



# MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT 2023

## SUMMARY



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## INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

The Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC) is an independent humanitarian organization focused on aiding and alleviating human suffering in collaboration with government and local partners. MRC's goals include emergency response, health promotion, and social inclusion. MRC supports migrant communities through various initiatives, including training and assistance during emergencies. MRC recently conducted a Migration and Displacement Needs Assessment to understand migrant needs and improve services with the following objectives.

- **Objective 1.** To map and analyse stakeholders.
- **Objective 2.** To identify barriers to access essential services.
- **Objective 3.** To understand current living and working conditions of migrants across Maldives.
- **Objective 4.** To understand migrant communities' perspectives on receiving services from humanitarian actors and service providers at various capacities.

# CONTEXT OF MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT IN THE MALDIVES

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The main migration trends are related to urbanisation and the internal movement of people to Greater Male' region, and labour migration, as 26% of the population of the Maldives are international migrant workers. International migrants are mainly from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, and Sri Lanka. An estimated 63,000 international migrants are believed to be irregular migrants.

Living conditions in densely populated Male' City are harsh, especially for migrants in manual and domestic work. Issues include overcrowding, unsafe structures, and poor sanitation. Similar challenges exist in labor quarters on resorts and construction sites.

Internal displacement due to floods and fires has been increasing in recent times, with hundreds affected annually. This is due to an increase in urban vulnerability which is exacerbated by infrastructure deficiencies and climate change.

## — Review of Local Legislature, Regulations, and Procedures

Maldivian legislation includes non-discrimination clauses, but migrant workers lack certain protections like minimum wage. While comprehensive legal safeguards exist, a gap between laws and implementation persists due to resource constraints and limited migrant access to information. Employers' understanding Supported by of laws seems lacking, as seen in practices like passport withholding. Additionally, the Ministry of Economic Development is drafting Labor Migration and National Migration Policies with stakeholders, which could lead to improvements in migrant rights and protections.

## — Ratified International Conventions

The Maldives has ratified various international human rights treaties but has yet to ratify 60 conventions related to workers' rights, including two concerning migrant workers. It has also not ratified the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, leading to a lack of national protection mechanisms for refugees and asylum seekers. This absence of ratified conventions and domestic mechanisms poses challenges for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in accessing legal protections and essential services, emphasizing the need for structured legal processes to reduce their vulnerabilities.

## — STAKEHOLDER MAPPING & ANALYSIS

This component of the assessment was done to identify key actors, their services roles, and responsibilities with regards to migration. Additionally, how their services can be accessed is also highlighted where relevant. 44 stakeholders were identified and are presented in the report. This includes government actors, non-governmental organizations, RCRC movement partners, international organizations, foreign missions, and independent statutory bodies.



# FINDINGS FROM SURVEY

## Demographics



## Dependents and Family

The majority of participants stated that their family isn't in the Maldives with them. In response to the question about supporting dependents, the majority reported supporting five or more.

## Duration in Maldives

Most of the respondents of the Survey had been in the Maldives for over 3 years, with a significant portion of them having reached 10 or more years.

## Documentation Status

The survey data shows a diverse range of identification documents among participants. The most common are passports and work permits. MRC beneficiary cards were also held by a minority of the respondents. A small percentage of participants had no valid ID, while a few also noted that they had only expired documents.

### Access to Passport

Majority of the participants reported to having access to their passports, but more than half indicated their passports were with their employer.

## ■ Employment Status

Most worked in the private sector, while some were self-employed or on daily wages. A small percentage cited document issues for unemployment. Others held multiple jobs, indicating diverse employment.

## ■ Findings on access to needs & knowledge

### ■ Social

Most participants identified internet access, shelter, and food as their top social needs. Additionally, about a quarter valued clothing, supporting their family, socializing, and free time. Majority of respondents reported having access to over 50% of their above stated needs.

### ■ Healthcare

Participants identified their healthcare priorities and needs, with the majority considering health insurance essential, and a significant number of respondents needing knowledge about accessing healthcare without proper documentation. Almost half the respondents prioritized free health screening, while about one fifth of the respondents identified mental healthcare as a need.

Regarding access to healthcare, only about half of the respondents could access over 50% of their healthcare needs. Financial constraints were cited as the primary barrier to accessing healthcare services. It is notable that regarding insurance coverage that only half were covered, and about 10% were unaware of their coverage status.

A few respondents cited lack of proper ID documents and recovery without formal treatment which included buying medications without consultation, as reasons for not accessing healthcare facilities.

Overall, a significant majority had sought services at healthcare facilities in the Maldives, with over half exclusively accessing government hospitals, and only a minority using private clinics.

## ■ Employment

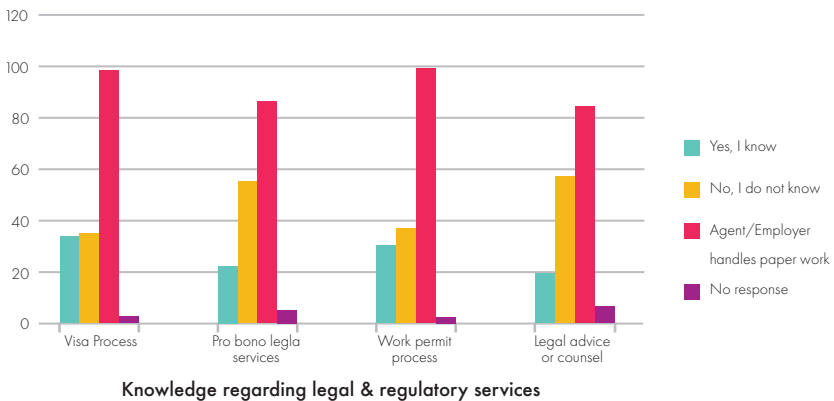
Participants highlighted their priorities and needs regarding employment, with a vast majority prioritizing appropriate wages, followed by emphasizing stable employment with clearly defined roles. Job security was considered important by over half, closely followed by workplace safety. Additionally, over a quarter cited regular work hours and the importance of having a proper work permit and visa.

Regarding access to employment needs, less than half of the respondents had all of their needs fulfilled.

## ■ Legal and regulatory services

Participants had varying needs and priorities regarding legal and regulatory services. While the majority found this category not applicable, this was closely followed by those prioritizing access to legal advice and counsel, as well as accessibility to immigration and work visa services. Additionally, a quarter identified the need for regularization and work permit services, while a similar percentage prioritized security from detention and deportation.

Overall, regarding knowledge of visa acquisition and work permit processes, legal services, the majority depended on their employer or agent, as shown in the graph below.



## ■ Findings on information and access to humanitarian assistance from MRC

Participants were surveyed about their interaction with the Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC). Among recipients of services from MRC, access to healthcare and information were the most common. Closely followed by receipt of hygiene materials. Food assistance was only mentioned by a minority.

Reasons for non-access to MRC's services and migrants' trust towards humanitarian actors are discussed further in the report in an extracted case study from the Global Migration Lab's research on *Migrants' Perspectives: Building Trust in Humanitarian Action* (Arias Cubas, Hoagland, and Mudaliar, 2022).

# KEY THEMES AND CONCERNS

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## ■ Documentation concerns & protection gaps:

The report shows that over 58.9% of participants had their passports held by employers longer than needed, with paperwork often managed by agents or employers. This lack of awareness about laws poses risks for migrants, especially for undocumented migrants who may lose basic rights and become vulnerable to exploitation.

## ■ Issues of accessibility to justice:

The absence of materials in languages other than the local language and the lack of diverse modalities of information dissemination, pose a barrier to justice for migrants in the Maldives. Additionally, there is a shortage of official translators to mediate court proceedings and provide legal aid for migrants, particularly in matters of employment disputes.

## ➤ **Issues of accessibility to healthcare:**

The report flags concerns about healthcare access. About 39.3% of participants lacked insurance, and 10.7% were unsure. Payment at government hospitals in the Greater Male' region is restricted to credit/ debit cards or limited insurance, excluding cash. This poses a barrier for uninsured migrants seeking care. Other hurdles include high costs, easy access to over-the-counter medications, and lack of documentation.

## ➤ **Lack of data on needs of female migrants:**

Efforts were made to boost female migrant responses in the Assessment, with stakeholder support, but these attempts were unsuccessful. One reason could be the shortage of female volunteers conducting the Assessment. Additionally, female migrants might have been inaccessible during field surveys, primarily due to their domestic work responsibilities, which often confine them to households.

## ➤ **Migration management, detention, and deportation:**

The Maldives Immigration Strategic Plan 2020-2024 prioritizes migration management, detention, and deportation. Maldives Immigration has intensified raids and set up a detention facility to achieve this goal, partnering with the Ministry of Economic Development. Additionally, individuals without proper paperwork face restrictions in inter-island travel, impacting access to healthcare and justice. However, information about these policies, available only in English and Dhivehi on social media, may exclude many migrants from understanding their rights and options.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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Generally, the recommendations are addressed towards the state, humanitarian actors, and any stakeholders involved in providing services to the migrant communities.

## ■ Immediate priorities

This first category of recommendations is proposed to address immediate challenges requiring urgent attention.

- Increase overall awareness and outreach efforts.
- Facilitate regular access to basic healthcare, legal, and regulatory services.

## ■ Short-term priorities

These recommendations are geared towards solutions that can be implemented within a relatively short timeframe.

- Increase Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) efforts of MRC.
- Inclusion of migrant youth in regular programming of MRC and other stakeholders.
- Create avenues for social interaction between members of the local community and migrant communities.
- Secure resources for detention monitoring and provision of psychosocial support for migrants in detention facilities.

## ■ Long-term priorities

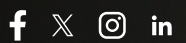
These recommendations centred on fostering sustainable systematic change and addressing root causes to create lasting impact over an extended period.

- Conduct further comprehensive research on the provision of mental health support to migrants.
- Advocate for inclusive laws, policies, and regulations, as well as the ratification of important international conventions



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