



01 June 2020

# REGIONAL IMPACT OF COVID-19: REPORT OF BWI-ASIA PACIFIC

## INTRODUCTION

### BWI Industries and Organizational Coverage in Asia-Pacific

In the Asia-Pacific region, the BWI has presence in the following sub-regions and countries: Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in South Asia, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia and Hong Kong in East Asia, and Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia,

Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia in Southeast Asia. The BWI Asia-Pacific Region is also active in Qatar where many of the construction workers are from South Asia and Southeast Asia.



At the BWI Asia-Pacific Regional Conference in Perth, Australia in November 2019, regional leaders adopted the theme Strong Union Power: Sports, Superstructures and Supply Chains for its work in the region during the 2020-2023 Conference period. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this work agenda will be transformed: some issues will increase or decline in terms of importance

While the Asia Pacific region was set to host many of the world major Sports events during this period, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics has now been postponed while it is unclear whether events like the 2021 Lombok MotoGP, the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics will proceed at all or in a modified form.

For superstructures, the Asia-Pacific region has been the global epicentre of infrastructure development (accounting for around 60% of global investment in this area), with BWI affiliates organising workers in Chinese multinational companies and projects financed by International Financial Institutions (IFI). While some governments will rely on these projects to maintain jobs and stimulate the economy, others will be deemed unjustifiable in the new COVID-19 business environment

BWI membership in the Asia-Pacific region is increasingly now integrated in global supply chain, including those in wood and forestry, cement and other electrical works. Protecting jobs in those industries in light of the COVID-19 pandemic is critical. However reduced demand across the economy may lead to major job losses and more stress and undermine decent working conditions.



Know more about BWI and Affiliates' COVID-19 Responses at:  
<https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/covid-19-union-response-1689>

BWI affiliates will still focus on these critical areas, but the rules of the game have already changed significantly. The following report looks at the impacts our sectors are facing, how governments are responding and the role that workers have in safeguarding their rights across the region.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ASIA-PACIFIC

Asia-Pacific is now widely known as the region where the COVID-19 pandemic started. Since the first cases of COVID-19 infections were discovered in Wuhan, China and made publicly known to the global public in end-January 2020, countries in the region have witnessed hundreds of thousands of confirmed cases and tens of thousands of deaths.

### Health Impact

Table 1 below shows the number of confirmed cases and deaths in Asia-Pacific countries where BWI has presence.

**Table 1:** Cases and Deaths in Asia-Pacific, per country (as per BWI presence), as of May 14, 2020

	Total Cases	Total Deaths
<b>South Pacific</b>	<b>8,140</b>	<b>119</b>
Australia	6,975	98
New Zealand	1,147	21
Fiji	18	0
Solomon Islands*	0	0
<b>South Asia</b>	<b>134,204</b>	<b>3,630</b>
India	78,003	2,549
Pakistan**	37,218	803
Nepal	246	0
Bangladesh	17,822	269
Sri Lanka	915	9
<b>East Asia</b>	<b>28,123</b>	<b>951</b>
Japan	16,079	687
South Korea	10,991	260
Hong Kong ***	1,053	4
Mongolia	98	0
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	<b>47,352</b>	<b>966</b>
Singapore	25,346	21
Malaysia	6,779	111
Philippines	11,618	772
Thailand	3,018	56
Myanmar	181	6
Vietnam	288	0
Cambodia	122	0
<b>TOTAL ALL:</b>	<b>217,917</b>	<b>5,666</b>

SOURCES: WHO Situation Report as of May 14, 2020, except

\* For Solomon Islands

[https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/dps/outbreaks-and-emergencies/covid-19/covid-19-situation-report-14.pdf?sfvrsn=fed72964\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/dps/outbreaks-and-emergencies/covid-19/covid-19-situation-report-14.pdf?sfvrsn=fed72964_2)

\*\* for Pakistan,

<http://covid.gov.pk/>

\*\*\* for Hongkong

<https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html>

In the South Pacific, Australia has the highest number of total confirmed cases and total deaths although new cases and new deaths are low. New Zealand has the second highest number of cases but the number of deaths is lower. Fiji has less than 20 cases and no deaths. Solomon Islands has no cases at all. The figures for these countries, once combined, are as follows: more than 8,000 total confirmed cases and more than 100 deaths.

In South Asia, the number of cases and deaths are highest in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Numbers are lower for Sri Lanka and Nepal. The figure for these countries, once combined, are as follows: more than 130,000 total confirmed cases and more than 3,000 total deaths.

In East Asia, the number of total cases and deaths are higher in Japan and South Korea than in Hong Kong. The numbers of these three combined are: more than 28,000 total cases and almost a thousand deaths.

In Southeast Asia, the numbers are high for Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand, and, low for Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia. The numbers for all the countries in Southeast Asia combined are: more than 47,000 total cases and almost a thousand deaths.

All the countries combined registered more than 200,000 total cases and more than 5,000 total deaths.

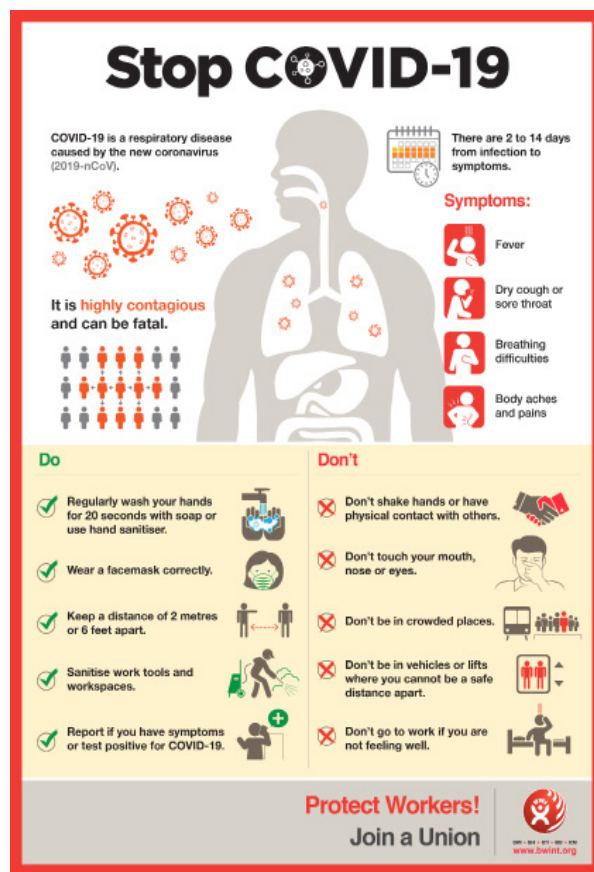
### Social and Economic Impact

According to the ILO, of the 305 million full-time workers that are expected to lose jobs in the second quarter of 2020, 175 million or around 57% are in Asia-Pacific.

Much of the Asia-Pacific region is integrated into China's economy and thus many countries in the region are affected by the slowdown of economic activity in China due to the coronavirus pandemic. In a report on the social and economic impact of COVID-19 on Asia-Pacific, the UNDP claims that "Asia's value chains have closely integrated the economies of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia". These value chains are said to have created large economies of scale in manufacturing in the region. "Less complex values chains such as in apparel, wood and food products" have also been created between China, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indonesia. COVID-19 has "severely disrupted" these value chains.

ILO's projected numbers of unemployed in Asia-Pacific can also be explained by examining the economies and labour forces of the region pre-pandemic. Many of the countries in the region have been experiencing high unemployment and underemployment rates. The pandemic, which has compelled businesses to shutdown and workers to stay home, has raised the jobs problem to crisis proportions. Moreover, around two-thirds or 1.3 billion people of the estimated 1.9 billion workers that comprise the workforce of the Asia Pacific are informally employed. With or without COVID-19, these informal workers are among the most vulnerable and marginalised in the region.

Labour migration is also a major issue for workers in the Asia-Pacific. According to the ADB, of the 258 million international migrants, "over a third originate from Asia and the Pacific" making the region the "largest source" of migrant workers. As per the latest (2017) figures of the ADB, India has the highest number of outmigrants with 17 million followed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) with 10 million. Other key sources of migrant workers are Bangladesh (7.5 million), Pakistan (6 million) and the Philippines (5.7 million). Still according to the



ADB, some 42.4 million migrants are now residing in Asia and Pacific, 71% of whom come from region itself. The biggest host economies are the following: Australia (7 million), India (5 million), Thailand (3.5 million), Pakistan (3.4 million) and Hong Kong and China (2.7 million).

Because of the pandemic, many borders have closed, and many businesses employing migrant workers have shutdown their operations. This situation has left thousands of migrant workers without work and without secure shelter, sources of food, and in many cases access to healthcare.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON BWI INDUSTRIES IN ASIA-PACIFIC: CONSTRUCTION AND FORESTRY

### Impact of containment measures

**Table 2** below shows the list of countries that have experienced total shutdown, partial shutdown or continuing operations.

As shown in Table 2, seven (7) countries have experienced total shutdown: New Zealand, India (but lifted starting May 4), Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia (now largely lifted) and Philippines.

Five (5) countries have experienced partial shutdown: Fiji, Pakistan, Singapore, Myanmar and Thailand.

Seven (7) other countries have decided to continue operations in construction and/or forestry: Australia, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Indonesia (wood and forestry only), and Vietnam (wood and forestry only).

**Table 2:** COVID 19-related Shutdowns and Continuing Operations in Asia-Pacific

Total Shutdown	Partial Shutdown	Continuing Operations
New Zealand	Fiji	Australia
India	Pakistan	Japan
Nepal	Singapore	South Korea
Bangladesh	Myanmar	Hong Kong
Sri Lanka	Thailand	Cambodia
Malaysia		Indonesia (wood and forestry only)
Philippines		Vietnam (wood and forestry only)

Source: BWI APRO data

Table 3 shows the total number of construction workers and wood and forestry workers in Asia-Pacific countries experiencing total shutdown, partial shutdown and continuing operations. Countries included are those where BWI is operating. The table reveals that the potential number of workers to be affected by the pandemic in Asia-Pacific in both construction and wood and forestry industries is staggering – more than 76 million workers!

**Table 3:** Number of construction workers and food and forestry workers in affected (BWI) Asia-Pacific countries

Sub-region/ Country	Construction Workers	Wood and Forestry Workers	Totals (both sectors)
<b>Pacific and Oceania</b>	<b>(Total: 1,316,000)</b>	<b>(Total: 98,700)</b>	<b>1,414,700</b>
Australia	1,050,000	98,700	
New Zealand	241,000	-	
Fiji	25,000	-	
<b>South Asia</b>	<b>(Total: 53,091,859)</b>	<b>(Total: 6,600,000)</b>	<b>59,691,859</b>
India	44,000,000	5,000,000	
Nepal	978,000	1,600,000	



Pakistan	4,700,000	-	
Bangladesh	3,300,000	-	
Sri Lanka	113,859	-	
<b>East Asia</b>	<b>(Total: 5,630,100)</b>	<b>(Total: 50,000)</b>	<b>5,680,100</b>
Japan	3,300,000	50,000	
South Korea	2,000,000	-	
Hong Kong	330,100	-	
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	<b>(Total: 4,844,300)</b>	<b>(Total: 5,240,000)</b>	<b>10,084,300</b>
Malaysia	1,460,000	240,000	
Singapore	534,300		
Myanmar			
Cambodia	200,000		
Philippines	2,000,000		
Thailand	500,000		
Indonesia	8,300,000	3,850,000	
Vietnam	-	5,000,000	
	<b>(Total construction workers: 64,882,259)</b>	<b>(Total wood and forestry workers: 11,988,700)</b>	<b>Total both sectors: 76,870,959</b>

Source: BWI APRO data

#### **For countries that have experienced total shutdowns:**

The government of **New Zealand** declared a strict lockdown on 25 March when there were fewer than 150 COVID-19 cases and zero deaths. The lockdown was eased on 27 April when the government claimed that the country had “stopped a wave of devastation”. While the construction industry in the country has not been hit as hard as the tourism industry, labour and building materials shortages were felt by industry players. Major concerns were raised by FIRST Union when the country’s largest construction company, Fletchers, imposed wage cuts at the same time as they were receiving wage subsidies.



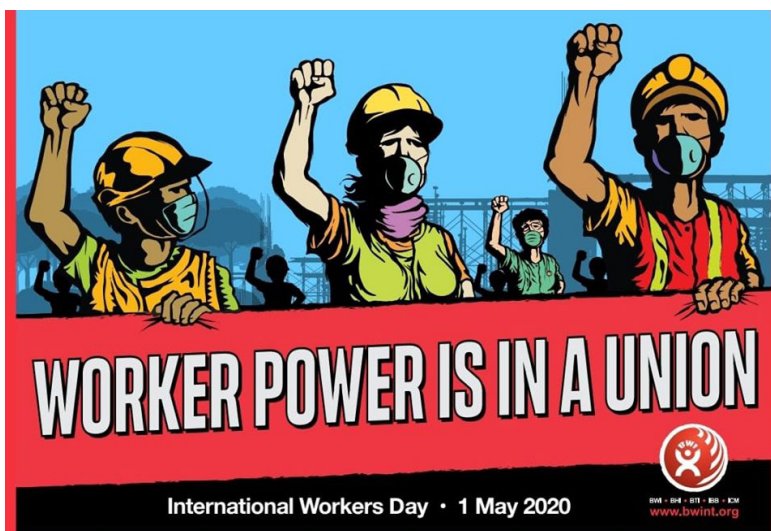
In **India**, the government has implemented a lockdown policy in at least three phases. The first phase was from March 25 to April 14. The second phase from April 15 to May 3. The third phase from May 4 and scheduled to end on May 18. Especially in the third phase, some industries and sectors, including construction, cement plants and brick kilns, have been allowed to operate. Collection of non-timber forest produce (minor forestry) has also been allowed. Moreover, India has been divided into red, orange and green zones, with a number of activities permitted in the latter two zones.

In **Nepal**, the government initially implemented a lockdown policy from 24 March to 15 April, later extended to 18 May. The country has also been divided into red, yellow and green clusters depending on population density, geography, linkage to international border and number of coronavirus cases. Relaxations are to be made in the yellow and green clusters.

In **Bangladesh**, the lockdown started from 26 March and has been extended for the seventh time until 30 May 2020.

In **Sri Lanka**, a total lockdown policy has been in place from mid-March until April 20 and there is an extended lockdown in risk zones until 11 May 2020.

In **Malaysia**, the initial two-week shutdown from 18 to 31 March – the “Movement Control Order” (MCO) - policy was extended until 13 May. However some 200 saw mills were exempted from the MCO on dubious grounds, with only migrant workers required to work. The union TEUPM complained publicly about this arrangement. The MCO has since been replaced by the Conditional MCO (CMCO), in which most businesses – including all companies in the BWI sectors – can now open, subject to occupational safety and health, and social distancing protocols. Certain operations in the construction industry have now resumed work, subject to a Standard Operating Procedure requiring social distancing. The sector employs around 850,000 workers, the majority of whom are migrant workers.



In the **Philippines**, over 2 million workers were displaced during the first five weeks of the Luzon-wide “enhanced community quarantine” (ECQ) that started in mid-March and has been extended till end-May. The government’s infrastructure program has faced delays due to the quarantine and construction growth has slowed down. According to the Philippine Constructors Association, around 1.3 million construction workers were displaced and stranded in Luzon due to the island-wide ECQ.

#### **For countries that have experienced partial shutdown:**

In **Fiji**, lockdowns were imposed in the capital Suva and the second largest city Lautoka. However, the construction and timber industry continued to operate outside these areas, despite building materials shortages.

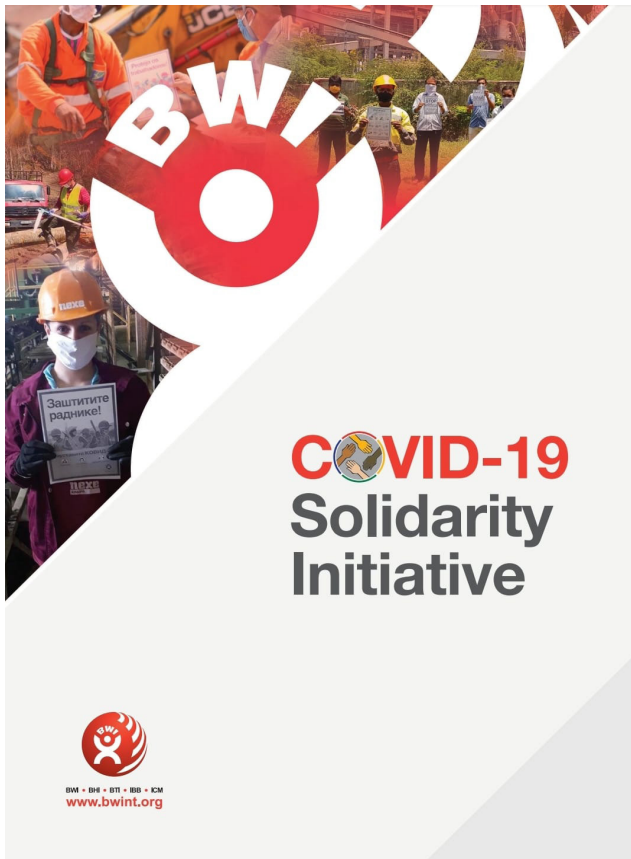
In **Pakistan**, the government has instituted a partial shutdown policy saying that the country “could not afford a total shutdown”. The shutdown mainly involved Sindh province, where 70% of Pakistan’s COVID-19 cases are located. On 3 April the government announced that all activities related to construction will continue despite the partial lockdown. Although construction activities are permitted, unions have raised concerns about working and living conditions at construction projects.

In **Singapore**, the government has called for a “circuit breaker” policy given the rise of COVID- 19 cases in the country after border restrictions and containment measures had been eased. The policy called for tighter measures from 21 April until 1 June, with only essential services allowed to operate. Some “less critical” enterprises were allowed to open with strict health protocols. Construction sites are among those restricted in Singapore. Construction companies in the country have also faced difficulties due to supply chain disruptions for building materials and equipment. The construction industry in Singapore is expected to contract by 15% in 2020 due to the pandemic.

In **Myanmar**, by mid-March, some 4,000 workers, mostly coming from the bag, shoe and garment manufacturing industries, became unemployed because of the government shutdown of factories and lack of raw materials needed for continued operations. According to the BWFM, employers and governments want to shut down worksites but do not want to take the responsibility for wage protection.

#### **For countries that experienced continuing operations:**

In **Australia**, while \$5b worth of new construction projects have been cancelled due to COVID-19, work in construction sites has not been halted by government. Australia is framing its construction industry as a national economic priority and Prime Minister Scott Morrison has declared that construction is “an essential service”



vital to the economy and jobs. The timber industry in Australia has also been affected despite government policy of continuing operations. Australia's largest sawmilling company, AKD Softwoods, which produces 20% of the timber for housing construction in Australia, had to temporarily close its operations in late April due to lowered demand for building products. More than 800 workers were forced to take a leave because of said temporary shutdown of AKD's four mills. The company has said that it might have to operate at half of its production rate in the coming six months.

In **Japan**, there is no shutdown or lockdown policy in place but on April 7, the central government announced a "state of emergency". Construction sites were thus able to continue operations, although some were closed due to lack of building materials. Two giant construction companies, Nishimatsu and Shimizu, decided to shutdown operations. Shimizu publicly revealed that three of its employees working on a Tokyo construction site had been infected with COVID-19 and one had died. Moreover, the indefinite postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics will have severe repercussions on Japan's economy, including its construction industry.

By mid-February, **South Korea** had the world's second highest number of COVID-19 cases after China, tracing the rise in infections to churchgoers in the city of Daegu, 150 miles South of the capital Seoul. Moreover, about 10 constructions sites in Daegu, Gyeonggido, Incheon and Jeonjui were temporarily closed due to confirmed COVID-19 cases. South Korea immediately adopted the "test, train and contain" strategy, quickly developing the capacity to test somewhere between 12,000 to 20,000 people a day through drive-through and walk-in testing centres. To date, with a death rate of 2.23%, South Korea has one of the lowest COVID-19 mortality rates in the world. According to Global Data, a leading data and analytics company, even while South Korea has not implemented very strict containment measures and construction projects have been allowed to continue with social distancing rules in place, the country's construction industry is expected to contract by 2.8% in 2020.

Some 50,000 construction workers in **Hong Kong** have been laid off as a consequence of the coronavirus, and another 80,000 workers had their hours significantly reduced. According to the Hong Kong Construction Industry Employees General Union, half of its 57,000 members are now unemployed. Even while containment measures have not been strict and construction projects have been allowed to continue operations, Hong Kong's construction industry has been negatively affected by building materials supply chain disruption from mainland China. According to the BWI affiliate in Hong Kong, the Construction Site and General Workers Union (CGSWU), 2,310 of its member-construction workers have been displaced between December 2019 to February 2020.

In **Cambodia**, according to the Cambodia Contractor Association, despite government policy to continue operations, some 90,000 construction workers have left their job sites for fear of getting infected with COVID-19. Chiv Sivpheng, general manager of CCA, told Khmer Times that the issue is a "social-distancing issue rather than an economic issue". Meanwhile, Chrek Soknim, president of the Cambodian Valuers and Estate Agents Association has claimed that "big projects will continue but at a slower rate of progress due to the



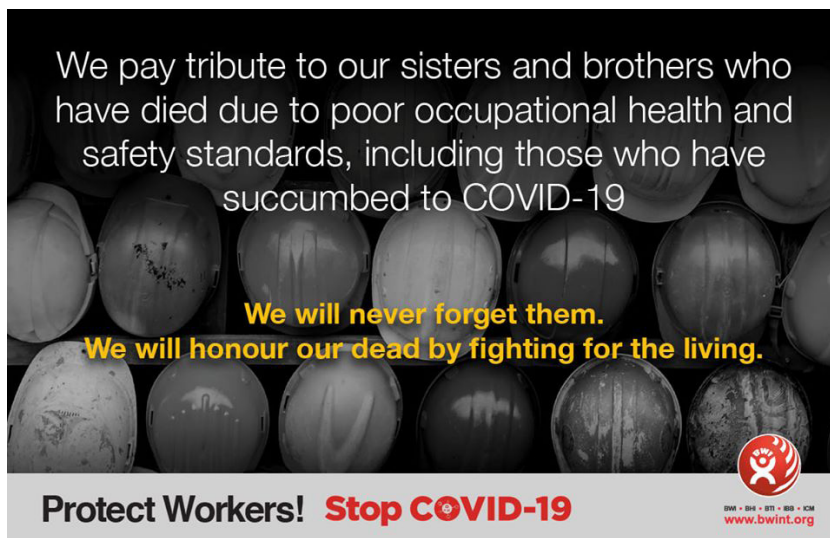


current lack of labour". The Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Cambodia (BWTUC), is expecting to lose some of its 7,000 members due to loss of jobs in small subcontractors' projects and housing projects.

In **Indonesia**, the wood and forestry industry is still operating, but illegal logging is expected to expand with the scrapping of the SVLK verification system, which sets standards for legal timber verification. The Ministry of Trade and Industry led the scrapping of this 2009 system, without even consulting the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

In **Vietnam**, operations of all companies except entertainment clubs have been allowed to continue, subject to strict safety procedures. Work in the timber and forestry industry has not been disrupted but social distancing measures in workplaces have been instituted.

### **Migrant Hotspots and Support for Migrants**



In **Singapore**, dormitories that house around 370,000 documented migrant workers, mostly in the construction industry, were in February 2020 found to house more than 60 workers infected with COVID-19. The spread of the disease was blamed on cramped living conditions in these dormitories where 12-20 migrant workers share single rooms. By the third week of April, these dormitories accounted for more than 75% of Singapore's total infection cases.; today the country has registered more than 26,000 cases. The Singaporean government has since restricted movement in these dormitories, and at least 19 dormitories have been

quarantined. Tens of thousands of migrant workers are now unable to work or move around to access much needed supplies. The Migrant Workers' Centre (MWC), in collaboration with the Singapore National Trade Union Congress (SNTUC), has conducted a donation drive for migrant workers, and by early May they had distributed essential supplies to workers in these dormitories, including 370,000 reusable masks, 120,000 bath soaps and more than 100,000 in-kind items, (mostly foodstuffs). In coordination with the NGO Alliance of Guest Workers Outreach, the MWC also provided 250,000 catered meals that served 10,000 workers daily, including 4,000 Ramadan meals.

In **India**, the government issued standard operating procedures to address issues and challenges relating to internal migration, based on demands made by unions and like-minded organizations. The lockdown had triggered a massive exodus of internal migrant workers and made livelihoods uncertain. The unrest among internal migrants numbering in thousands ensued and resulted in numerous instances wherein workers walked on highways and railway tracks or cycled to their native State. With continued pressure from trade unions, CSOs, media and political parties, special trains and buses have been organised to send back migrant workers to their native places. In India, the cost of sending internal migrant workers back has become a political issue and the opposition Congress party has announced that it would cover travel cost of migrants. This prompted the ruling government to ensure that no such costs will be shouldered by the migrant workers. BWI affiliates in India have extended relief to internal migrant workers stranded in different States through the union to union network and cooperation in different States.

In **Nepal**, migrant workers also faced a lot of difficulties in going back to their native villages due to the lock down. The BWI affiliates arranged transport to ensure safe return of migrant workers. It is estimated that there are over 1 million Nepalese migrant workers in India, with the countries sharing an open border. In this period of the COVID-19 pandemic, around 500 Nepalese workers were reported stranded at the border in Darchula, displaced from work because of the shutdown in India and unable to return to Nepal given the lack of



transportation services. To address this issue, Nepali officials have opened a suspension bridge that connects Nepal and India. In a unique intervention, Nepali unions extended coverage to Indian migrant workers from Odisha State stranded in Nepal.

The **BWI affiliates in India, Nepal and Bangladesh** also extended relief to workers in the form of food supplies, masks and sanitizers. In India, selected unions in Bihar and Punjab State have started making masks in bulk through union run Self-Help Groups.

In **Thailand**, the Migrant Working Group (MWG) has reported that migrant workers either face reduced working hours or termination without payment. Construction workers and workers in the tourism sector have experienced job termination without receiving any compensation package. Moreover, migrant workers are unable to access the relief measures, such as the THB 5,000 per month for three months provided by the Thai government, which is reserved only for Thai citizens. About 60,000 migrant workers living in Thailand have fled the country since Thai authorities shut malls and many businesses to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

For **Malaysia's** migrant workers, lack of food is a bigger worry than COVID-19 as thousands of these workers were abandoned by their employers upon enforcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO). This dire state of migrant workers in Malaysia has been amplified by reports of some 65 Bangladeshi construction workers living in container vans and relying only on public generosity to meet basic needs.

In **Qatar**, where construction projects for the 2022 FIFA World Cup are underway, BWI has assisted construction migrant workers in distress. Almost 90% of the Qatari workforce is comprised of migrant workers mostly coming from Asia: 700,000 Indian, 400,000 Nepali, 400,000 Bangladeshi, 150,000 Pakistanis, 140,000 Sri-Lankans and 236,000 Filipinos. About half of the entire labour force are in the construction sector. Construction sites have become a transmission hotspot, as cramped living quarters, transport facilities and inadequate management of construction sites makes social distancing impossible. In March, 238 migrant workers tested positive for COVID-19 in a single industrial compound. Since then, more of these migrant workers have either fallen sick or lost their jobs or salaries, while travel restriction prevent them returning to their countries of origin. BWI's network of leaders, the Community Leaders Forum, composed mostly of migrant workers from the Philippines, India, Nepal and Bangladesh, has collaborated with the Ministry of Labor in Qatar to disseminate information and raise awareness regarding health and employment at a time of crisis.

In **Qatar**, BWI has also mobilized a network of volunteers to assist workers in distress and has distributed some 1,336 food packs to these workers. BWI has in fact been assisting the Ministry of Labor in delivering food packs to workers in areas under lockdown. Bayanihan ng Manggagawa sa Konstruksyon ng Qatar-(BKMQ-FFW) women leaders have been at the forefront of distributing close to 2,000 food packs to migrant workers locked down in the industrial area. BWI has also been continuing the work of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC). The second joint BWI-SC inspection this year was conducted on 9-12 March covering Al Thumama and Ras Abu Abboud stadia. It was during this period that a number of positive COVID-19 cases in Qatar were detected, and the government started implementing more stringent measures. BWI and SC held a conference call last April to exchange information and develop joint action to protect stadia workers and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in worksites and accommodation.

### **Pathways and Engagements for COVID-19 Policies/ Agreements**

Table 4 below enumerates the pathways and engagements for COVID-19 policies. The table reveals that in Asia-Pacific, for both the construction and the wood and forestry industries, most governments created policies unilaterally, while some involved business and workers in their negotiations. Moreover, there are still a few countries that have not established policies specific to the construction industry or to the wood and forestry industry.

**Table 4:** Pathways and Engagements for Covid-19 Policies

<b>For Construction Industry</b>		
<b>Unilateral government policies</b>	<b>Bipartite or Tripartite Agreements</b>	<b>Nothing Sector-Specific Yet</b>
New Zealand	Australia	Bangladesh

Fiji	Cambodia	Sri Lanka
India	Philippines	
Nepal	Thailand	
Pakistan	Myanmar	
South Korea		
Hong Kong		
Japan		
Malaysia		
Singapore		
<b>For Wood and Forestry Industry</b>		
<b>Unilateral government policies</b>	<b>Bipartite or Tripartite Agreements</b>	<b>Nothing Sector-Specific Yet</b>
New Zealand		
India		
Nepal		
Malaysia		
Vietnam		

Source: BWI APRO

For the construction industry, unilateral government policies have been instituted in the following countries: New Zealand, Fiji, India, Nepal, Pakistan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. For the forestry industry, unilateral government policies are in place in the following countries: New Zealand, India, Nepal, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Unilateral policies do not, however, mean the absence of union advocacy or union participation in the making of policies. In India, for example, the 45-member BWI Indian Affiliates Council undertook online consultations with members and submitted a 10-point “charter of demands” to the Indian Prime Minister and the Ministry of Labour in relation to the government’s extended lockdown policy. Moreover, in countries considered to be migrant hotspots such as Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, BWI affiliates have actively coordinated with civil society groups to ensure that migrants are included and gain access to COVID-19-related government policies and programs.



In Australia, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand and Myanmar, BWI affiliates have actively shaped government policies. In Australia, for example, the BWI affiliate CFMEU, as part of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), successfully convinced the Australian government to commit to an AUD 130 billion (USD 84 billion) wage subsidy program for six months. Because of this, Australian workers are now assured of wages of AUD\$1,200 (USD 775) for six months. BWI affiliates in Australia and New Zealand have actively campaigned for worker and union-friendly occupational safety and health protocols in construction and forestry sites. In the Philippines, the BWI affiliate NUBCW has worked for the inclusion of women workers as beneficiaries to government’s social amelioration program.

In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, sector-specific policies have yet to be formulated and BWI affiliates are now pushing for these policies.

## BWI AND ITS AFFILIATES IN ACTION

### On Employment and Wage Protection

#### Australia and the South Pacific

In **Australia**, given the slowing down of the construction industry, the CFMEU, the ETU and the Master Builders of Australia have called on the National Cabinet for a AUD 10 billion (USD 6.5 billion) social housing stimulus package. For the timber industry, the Forestry, Furnishing Division of the CFMEU has called on government to assist timber workers displaced by the COVID 19 pandemic. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) successfully convinced the Australian government to commit to a AUD 130 billion (USD 84 billion) wage subsidy program called the Jobkeeper. Under this program, the government subsidizes \$1,500 to businesses per fortnight per employee for up to 6 months. This subsidy is on top of the Newstart Program which is an unemployment benefit.

In **New Zealand**, the government has enacted a NZD 585 (USD 330) weekly wage subsidy for full-time workers, or NZD 350 (USD 210) for part-time workers, to help keep businesses afloat. Originally available for 12 weeks, it has recently been extended a further 8 weeks, costing a total of NZD 8.3 billion (USD 5 billion). Moreover, infrastructure development is now being viewed as a core plank of the country's economic recovery, with an additional NZ\$3 billion added to the \$12 billion approved earlier in the year at the 14 May budget, as well as \$1.6 billion being put into free programs for trades training for workers. The NZ forestry industry, meanwhile, was an early victim of COVID-19, with major demand shortfalls from China (which buys more than half of NZ's raw log production) in early 2020. The NZ government is planning to spend NZ\$100 million to redeploy forestry workers displaced by the pandemic.

In **Fiji**, some workers have no pay and many others have used up their paid leave allowances. The government has allowed workers to access the public pension fund but the process for this has been slow. Pension fund contributions have also been halved while the pandemic crisis is ongoing.

#### South Asia

In **India**, retrenchment or termination of service contracts are not allowed during the lockdown period which has been extended until 17 May. This policy is applicable to permanent, contract, and temporary workers. Indian unions have been lobbying for a stimulus package, relief to migrant workers, insurance coverage for electricity and water supply workers, and expansion of testing facilities at worksites and workers' settlements. India has announced financial relief to the tune of INR 1700 Billion (USD 24.28 Billion) and the package targets widows, self-help group members, disabled persons, construction workers, farmers, migrant workers and also low-income workers in the organised sector (for units employing up to 100 workers who are earning up to INR 15,000 or USD 214 monthly). The package includes direct cash transfers and food security and aims to cover urban and rural poor in the country so as to lessen the economic hardships posed by the outbreak of COVID-19. Specifically, for the construction sector, the government of India has urged the States to use funds from the State Construction Workers Welfare Boards. Many States have also provided financial relief in the form of cash transfers to the registered workers to help them sustain their families during the challenges and crisis posed by COVID-19.

Indian unions have also raised the alarm regarding some State governments in India that have been amending or relaxing labour laws without consulting trade unions. In addition to the protests and representations made by the national trade union centres, the Indian Affiliates Council (IAC) has decided to file a complaint to the ILO. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has also been filed in the Supreme Court of India and another PIL filed in the



High Court in Uttar Pradesh State. In Tamil Nadu State, all workers in certified units, whether regular or contract workers, are being paid salaries during the lockdown period. In the minor forestry sector in Gujarat and Odisha States, the season for picking Kendu and Sal leaves has started and since it is a time-bound activity lasting from 2-4 months, unions in these States petitioned the government to permit the work, and during the second phase of the lockdown, the government permitted collection of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP). In certified unions, regular workers have been paid, but there is concern for contract workers. This is true for many other sectors such as cement, stone quarry and construction work where contract workers have been only paid for the days they worked despite a government announcement at the beginning of lockdown.

Also in **India**, the BWI affiliate in the cement sector has submitted representations to the Cement Manufacturers Association on wage and employment protection, and the observance of COVID-19 safeguards as the lockdown lifts gradually. The union is closely monitoring developments at cement plants across the country and specifically lobbying for coverage of contract workers. This was also emphasized during International Workers' Memorial Day (IWMD) commemoration at different cement plants in India.

Unions in India are also active in the stone quarry value chains. The unions lobbied stone quarry owners' association and selected companies to ensure wages for workers during the closure of units or mines in the COVID-19 lock down.

In **Nepal**, employees in the formal sector have continued to receive salaries despite the lockdown. The BWI affiliates submitted various representations to the government through their respective national centres. The government established a Central Relief Fund to fight the epidemic to the tune of 100 Million NPR (830,000 USD). On 29 March 2020, the government of Nepal announced a relief package that includes food relief to marginalised households, rebate on house rent tax, utility bills, extension of tax payment deadlines, payment of wages for both organized and unorganized sectors and government contributions for one month to the social security fund among others. As a follow-up, the BWI affiliates assisted in registering workers and completing their documentation at the local-level administrative structure for provision of relief to the workers.

In **Bangladesh**, the government has said that it would pay the salaries and wages of select factories but implementation details have yet to be announced. Specific packages for the garment sector and farmers have been announced although there are no relief measures for the construction workers.

In **Pakistan**, the government launched a PKR 1,200 billion (USD 7.5 billion) COVID-19 spending package to support export-oriented, medium and small enterprises and medical workers, as well as increased the budget for the building of more homes. A total of PKR 200 billion (USD 1.25 billion) was also earmarked from the spending package to cover daily-wage earners. Further, the Prime Minister stated that industries connected to construction shall continue to function even during the lockdown due to its huge potential for job generation.

### **East Asia**

In **Japan**, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has unveiled plans for a stimulus package that will grant all Japanese residents a one-off 100,000 Yen (USD 933) cash payment, including foreign residents.

In **South Korea**, the government has declared that it will spend 40 trillion won (USD 32 billion) to aid basic industries that have a significant impact on the economy. This aid will be provided on the condition that companies maintain their workforces.

In **Hong Kong**, the construction industry has been identified as a "hard-hit sector" and there are now proposals to provide the industry with subsidies. The proposals include the following subsidies: \$7,500 for each eligible registered construction worker, \$20,000 for each eligible contractor, specialist contractor and supplier, or company member of major construction-related trade associations, and \$10,000 for each eligible minor works contractor. The Hong Kong government has also created and implemented an HKD 80 billion (USD 10 billion) "Employment Support Scheme". The scheme provides wage subsidies to eligible employers to retain their employees. The wage subsidy is equivalent to 50% of the monthly salary which is capped at HKD 18,000 (USD 2,300) and is expected to be rolled out for a period of six months. It is expected to benefit 1.5 million employees. In mid-April, however, Chan Pat Kan, General Secretary of the Construction and General Site Workers Union (CSGWU) observed that "the government has made subsidies available for contractors and subcontractors to



reduce the risk of spread COVID-19 on construction sites, but workers have received next to nothing and many are ineligible”.

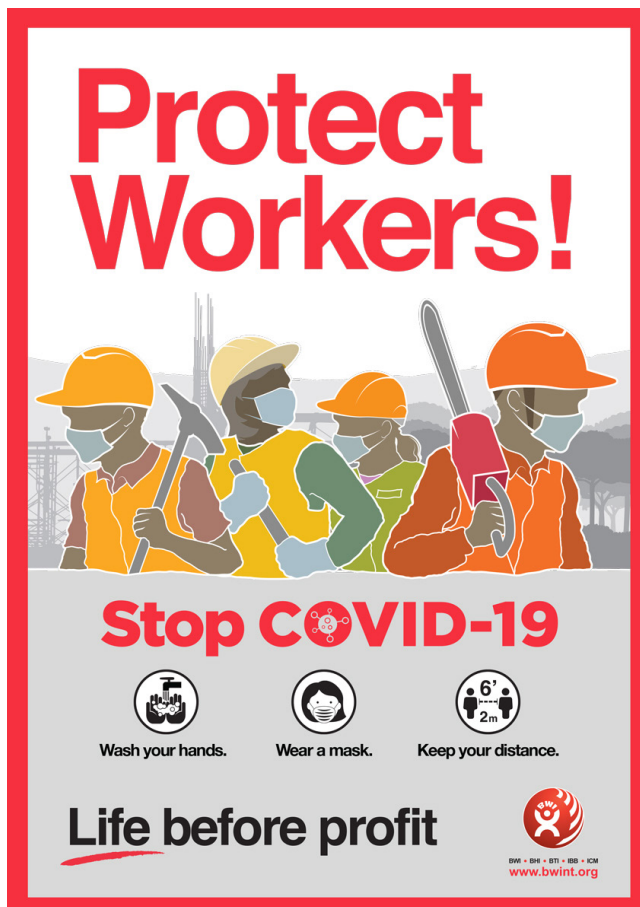
### Southeast Asia

In **Singapore**, the government has rolled out three stimulus packages as of the 1<sup>st</sup> week of April amounting to SGD 60 billion (USD 41.7 billion). Part of this is a “Jobs Support Scheme” to help enterprises retain their local employees during the pandemic. Under this scheme, the government will fund 25% of the first \$4,600 of gross monthly wages of local employees for a period of 9 months. Only Singapore citizens and permanent residents can apply for this jobs support scheme.

In **Malaysia**, the government introduced a “Wage Subsidy Scheme” on April 1. The scheme is an extension of the “employment retention programme” announced on 16 March as part of the country’s economic stimulus package for 2020. By the latter part of April, more than 200,000 workers – through their employers – have applied for the wage subsidies. These subsidies are available for a three-month period to all registered employers. Households earning less than \$913 per month are given cash assistance of \$365 per month.

In the **Philippines**, the government has earmarked PHP 1.17 trillion (USD 23 billion) for its 4-pillar socio-economic strategy to fight and recover from the pandemic. It has allocated and distributed a social amelioration program (SAP) worth PHP 5 billion (USD 98 million) pesos for workers affected by the lockdown. The SAP allocates PHP5,000 (USD 98) per displaced local worker and PHP 10,000 (USD 197) per displaced Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). The Philippine government is also planning to implement a PHP 120 billion (USD 24 million) credit guarantee program for affected small businesses. This is expected to translate into wage subsidies for COVID-19-displaced workers. BWI affiliate NUBCW has been organizing women in trades and have been providing online-hotline support for women members to ensure that they gain access to the government’s SAP.

### **On Social Protection and Humanitarian Actions**



### Southeast and East Asia

In the Philippines, the Social Security System has rolled out additional funds to cover unemployment insurance of some 30,000-60,000 workers projected to lose jobs and Philhealth has provided additional funds for hospitals.

In **Myanmar**, the government has provided food packages for low-income households who do not have regular income. Exemptions from utility bill payments have also been provided.

In **Indonesia**, the BWI affiliate FKUI conducted food package distribution while 17 wood workers in Lahud Datu, Sabah were recipients of food packs from Filipino Migrants Association in Malaysia (FMAM) -- in partnership with the BWI Regional Office.

In **Hong Kong**, the government will cover one month’s rent for lower-income tenants living in public rental units.

### South Asia

In **India**, the government has also decided to pay both the employer and employee contribution to the Provident Fund in the next three months in companies

that employ less than 100 workers and of which at least 90% earn less than INR 15,000 (USD 208) per month. Moreover, the government has earmarked INR 1700 Billion (USD 24.28 billion) for a relief package that includes cash transfers and food supplies. The National Social Assistance Program is expected to provide cash assistance of INR 1000 to 35 million beneficiaries.

In **Nepal**, the government will be paying contributions to the Social Security Program for one month, on behalf of employers and employees. It has also distributed food supplies to those affected by the pandemic and have provided rebates on certain services and extension of deadlines for utility bills' payment.

In **Pakistan**, the government earmarked PKR 1200 billion (USD 7.5 Billion) for a relief package that includes food supplies. Of this, PKR 200 Billion (USD 1.25 billion) has been allocated for daily wage earners and labourers. It has also launched the "Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme" that provides PKR 12,000 per family and is expected to benefit 10 million families.

In **Bangladesh**, the government has claimed that it will provide cash transfers but no definite amount has been determined. Food subsidies have also been rolled out including price reduction of rice from Tk30/kg to Tk5/kg.

BWI affiliates in South Asia also launched their humanitarian efforts by distributing food packages to their members. Involved in these efforts were 15 unions in India, 3 unions in Nepal and 1 union in Bangladesh.

## On Health and Safety at Workplaces

### Australia and South Pacific

Unions in **Australia** and **New Zealand** have been at the forefront of engaging governments and employers regarding health and safety protocols at work. The CFMEU and ETU have met with the Master Builders Association and major employers on health concerns of workers and job continuance.

### South Asia

In **India**, the government has issued an order to all workers' organizations and employers' organizations regarding "preventive measures to be taken to contain the spread of COVID-19. The Indian Affiliates Council of the BWI, meanwhile, developed a '10-point Charter of Demands" which included the demand for PPE kits for all workers and adequate OHS safeguards to be observed at worksites when work sites become operational again. The responsibility for implementing health protocols in work sites has been entrusted to the principal employers. Moreover, the unions also demanded transport facilities for workers with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The BWI affiliates in the forestry sector in India have also demanded the provision of adequate PPE, hand washing/sanitizer facilities and other health safeguards. Also, dialogue was also convened with two State level employer organizations/ coalitions on issues faced by construction workers and on OSH safeguards. The online meetings were held with the Construction and Real Estate Industry Coalition, Tamil Nadu State (led by the TKTMS) and Gujarat Contractors Association, Gujarat State (led by the BMS).

In **Nepal**, the BWI affiliates conducted meetings with the Federation of Contractors Association of Nepal (FCAN) concerning workers' issues and it was agreed that the FCAN shall ensure health check-up, OHS safeguards, related facilities and also food supplies for workers at construction sites.

The **Pakistan** Federation of Building and Wood Workers (PFBWW), which organizes workers on several mega-infrastructure projects such as the Karot Hydropower, Mohmand Dam, Suki Kinari and the World Bank-funded Tarbela Dam, has raised concerns regarding working



and living conditions. PFBWW is demanding that employers and contractors implement safeguards at worksites to ensure workers' health and safety as they continue work amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **East Asia**

In **Japan**, the government has expanded the Industrial Safety and Health Act and companies have been instructed to ensure that workforces are prevented from contracting or spreading infections in the workplace. Protocols include giving instructions to employees regarding hand washing, providing hand sanitizers, ensuring proper indoor ventilation, sanitizing public or common spaces within the worksite and similar measures.

In **South Korea**, the KFCITU demanded government and employers provide masks and other PPE, increased oversight to ensure labour-management consultation and OSH committee consultations on response measures, and modification and relaxation of construction deadlines.

In **Hong Kong**, the Labour Department has issued a "Guidance Note" that stipulates the "obligations and rights of employers and employees under the Employment Ordinance (EO) relating to the COVID-19".

### **Southeast Asia**

In **Malaysia**, the Timber Employees Union of Peninsula Malaysia (TEUPM) has called for "mandatory and regular testing of all workers working on the sites... to ensure their health and safety, and so that the industry does not become a vector for the virus. According to TEUPM General Secretary Azlan bin Yaacob, the union is "in close communication with workers in many mills" and that workers feel like "they're being made to choose between COVID-19 or starvation".

In the **Philippines**, the BWI affiliate Associated Labor Union (ALU) has proposed to the Philippine government "the new normal mandatory OSH protocol against COVID-19 for construction workplaces/sites".

### **On Organizing and Members Retention**

In countries where construction sites have been allowed to operate, BWI affiliates have worked in direct response to the need to maintain union work and membership amid COVID-19.

Efforts of BWI affiliates to provide humanitarian aid to its members, either through direct means or in partnership with networks, have been a way to mobilise BWI's membership and assert union relevance at a time of crisis. BWI, for example, has been quite active in arresting further humanitarian crises among migrant workers in Malaysia, Thailand and many parts of South Asia.

BWI affiliates in Asia-Pacific have also mobilized for the International Workers' Memorial Day online campaigns and May Day celebrations.

### **On Youth Organizing**


BWI Asia Pacific Regional Youth Committee, Gopi Panneerselvam, participated in the International Youth Committee online meeting in April 2020 to specifically discuss the impact of COVID-19 on young workers and strategies to strengthen union actions. Emphasis was placed on active usage of social media by young union activists and to further publicize BWI Global Youth Network on social media.

Youth actions in different regions have been firmed up especially in the context of COVID-19 and its impact on workers. A specific youth campaign – Life before Profit – has been endorsed and implemented across regions. In the Asia-Pacific, youth posters and slogans were also used as part of IWMD commemoration. The Asia-Pacific region has planned to steer specific issue-based discussions with a focus on young workers in different BWI sectors.

# Matrix of Actions relative to the 7 BWI Convergences

BWI Convergence	Summary of Actions and Outputs Relative to COVID-19 Pandemic
	<p>BWI Asia-Pacific affiliates have underscored the rights-based approach to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and has employed a “no-one-should-be-left-behind” framework.</p> <p>This is seen especially in the advocacy of unions for inclusiveness in government stimulus packages in Australia, South Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, India. BWI unions in Asia and Pacific have insisted that all workers – including migrant workers – be included in these stimulus packages and health protocols/mass testing.</p>
	<p>BWI affiliates have been publicly demanding governments and employers ensure that health and safety protocols are in place -- especially in places where construction and forestry work have been allowed to continue or partially operate such as in Australia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Pakistan. In this connection, the following have been active: CFMEU, ETU, First Union, Malaysian Liaison Affiliates Council (MLC) and the Labour Law Reform Coalition (LLRC).</p> <p>In places where shutdowns have been in place, such as in India and the Philippines, BWI affiliates are currently proposing health protocols when companies are allowed to operate again.</p>
	<p>BWI Asia Pacific Regional Youth Committee, Gopi Panneerselvam, participated in the International Youth Committee online meeting in April 2020 to specifically discuss the COVID-19 impact and strategies to strengthen union actions. Emphasis was placed on active usage of social media by young union activists and to further publicize BWI Global Youth Network on social media.</p> <p>Youth actions in different regions have been firmed up especially in the context of COVID-19 and its impact on workers. A specific youth campaign – ‘Life before Profits’ has been endorsed and implemented across regions. In Asia-Pacific, youth posters and slogans were also used as part of IWMD commemoration. The Asia-Pacific region has planned to steer specific issue-based discussions with a focus on young workers in different BWI sectors.</p>
	<p>Bayanihan ng Manggagawa sa Konstruksyon ng Qatar-(BKMQ-FFW) women leaders have been at the forefront of distributing close to 2,000 food packs to migrant workers locked down in the industrial area.</p> <p>BWI Philippine affiliate NUBCW has been organizing women in trades and have been providing online-hotline support for women members to ensure that they gain access to government’s SAP.</p>
	<p>BWI Asia Pacific has intervened in processes of FSC certified companies to uphold workers’ rights and sustainable industries. BWI has contributed to the incorporation of ILO standards in the FSC Chain of Custody Standards through its active participation in online public consultations about these standards.</p> <p>BWI has filed a complaint to FSC and PEFC regarding its certified company, Ekowood Malaysia, for violation of workers and trade union rights.</p>
	<p>BWI Asia Pacific participated in the BWI and Supreme Committee for Delivery of Legacy (SC) and ITUC, ILO Qatar Office and Qatar Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs (MADLSA) video conferences to determine and coordinate field level interventions for migrant workers affected by Covid-19; in particular BWI AP shared the CFMEU and UNITE OSH Guidelines and SOP with the SC.</p> <p>BWI participated in Open Society Foundation and Humanity United-led joint statement calling upon Qatar and other GCC countries to assist distressed migrant workers.</p> <p>In terms of 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, BWI AP provided information about complaint cases to Japan Human Rights Now to strengthen a similar complaint they are filing.</p>



	<p>BWI affiliate in cement sector has submitted representation to the Cement Manufacturers Association in India on protection of workers' rights specifically wage and employment protection and also observance of COVID-19 safeguards as lock down lifts gradually. The union is closely monitoring developments at cement plants across the country and specifically lobbying for coverage for contract workers. This was also emphasized during IWMD commemoration at different cement plants in India.</p> <p>In South Asia, unions are also active in the stone quarry value chains. The unions lobbied stone quarry owners' association and selected companies for ensuring wages to workers during closure of units or mines in COVID-19 lock down.</p> <p>The BWTUC in Cambodia is gearing up for strike against Chakrey Ting Cement Company for illegal dismissal of the local union Vice-President Union Vice Mr. Houn Hoeurn and forcing employees to report 15 minutes before call time without additional pay</p>
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## PROSPECTS FOR THE BWI INDUSTRIES

### Government Policies for BWI Industries

As mentioned in the first few sections of this report, BWI industries have been severely affected by the containment measures especially those that entailed total or partial lockdowns. Even in countries where no lockdown has been in place, the effects of the slowing down of economies and the disruptions in the supply chains can be felt in BWI industries.

Aside from containment measures, governments in the Asia-Pacific have instituted the following measures: stimulus packages for economic recovery, assistance to employers through cash subsidies, cash assistance to displaced workers, food and shelter provisions, and health and safety protocols for workplaces that are back in operations.

### Post-COVID Transition Plans and Union Demands

The challenges in the post-COVID transition can be drawn from the varying and multi-faceted realities that are shown in this report.

**Health challenge.** High on the agenda of BWI unions in the region is the creation of health and safety protocols to protect workers from the coronavirus. These protocols include the provision of safety tools and equipment, proper hygiene, social distancing at workplaces, safe transport to workplaces, and reporting and grievance machineries in case of breach of health and safety protocols.

**Economic recovery challenge.** BWI unions have been at the forefront of protecting jobs and wages amidst the disruptions brought by the pandemic. Thus far, BWI unions have been successful in influencing government policies that affect construction and wood and forestry workers – such as the wage subsidies and cash assistance for displaced workers. BWI, however, needs to influence decisions regarding the recovery of supply chains that take into consideration sustainable construction and forestry. Since China is at the center of the supply chain disruption, BWI unions may have to influence their respective governments' China policy. The rest of the Asia-Pacific region is not likely to recover without China recovering. The only other option for the region is to be less economically reliant on China.

**Social inclusion challenge.** Asia-Pacific is home to some of the poorest and most marginalized workers. The task at hand is to make sure that the poor and marginalized have access to government and societal resources that will keep them afloat during and after the crisis. For BWI, this means engaging firms in the construction, cement, wood and forestry industries to prioritize workers in their recovery measures. It also means engaging governments so that informal workers and migrant workers are assisted and able to gain access to government programs meant to alleviate the burdens caused by the pandemic. Governments should respond to the needs of both permanent and mobile/migrant populations.

**Union revitalization challenge.** All the abovementioned challenges need union revitalization since unions are necessary to ensure that workers are not left behind in governmental and societal efforts to prevent the

coronavirus pandemic from spreading and to cushion its negative effects on economies, livelihoods and incomes. In this connection, the mobilization of the youth in BWI Asia Pacific will be crucial.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

BWI Asia Pacific is strategically located since it is the region where the COVID 19 pandemic originated and where the negative effects on workers and workplaces were first felt. The recovery of the region could signal and trigger a global recovery of both livelihoods and economies.

BWI's work in the region is crucial because Asia-Pacific is home to more than 76 million workers in the construction and wood and forestry industries. It is also the biggest source of migrant labor and as such, faces particular challenges and opportunities.

BWI unions have been very active in engaging governments so that public policies are truly responsive to the needs of construction and wood and forestry workers in the region. The challenge for BWI Asia Pacific is to continue and scale up union work so that construction workers in the region do not lose lives nor livelihoods.

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BWI is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Forestry and Allied sectors.

BWI brings together around 334 trade unions representing around 12 million members in 130 countries. The Headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland while the Regional Offices are in Panama, Malaysia, and South Africa.

Our mission is to defend and advance workers’ rights, and to improve working and living conditions in our sectors. The BWI, above all, has a rights-based approach. We believe that trade union rights are human rights and are based on equality, solidarity and democracy, and that trade unions are indispensable to good governance.

BWI goals include 1) to promote and defend human and trade union rights; 2) to increase trade union strength; 3) to promote a stable and high level of employment in our sectors; and 4) to influence policy and strengthen the capacity of institutions and tripartite structures in our sectors.

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