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# 'Hold off Immigration enforcement'

By [Dawn Chan](#), [Teh Athira Yusof](#) - August 12, 2021 @ 9:01am



Foreign workers lining up outside the Rumah Prihatin Grand Seasons Hotel vaccination centre in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. -BERNAMA pic

A moratorium on enforcement against undocumented migrants and refugees should be introduced to encourage them to come out and get vaccinated against Covid-19.

Beyond Borders Malaysia founder Mahi Ramakrishnan said many of them had expressed interest in getting vaccinated to protect themselves against the virus, but feared being arrested and detained if they turned up for Covid-19 inoculation appointments at vaccination centres (PPVs).

She suggested the Immigration Department allayed such fears as some refugees who had registered for vaccination on the MySejahtera app had yet to receive their jobs.

She said undocumented migrants and refugees did not go for walk-in vaccinations at facilities near them as they were afraid they would land in trouble with the authorities.

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"The department should have made an official statement that these groups of vulnerable people have nothing to worry about. They shouldn't have to worry about their immigration status, whether they have valid documents or otherwise, or the United Nations High Commission for Refugees card.

"What's important is for the country to achieve the goal of having its population vaccinated and attain herd immunity. To do this we need everybody to get the vaccine."

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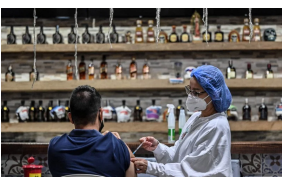


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Mahi Ramakrishnan

Mahi said a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have reached out to the groups and encouraged them to get vaccinated.

"They ask questions like 'what if I get arrested?' and 'how do you know



that the authorities will not arrest us?'

"I can't give a definite answer because there has been no official announcement on this and I am in no position to guarantee their safety. To my knowledge, there hasn't been any arrest over this (going for vaccination). The authorities should not be targeting the most vulnerable communities amid the raging pandemic.

"The onus now is on the government to convince them to get vaccinated."

She said the Immigration Department had, in the past, gave an assurance that no action would be taken against those going for vaccination, but previous raids by it on the groups when they went out to get tested for Covid-19 had increased their fear, which led to distrust and apprehension.

"NGO workers find it incredibly difficult to persuade them to get vaccinated as they have no assurance of what lies ahead.

"The vulnerable communities are increasingly worried and have no idea what to do. They know the importance of being vaccinated, but they also fear losing their freedom when they are arrested. In a way, they are in a precarious situation.

"So far, everyone I spoke to want to get vaccinated, but they are scared of the possible repercussions from the authorities. They don't feel safe," she said, adding that she was told at least 10 refugees from one community in a particular area in Klang Valley had died of Covid-19 in less than three weeks.

Human Rights Commission of Malaysia commissioner Jerald Joseph said to ensure the Covid-19 National Immunisation Programme (NIP) was a success, efforts should be made to boost the confidence of those without valid documentation in their safety when going for vaccination.

He said agencies under the Home Ministry should follow what Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Khairy Jamaluddin did, by assuring the group that no arrest would be made.



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Jerald Joseph

"Previously, during Covid-19 screening tests for undocumented migrants, officers from the Immigration Department were present. This led to some of them running away as they feared being detained.

"To ensure the NIP is a success and the country can achieve herd immunity, the Home Ministry should communicate the message to the group effectively."

Joseph said the government could collaborate with NGOs to boost the confidence of undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in getting vaccinated.

"Khairy had previously said NGOs could assist the government to get them vaccinated, but now the vaccination process is managed by PPVs. By having NGOs and associations at PPVs, we can allay their fears and concerns, especially with the presence of uniformed officers at PPVs."

Migrant Care Malaysian branch coordinator Alex Ong said most undocumented individuals from Indonesia were keen to get the vaccines, especially after the government introduced walk-in appointments.

"We have been encouraging and raising awareness among the community on the (walk-in) vaccination programme," he said.

"The response has been very good. We are happy to know that there are no officers monitoring the walk-in appointments as shown at the KLCC PPV."



Alex Ong

Ong also expressed concern over the safety of workers in the cleaning services, many of whom were undocumented migrants, who risked exposure to the virus.

"The workers, who are also hired to clean people's homes, make up the



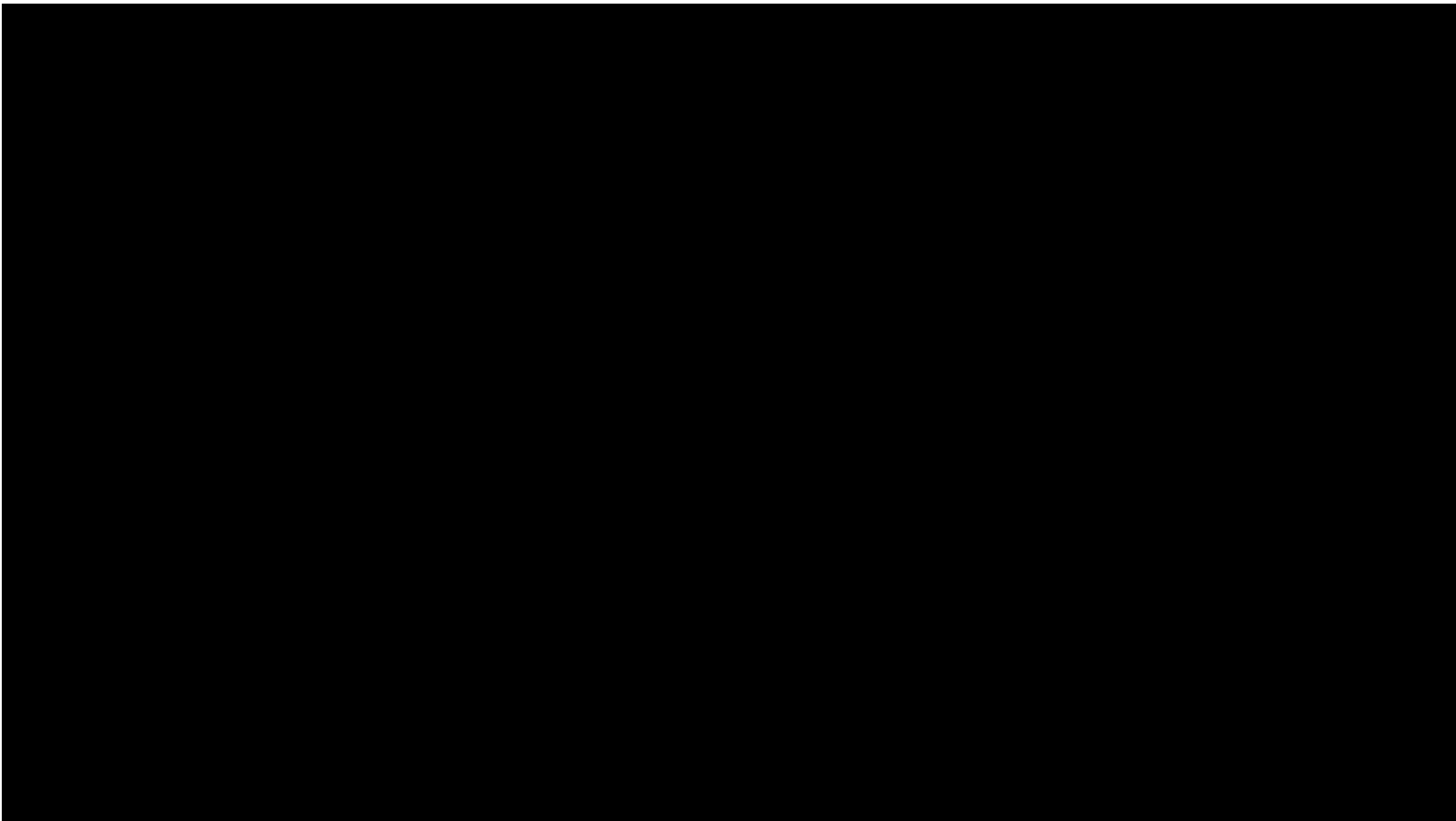
most number of undocumented workers here.

"There is no way of knowing where they have been due to their work, as they are hired to clean hotels, shopping malls and other business premises.

"We need to identify the workers and get them screened and vaccinated fast due to the potential risks, not only to themselves but also others."

Ong said it was harder to track the vaccination progress among domestic workers, compared with larger industry workers, such as in manufacturing, as many passports were kept by employers.

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