Academy have been suspended but we continue to engage with the community to ensure domestic workers at home are getting peer support.



Hari Raya Zoom Event



Labour Day 2020

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond, we have been making recommendations to improve the well-being and employment standards of the migrant worker community, which have been exacerbated due to the pandemic.

- **The right to switch employers freely**

MWs

For construction workers who have lost their jobs, the Ministry of Manpower should allow workers in such circumstances to switch employers without having to obtain the permission of their current employers and facilitate job-matching at a national level. An online platform can be made available for companies who are hiring so that others who intend to be their employees can match their workers to those who need them. MOM can also advise employers who are intending to hire workers from abroad, to consider hiring applicants from this platform first.



MDWs

Currently, MDWs are reliant on their employers' consent in order to switch employers. Meanwhile, employers are able to unilaterally dismiss and repatriate a domestic worker without giving any prior notice. MDWs' deportability and the constraints on labour mobility are fundamental factors influencing MDWs' decisions to stay in highly exploitative situations and to not report abuses and violations. MDWs should be given the freedom to switch employers with clearly defined notice periods.

The right for an MDW to switch employers is currently given under very limited circumstances (for example, when the MDW is assisting the authorities in investigations). We should move towards establishing the right for MDWs to switch employers freely, with clearly defined notice periods that employers and MDWs are to abide by. As a start, MDWs who have finished their contracts should be allowed to look for alternative employment without their employers' consent. This will effectively help them to negotiate their salary commensurate with their experience and skill sets. Lack of labour mobility for MDWs is a fundamental factor in influencing MDWs to stay in exploitative working conditions and to not report abuses and violations. The freedom of MDWs to terminate their employment and change employers without their current employer or EA's permission is fundamental to the improvement of MDW's overall well-being

- **Salary recommendations**

MOM should inform employers that MDWs should be paid their full salaries in a timely manner, and strictly follow enforcement measures on employers who do not do so. It is also timely for MOM to mandate electronic payment of salaries for MDWs, as it has done for migrant workers living in dormitories, for better tracking of salary payment.

Wage protection should be guaranteed for all workers who test positive for Covid-19, even after they have used up the legal entitlements of 14 days of outpatient sick leave and 60 days of hospitalisation leave under the Employment Act.

More information from MOM on how errant employers will be identified, and what consequences they will face, will help reassure the public that the advisory on wages is enforceable. Suspension of work pass privileges, and other administrative penalties, is an inadequate deterrent, especially in these times. Employers should be charged and sentenced to deter others such offenders.

Singapore does not prescribe a mandatory minimum wage for any worker. The lack of enforceable minimum wage guidelines leave migrant workers vulnerable to long-term economic exploitation, where their wages remain depressed and do not reflect increased costs of living. Depressed wages and higher migration costs also lead to increased debt burdens and longer loan repayment periods. It can also result in migrant workers forgoing rest days in lieu of financial compensation in order to earn a higher monthly wage.



- **Freedom of Mobility for MDWs**

MOM should issue a clarification for employers that MDWs' movements should not be unduly restricted by their employers.

HOME also recommended adopting a rights-based framework. All MDWs in Singapore are required to live with their employers. However, this arrangement effectively allows them to be worked around the clock and have their movements unduly controlled by employers. A [live-out option](#) will make MDWs less vulnerable to exploitation, and will be a way to regulate their working hours and reduce isolation faced by many domestic workers. The live-in nature of domestic work also makes them inherently more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Live out options allow MDWs to receive adequate rest. It also facilitates the enforcement of the Employment Act as it is easier to determine overtime pay and limit working hours. Allowing MDWs to live out also reduces the surveillance and communication restrictions that they are sometimes subject to by their employers.

- **Dormitories for MWs: Density**

We urge for more efforts to reduce the density of dorms. Older patients may not be the only ones susceptible to poor clinical outcomes and living in close proximity with other workers, some of whom may be asymptomatic, will make these workers more vulnerable and

reduce opacity around decision making and offering explanations surrounding decisions made by authorities, particularly when it involves life and death matters, strengthens public trust, in how the outbreak among the migrant community is being managed.

- **Ratify ILO's Convention on Decent Work for MDWs**

It is time we apply the values of justice, equality and respect for labour rights to domestic work. We urge the Singapore Government to ratify ILO's Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers and guarantee equal protection to its MDWs, particularly in the form of the following recommendations:

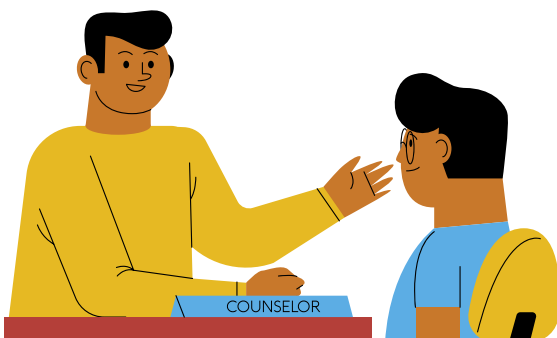
- Extend the Employment Act to MDWs so that basic labour rights for MDWs, such as working hours and overtime pay, are regulated. Including MDWs under the Employment Act also entrenches the notion that domestic work is formal work, by giving MDWs the legal protections that are given to other categories of workers.
- Define the duration of a rest day as 24 hours: To allow for their mental and physical recuperation, MDWs are entitled to a weekly rest day. However, rest days are not defined as being 24 hours, which leads to many MDWs doing some work on their rest days without pay.



- Move towards a zero recruitment fees model: MDWs paying large sums for their overseas placements in the form of many months of salary deductions by employers. The indebtedness of migrant workers in Singapore is a significant factor in their acceptance of dehumanising working and living conditions.

- **Migrant workers need better recourse to address their mental health concerns**

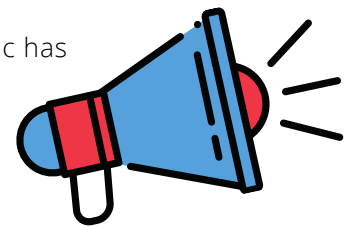
The enhanced isolation of migrant workers due to Covid-19 (for MDWs, being in their employers houses with little recourse to leave and for the other migrant workers, being quarantined in their dormitories) have left many of them feeling depressed and anxious. Apart from the stress of managing their workload and meeting the needs of their families back home, their anxieties are heightened by lack of rest and poor living conditions - MDWs are sometimes subject to uncomfortable sleeping arrangements with little privacy while those in other industries often live in cramped, unhygienic conditions in dormitories, work sites and private apartments, thus adding to their mental stress.



Workers who are confined to their dormitories and those living outside of them face tremendous financial and job insecurities which are affecting their mental health. Counselling and psychological services are not easily available for migrant workers to help them cope with these stresses. It is high time we implement readily-available and free helplines and counselling centres that address the mental health needs of our migrant workers.

- **Enable migrant workers to speak for themselves**

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that migrant workers are indispensable to the functioning of our country. We need to make it possible for them to advocate for their own well-being and for them to speak up without fear of persecution. Migrant workers are best placed to speak about their lived experiences and suggest feasible and effective recommendations. Worker-led and worker-owned unions need to be set up so they are empowered and can represent their own interests, be able to advocate for themselves and reverse the powerlessness they have felt for so long.



We should not treat migrant workers as disposable goods: usually the first to be hired because of the relatively low costs to employ them, but also the first to be fired, not being citizens and having the least employment protection under the law. Job security is the main source of mental stress for many of the workers we have spoken to. Addressing these concerns should also be the government's priority in looking after the well-being of migrant workers.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORT

The key areas of HOME's operations which require funding are:








- Emergency financial assistance for those in crisis situations – food, mobile phone top-up, transport and rent. These funds will go to MDWs who are at our shelter, and migrant workers who are not allowed to work but have no access to money to provide for daily essentials such as food and accommodation.
- Emergency medical or repatriation Assistance Crisis including medical / counseling support.
 - Additional funding is required for meeting medical needs or professional longer term counselling for MDWs who are either victims of physical or sexual abuse.
 - It is not uncommon for migrant workers to be left without a means to get back to their home country, especially if wages have been unpaid and they are not able to be recovered. One off funding is required to assist individuals in this predicament to return when safe and possible to do so.
- HOME runs a shelter for MDWs, providing accommodation for those in distress, including medical and counselling support – funding is required for additional shelter for MDWs who are in distress but are unable to go home due to loss of jobs, travel restrictions, pending cases and disputes. In addition to meeting basic human needs, our shelter also takes care of emotional and physical well-being which has become even more critical in the current situation. We require:
 - Dedicated well-being officers - to ensure quality services provided with regular follow ups with the residents and support personnel
 - Medical Support - doctors, allied health professionals to attend to the residents' physical well being.
 - Counselling Support & Befriending Programme - as many residents are traumatised by issues faced during their employment and disputes. Native tongue counsellors are available in Bahasa, English Hindi, Tamil and additional emotional, support is also provided by befrienders.
 - Skill building, recreation and employment teams - skill building classes, recreation activities, to ensure immediate well being of the workers, as well as long term support for them to repatriate or reintegrate back into the workforce.
- Complex case management - including legal support when employers do not meet their statutory obligations . We are experiencing and anticipating further surges of people that need specialized help. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Information, paralegal counsel and advice to workers in crises situations.
 - Assistance to the workers in making complaints to Ministry of Manpower and the Police and following up with the authorities to advocate for the workers' cases.
 - Mediation with employers and agents.
 - Employment advice and legal assistance to migrant workers with questions about Singapore's employment practices and laws.
 - Connecting workers to pro bono lawyers for legal representation.

ANNEX

HOME Academy Classes were suspended due to Covid 19. This decision was made keeping in mind safety of all of our students and in accordance with the guidelines established by MOH and NCSS. Many of the workers felt disappointed as HOME Academy was not only a place of learning but a place of community. To continue to provide that space to our community HOME has organised free weekly online classes conducted on Zoom, every Sunday, 2 - 3 PM throughout the year. After the workshop, every participant got a certificate of participation.



MONTH	DATE (DD/MM/YY)	WORKSHOP	POSTER	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
MAY	10/05/20	BASIC MANDARIN FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS		40
	17/05/20	CPR FOR ADULTS & BABY		65
	31/05/20	HANDLE CHOKING FOR ADULTS & BABY		107

MONTH	DATE (DD/MM/YY)	WORKSHOP	POSTER	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
JUNE	07/06/20	ETHICS AND BEHAVIOUR OF CAREGIVER		120
	14/06/20	HEALTHY EATING FOR WHOLE FAMILY		110
	28/06/20	CHRONIC DISEASES		96
.....				
JULY	05/07/20	BASIC MANDARIN FOR CAREGIVER		86
	12/07/20	STRESS MANAGEMENT		85
	19/07/20	CHILD & TODDLER CAREGIVER		93
	19/07/20	PERSONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE		86

Suara Kita means “Our voice” is a platform of solidarity consisting of the combined “Pekerja Migran Indonesia” also known as PMI (Indonesian Migrant Workers) community in Singapore who come together to improve the welfare of work and forge harmonious relations with each other for the same purpose. From the beginning of the Circuit breaker until the year end we have been organizing multiple workshops to empower the community with different skills and educate them on their rights as Migrants Workers in Singapore.

MONTH	DATE (YEAR 2020)	WORKSHOP	SPEAKER	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
APRIL	28	PUBLIC SPEAKING WORKSHOP	TOMMY RISTANTO (TV NET)	40
MAY	10	MEETING WITH IDW PREPARING FOR IDW	BARIYAH	15
JUNE	13	PMI DI MASA PANDEMIC WORKSHOP	INVITED GOVERNMENT OFFICERS	110
	14	CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL DW DAY	IDW FEDERATION HONG KONG	
	28	CASE MANAGEMENT	JUSTIC WITHOUT BORDERS	19
JULY	5	INTERVIEW SKILLS	JUSTICE WITHOUT BORDERS	19
	26	EVALUATION MEETING WITH LEADERS		28
AUGUST	22	SHARING BY HONG KONG'S INDONESIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS NETWORK	JBM & IMA	52
	30	EVALUATION MEETING		26
SEPTEMBER	21	SHARING BY INSURANCE COVER FOR FDW	PASSION MAID/ MR LOW	42
	24	PARTI LIYANI'S SHARING HER CASE AND WINNING	PARTI LIYANI & GUSTI	56
	29	EVALUATION MEETING	SK LEADERS & MENTORS	23

Articles written by Migrant workers: https://myvoiceathome.org/Further_resources

Press statements: <https://www.home.org.sg/covid19-links-resource>



HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION ECONOMICS (H.O.M.E)

495 Geylang Road, #02-01, Singapore 389453

<http://www.home.org.sg/>

contact@home.org.sg

(+65) 63440224

Singapore 389453