Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of MYANMAR MIGRANTS and their Impacts on Thailand

Supplementary Report

Conducted by the International Organization for Migration, Country Mission in Thailand and the Asian Research Center for Migration, Chulalongkorn University

February 2015
ASSESSING POTENTIAL CHANGES IN THE MIGRATION PATTERNS OF MYANMAR MIGRANTS AND THE IMPACTS ON THAILAND: SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

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Funded by IOM Development Fund

Publisher
International Organization for Migration, Country Mission Thailand
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Summary

Thailand has an estimated total of around 3.5 million migrants (regular or irregular status), of which roughly 3 million are in the labour market (7% of Thailand’s total working population) with an estimated 2.3 million migrants originating from Myanmar.

In 2013, IOM published the report, “Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of Myanmar Migrants and their Impacts on Thailand”, which provides an evidence-based analysis of evolving migration patterns of Myanmar migrants and of the ways political and economic changes in Myanmar affect the migrants, their employers and other stakeholders in the two countries concerned.

Based on the success of the initial report, this supplementary report has been produced to present additional insight into the situation of Myanmar migrants in Thailand and implications for migration patterns between Myanmar and Thailand, focussing on three specific dimensions: gender, displacement and documentation status. This analysis aims to provide a more holistic and comprehensive picture of Myanmar migrants in Thailand especially as these aspects are likely to have important implications for future migration patterns between the two countries as well as the migration experiences of the individuals involved. Each of these dimensions of migration is tackled through a specific chapter providing further analysis and insights into the Myanmar migrant population in Thailand, followed by a set of conclusions and policy recommendations.

This supplementary study found that there were minimal differences between female and male migrants in terms of remittances, travel back to Myanmar, and skills gained during migration. Female migrants were slightly more likely to travel back to Myanmar and send remittances more frequently than males. Female migrants also reported slightly easier access to health, education and financial services. The most notable differences were found in terms of employment, with some industries predominantly employing one gender over the other.

A key finding regarding displaced migrants was that while most (75%) plan to return to Myanmar, the largest proportion of them did not have definitive plans of when they would return. Interestingly, the sectors of work also varied for displaced migrants, with a larger proportion of displaced migrants (45%) employed in construction in Thailand. Displaced migrants also reported lower overall levels of satisfaction with their jobs in Thailand. The amount of remittances and the proportion of remittance senders was lower amongst displaced migrants than non-displaced, but still substantial (64% of displaced migrants reported sending remittances) indicating a strong commitment among displaced persons to positive developmental outcomes in Myanmar.

The study revealed significant higher proportions of undocumented workers in the agricultural sector than other sectors. Interestingly, there were limited differences in the levels of job satisfaction, living conditions, access to healthcare and education amongst documented and non-documented migrant workers providing minimal support for the notion that documentation
increases migrants’ access to improved living and working conditions and access to services. Nonetheless, migrants with full documentation reported sending higher levels of remittances back to Myanmar. Undocumented migrants were more likely to remit through relatives or friends than documented migrants, whereas migrants with full documentation or coloured cards were more likely to remit through informal agents. Migrants with some form of documentation reported a higher utilization of broker services in Myanmar than undocumented migrants.

Justification

This report analyses the situations of Myanmar migrants in Thailand and prospects for return through three analytical lenses – gender, displacement status, and documentation status. These dimensions were selected based on the important implications they have for the migration experience in Thailand and prospects for return. Firstly, migration is a gendered phenomenon in relation to the economic and social conditions experienced by migrants in the destination country, and the first chapter therefore looks at the gender dimension of migration to Thailand in greater detail. Traditionally, Myanmar women have played a determinant role in managing their households, while recently they have been increasingly employed as paid workforce. Migration is reshaping social and family relations, either by strengthening support/protection mechanisms or exposing the most vulnerable individuals to additional vulnerabilities, thereby reinforcing or weakening original family structures. It was therefore deemed important to look at the gender dimension, particularly considering that the combination of these factors may greatly affect return patterns.

The second chapter looks at the nature and extent of displacement among Myanmar migrants in Thailand and how it affects the migration experience and reasons/willingness of migrants to return to Myanmar. Displaced Myanmar migrants are not entitled to Refugee Status, as Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. They are only allowed to stay in one of the camps along the Myanmar border, relatively safe from the risk of arrest or deportation, but without freedom to move and work and mainly relying on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. Those living outside the camps, on the other hand, may have access to work but have no legal rights specifically related to their displacement background, despite the specific circumstances which are associated with it. They may nonetheless be able to access procedures available to international migrants in the country (such as registration and regularization). These factors all have important implications for understanding the specific situations of those Myanmar migrants with displacement backgrounds, as well as how this affects likelihood and motivations for return.

The third chapter takes a closer look at how documentation status affects the migration experience. Similarly to displacement status, the possession of legal documents to reside in Thailand is often assumed to be an important determinant factor in accessing services, changing employers and moving freely across Thailand. Having legal status and documentation may also have important implications for remittance patterns and strengthening linkages
between migration and development. These factors are therefore investigated in more detail in the third and final chapter of this report.

Throughout this supplementary report, particular attention has been given to employment and remittance behaviour of the migrants, which were the predominant development indicators in the previous report.

**Methodology and limitations**

The findings of this report use the same methodology and the same sample as the main report “Assessing potential changes in the migration patterns of Myanmar migrants and their impact on Thailand”, December 2013, IOM Thailand and ARCM.

No additional data collection was conducted for the purpose of this supplementary report. Findings are based on the survey results of the original sample population of 5,027 Myanmar migrants covering 7 border and non-border provinces of Thailand that host large numbers of migrants. To better understand gender-based differences, the sampling attempted to have a similar number of males and females in each of the target provinces.

There are some limitations related to the research sample, particularly in relation to the displacement status and remittance behaviour of the migrants. The small portion of forced migrants included in the study sample (7%), limits the scope of the analysis which means that the findings are not necessarily representative of Myanmar migrants with a displacement background in Thailand.

With regard to displacement status, it is important to clarify that the sample is small because the representational sampling was done on the basis of official Thai government statistics which included provinces with higher percentages of documented migrants.

Similarly, the sampling was skewed towards provinces where there were higher percentages of documented migrants. Furthermore, gaining access to and obtaining the consent of undocumented migrants was generally more difficult than doing the same with documented migrants; as a result, the voices of undocumented migrants are less represented in this assessment.

With regard to remittance behaviour, it is worth noting that there may be some level of inaccuracy in the estimates, mainly because of the difficulties in appraising the value of in-kind remittances but also because the majority of people (67%) use informal brokers, making it difficult to track the precise nature and origin of the financial and in-kind transfers to Myanmar.

Full details of the methodological approach can be found in the report *Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of Myanmar Migrants and their Impacts on Thailand*.
1. General Findings

1.1 Employment

Figures 1 and 2 detail overall employment and job satisfaction in Thailand, respectively, for all respondents. The largest numbers of Myanmar migrants were employed in construction (16.16%), fishery and fishery related work (15.56%), and agriculture/animal husbandry and related (12.49%). In all sectors of work, migrants most often reported feeling either “neutral” or “satisfied” with their job. The highest percentage of those who feel “very satisfied” is found in agriculture/animal husbandry and related, while the highest percentage of those who are “very unsatisfied” either worked in construction or were unemployed.

Figure 1 Overall Employment Categories of Myanmar Migrants in Thailand

What is your current job?
1.2 Remittances
Migrants sent back an average of USD 962 of remittances to Myanmar every year, and 75 per cent of all respondents reported having sent remittances at some point since arriving in Thailand. Based on these, the annual inflow of remittances from Thailand and Myanmar is estimated to be USD 1.7 billion. Of these, USD 1.4 billion is sent to Mon, Shan, Thanintharyi and Kayin states (See Table 1).

In regard to means of sending back remittances, 83 per cent of survey migrants reported that they send remittances through unofficial channels such as brokers, family and friends. There are barriers to receiving money formally, including the need for identity cards or bank accounts and remoteness from urban centres.
Table 1 Annual Remittances Flow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Region</th>
<th>Average (those who send)</th>
<th>Median (those who send)</th>
<th>% non-sender</th>
<th>Total Amount Sent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>1185</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>588,953,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>197,668,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanintharyi</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>265,578,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayin</td>
<td>1134</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>328,152,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bago</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>133,694,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangon</td>
<td>1019</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>87,017,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>139,228,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1,740,293,396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Analysis of the Situation of Myanmar Migrants by Gender

This supplementary study found that there were minimal differences between female and male migrants in terms of remittances, travel back to Myanmar, and skills gained during migration. Female migrants were slightly more likely to travel back to Myanmar and send remittances more frequently than males. Female migrants also reported slightly easier access to health, education and financial services. The most notable differences were found in terms of employment, with some industries predominantly employing one gender over the other.

2.1 Occupations in Myanmar and Thailand

Overall, Myanmar families seem to keep the same features as in their home country: a large proportion of migrants surveyed owned and farmed their own land (32%) in Myanmar before migrating to Thailand. Figure 1 shows that of this category 55 per cent were male and 44 per cent were female (1% not providing a response) with the next largest category being “unemployed” (21% of the total responses). Occupations which were predominantly held by males included those in the construction and fishery industries, whereas females were the predominant sex employed in garment factories, food and beverage, trade and sales, and domestic work. Of those migrants who stated they were unemployed prior to migrating, 59 per cent were female and 41 per cent were male.

Figure 3. Occupations in Myanmar
Figure 4 shows occupations held by Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Domestic work is predominantly done by females whereas fisheries work is primarily carried out by males. Out of the migrants surveyed who performed domestic work in Thailand, almost 95 per cent were female. The same percentage of male migrants was represented in the fishery sector. However, the gender differences in other professional categories were not as stark. For example, there were practically as many female migrant workers as male employed in fishery-related sectors as well as other sectors, with the exception of construction where male migrants constituted approximately 68 per cent of overall numbers of workers.

Figure 4. Current Occupations in Thailand

When asked to rate their working conditions, the results between genders were almost identical with the majority of males and females rating their working conditions as “adequate”, followed by “good”, as shown in Figure 3. Slightly more males than females rated their working conditions as either “bad” or “very good”.
2.2 Family contact

Figure 6 shows that just over half of all migrants surveyed (52%) maintained monthly contact with their families in Myanmar. Amongst those migrants maintaining monthly contact, there was an even (50/50) split between gender. Migrants living in Thailand who did not maintain any contact with their families in Myanmar (approximately 15% overall) were more likely to be male (60%), than female (40%).

The frequency of family contact certainly depends on the presence of the family together with the respondent in Thailand. Over 68% of those who are single are aged 15-25 and have no children. Despite this, they represent over half of those who more frequently contact their families (weekly or daily), suggesting a strong tie with the original household and friends, in comparison to those having the spouse living back in Myanmar, who are also found to be older.

It is worth noting how females maintain a caregiving role in the family during the migration experience, as findings show a moderate prevalence of women as primary caregivers. Figure 5 displays data for respondents having children. Data show not only that females are more likely to...
to be the main caregivers in the household in contrast to male respondents, but also that the male migrants reported relying more on their spouses than female migrants did.

**Figure 7. Primary Caregiving role by gender**

![Graph showing caregiving roles by gender](image)

Figure 8 shows that in general, migrants sending remittances back to Myanmar are split evenly between genders. Approximately 42 per cent of migrants surveyed send remittances to Myanmar regularly (monthly or every 2-3 months). Of this group, slightly more are female (52%) than male (47%). Of those migrants who have never sent remittances home to Myanmar (24% of all migrants surveyed) 54 per cent are male and 45 per cent are female, indicating that female migrants are slightly more likely to send remittances than male migrants. Female migrant workers also spent a greater portion of their income on remittances.
2.3 Travels to and from Myanmar

Figure 9 shows the means by which Myanmar migrants entered Thailand. Females more frequently entered Thailand with friends or relatives. Slightly more males than female entered Thailand through MOU/formal recruitment, through a broker in Myanmar or by themselves.
Figure 10 demonstrates that of those migrants surveyed over half (55%) have travelled back to Myanmar since migrating to Thailand. Of those migrants who did not travel back to Myanmar, 55 per cent were male and 45 per cent were female.

A fairly similar percentage of migrants (16%) of both sexes declared traveling back to Myanmar on a temporary basis. Female migrants visit Myanmar slightly more often, i.e. at least once a year. Male migrants form a larger number of those travelling back to Myanmar every 2-3 years.

![Figure 10 Travels back to Myanmar (Yes/No)](image)

2.4 Skills Gained during Migration
74 per cent of female migrants and 72 per cent of male migrants gained technical skills. According to Table 2, the surveyed migrants also gained a variety of "soft" skills, particularly self-confidence, working in multi-cultural environments and working under pressure. 48 per cent of the migrants thought that the skills they had gained would help them find jobs in Myanmar while 27 per cent were unsure.
Table 2 Skills Gained during Migration by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Skills</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No skills gained</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Confidence</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural environments</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working under pressure</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity with technologies</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services attitude</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity with industrial system</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5 Living Conditions in Thailand

As shown in Figure 11, a slightly greater proportion of women rated their living conditions as either “very good” or “good”. However, both sexes most frequently described their living conditions as “adequate”.

Figure 11. Living Conditions in Thailand by Gender

In terms of access to various services in Thailand, data show a generally equal number with females reporting a slightly easier access to education, healthcare and banks. Healthcare was the most easily accessible service, though males faced difficulties in accessing healthcare to a slightly larger degree than females. In absolute terms, the least accessible service was education with the greatest number of respondents of both genders reporting either access with
difficulties or no access to education in Thailand. Data about access to health care can be viewed as the most meaningful indicator of access to services, as it is the most used services from Myanmar migrants in Thailand. As Figure 12 shows, only 10% of migrants of both sexes who have not tried to access health services (labelled as “don’t know”), compared to 20-25% for education and banks.

**Figure 12. Access to Healthcare by Gender**

![Access to Healthcare by Gender](image1)

**Figure 13. Access to Banks by Gender**

![Access to Banks by Gender](image2)
Figure 14 Access to Education by Gender

How would you describe your access to education in Thailand?
- Easily
- With difficulties
- No access
- Don’t know

Percent

Gender

Female
Male
3 Analysis of the Situation of Displaced Migrants

In the context of the research, displaced people are those who reported either “unstable political situation” or “security issues” as primary reasons to flee Myanmar to Thailand. Although the sample is small, it nonetheless provides some insights into the particular nature and consequences of their migration experience.

3.1 States or Regions of Origin

The majority of surveyed Myanmar migrants reported economic and employment opportunities as the primary reasons to migrate to Thailand. Only 7% of migrants reported that fleeing from conflicts and political persecutions were the main reasons they migrated to Thailand.

Given the unique needs and concerns of these individuals, it is nonetheless important to understand further the implications of their potential return to Myanmar. From Figure 15, 76% of surveyed migrants came from 30 townships (out of 247 townships) located in 4 states or regions bordering Thailand. The majority of those whose primary reasons to migrate to Thailand were insecurity and lack of safety come from the Shan (22%) and Kayin (7%) States. The big difference between the Shans and Kayins is that displaced Kayins were able to seek refuge at the refugee camps established along the western border of Thailand, whereas there were no such camps along the northern border of Thailand to accommodate the Shans. As a result, the displaced Kayins either entered into the refugees camps (many of whom also resettled in third countries) or lived and worked outside of the refugee camps, whereas the majority of Shans became a part of the general migrant population living and working in Thailand.

Figure 15. Percentages of Migrants with Displacement Background
Although there were more male respondents than female, the survey found that there were more females than males among the migrants from Shan and Kayin states whereas the majority of migrants from other states were male.

*Figure 16 Percentages of Shan and Kayin Migrants with Displacements Background*

More than 80 per cent of migrants with displacement backgrounds reported living with their children in Thailand whereas only slightly more than 50 per cent of non-displaced migrants live with their children as illustrated in Figure 17. This is a significant difference between the two groups of migrants, suggesting that it is important for displaced migrants to migrate as a family to avoid security concerns. Furthermore, those displaced are more likely to live in Thailand with spouses compared to those who are not, as their percentage account for almost 98 per cent.

*Figure 17. Percentage of Displaced Migrants with Children Living in Thailand*
3.3 Education
Figure 18 presents access to education among displaced and non-displaced migrants. A larger percentage of displaced migrants was easily able to access education, while a larger proportion of non-displaced migrants had no access to education in Thailand. Further, a similar proportion of both groups was able to access education “with difficulties”.

Figure 18 Access to Education among Displaced and Non-Displaced Migrants

3.4 Employment
It is interesting to note that the majority of displaced migrants (98.6%) was employed at the time of the research. The survey found that close to 45 per cent of the surveyed migrants with displacement backgrounds were currently employed in construction. Other leading sectors of employment for displaced persons from Myanmar include: food and beverage sales, agriculture and animal husbandry, and “other services” (Figure 19).
When asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction with their current jobs (Figure 20) the highest percentage of “very satisfied” workers was for domestic work. However, this proportion was still relatively low (around 10%). The largest proportions of migrant workers who reported being either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their jobs were seen in domestic work, food and beverage sales, other labour work, and other services. “Other services”, which proportionally received the highest numbers of satisfied responses, also saw the greatest number of respondents who were very unsatisfied with their jobs. In general, those engaged in wholesale retail trade & vending were the most unsatisfied.
When the daily working hours of displaced and non-displaced migrants were compared, it was found that a greater percentage of non-displaced migrants worked over nine hours each day and more than twice as high a proportion of non-displaced migrants reported working over 12 hours a day.

### 3.5 Remittances

In this sample, displaced migrants send fewer remittances back to Myanmar than non-displaced migrants, a finding reflecting a broader theory according to which refugees tend to send less remittances to their home country unless they are fully integrated in the economy of the host country. Integration is a complex, multi-dimensional migration component, a full discussion of which goes beyond the scope of the present report; nonetheless, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the migration-development nexus, and its impact on return patterns.
It must be highlighted that remittance patterns are strongly influenced by the family composition of displaced migrants in Thailand. As indicated above, the majority of displaced migrants are living with their spouse and children, reducing the likelihood of sending remittances back home. This may also be a reason for the limited number of journeys back to their home country: 58% never went back ‘at least once’ since their arrival in Thailand, while as little as 8% of those travelling back do it ‘regularly’ or ‘at least once a year’. However, as described in the next section, this does not necessary imply a weaker tie to Myanmar.

Data on remittances confirm this trend, with only 21% sending remittances on a monthly basis or every 2-3 months, with the remaining proportion sending remittances only sporadically. The amount sent by non-displaced migrants is considerably higher, providing further evidence of the overall importance of remittances for this category of migrants. On the other hand, there is a slightly wider range of remittance patterns among the displaced, meaning that there are more individuals sending amounts above average, signalling a willingness to send as much money as possible. This indicates that when the displaced have the possibility and/or the willingness to remit, the motivation to do so may be even stronger than for non-displaced migrants.

As shown in Table 3, the average amount of remittances sent back home in a year by displaced migrants is USD 586 whereas the average amount sent by non-displaced migrants is approximately double i.e. USD 1,034. Furthermore, a greater proportion of non-displaced migrants send money back home (76 %) than those with displacement backgrounds (64 %).
Table 3. Level of Annual Remittances in Thai Baht by Displacement Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average (those who send)</th>
<th>Median (those who send)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displaced</td>
<td>17,184 ฿</td>
<td>10,000 ฿</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Displaced</td>
<td>29,974 ฿</td>
<td>25,000 ฿</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Willingness and Primary Reasons to Return to Myanmar

Just below 80 per cent of survey respondents expressed their intention to go back to Myanmar. Among them, 81 per cent wanted to go back to their hometowns or villages and only 2 per cent were willing to move to where there were jobs available within Myanmar. These figures are better explained when considering the motivations for return: for both the non-displaced and displaced migrants, reuniting with family and friends is the prime reason to return to Myanmar. For the displaced sample this figure accounts for 43 per cent, clarifying why the majority would return to their hometowns regardless of the availability of jobs. Furthermore, the fact that this is still considered the primary motivation to return reinforces the importance of family/community ties for Myanmar displaced. When asked to provide a second reason for moving back to Myanmar, 75% did not provide any response. Other common primary responses included issues related to development in Myanmar, (such as increased opportunities), or individual achievements (e.g. amount of money saved).

Surprisingly given the forced nature of their migration, only 4% would return given improved security conditions in Myanmar. This finding can be put in context when considering that as much as 71% of the respondents are strongly or moderately optimistic about improved conditions in their home country, while 58% link these developments with intention to return.

Similarly to non-displaced, the willingness to return is not linked to the length of stay in Thailand, as results are similar for both newcomers and long-term stayers, despite research indicating generally that increased integration in the host country is likely to reduce the likelihood of return.

Table 4. Primary Reasons to Return to Myanmar by Displaced Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Reason</th>
<th>Displaced</th>
<th>Non-Displaced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live with family and friends</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More opportunities and services in Myanmar</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough savings now</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems living in Thailand</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater security in Myanmar</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed long enough in Thailand</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not save money</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 22 displays migrants’ willingness to return to Myanmar by displacement status. Approximately 80 per cent of non-displaced migrants wished to return compared to 75 per cent of the displaced migrants. It can be concluded that most migrants are willing to return to
Among displaced migrants who expressed a willingness to return to Myanmar, the timeframes for their planned return had notable variations. Fewer than 11 per cent of migrants planned to return within three years. Perhaps unsurprisingly given ongoing conflict and instability in certain areas of Myanmar, the majority of displaced respondents who do wish to return either plan to wait longer than five years before doing so or have no definitive plans for their return. Figure 25 presents a breakdown of timeframes for planned returns.

Figures 23 and 24 present the effect of economic and political changes on considerations of return. When asked to what extent they acknowledge economic and political changes in Myanmar, the majority of both displaced and non-displaced stated that they acknowledge the changes to some extent. However, displaced migrants were almost twice as likely as non-displaced to not acknowledge these changes at all, while non-displaced were approximately two times as likely to acknowledge the changes “very well”. Similarly, changes in Myanmar were less likely to affect the decision of displaced migrants to return, while the considerations of return among non-displaced migrants were more greatly affected.
For both the non-displaced and displaced migrants, reuniting with family and friends is the prime reason to return to Myanmar. The percentage of migrants who identified living with friends and family as the primary motivation to return to Myanmar permanently represented 62 per cent of responses from non-displaced migrants and 43 per cent among displaced migrants. For displaced migrants, the second main reason for potential return is the increase in opportunities and services in Myanmar. Other primary reasons for leaving Thailand for Myanmar include having enough savings, having stayed long enough in Thailand, problems living in Thailand,
more opportunities arising in Myanmar and greater security in Myanmar as shown in Table 4. (Page 26)

**Figure 25. Return Timeframe for Displaced Migrants**
4 Analysis of the Situation of Myanmar Migrants by Documentation Status

This chapter provides further insights into the documentation status of Myanmar migrants in Thailand.

The study revealed significant higher proportions of undocumented workers in the agricultural sector than other sectors. Interestingly, there were limited differences in the levels of job satisfaction, living conditions, access to healthcare and education amongst documented and non-documentated migrant workers providing minimal support for the notion that documentation increases migrants’ access to improved living and working conditions and access to services. Nonetheless, migrants with full documentation reported sending higher levels of remittances back to Myanmar. Undocumented migrants were more likely to remit through relatives or friends than documented migrants, whereas migrants with full documentation or coloured cards were more likely to remit through informal agents. Migrants with some form of documentation reported a higher utilization of broker services in Myanmar than undocumented migrants.

4.1 Employment and living conditions

As illustrated in Figure 26, the highest proportions of fully documented migrants were working in manufacturing, industrial production and sales. Migrants with temporary documentation were most often employed in physically demanding jobs whereas the largest group of those holding coloured cards were employed in “wholesale retail trade and vendor”. The highest percentages of undocumented migrants were employed in “agricultural and husbandry” as well as “other labour work”.

At this stage, it is worth reiterating that 64.6% of the sample population for the study were fully documented and this is reflected in the findings, with most migrants having fully documented status across most sectors.
This indicates slightly contrasting findings to those of previous research, which found that the largest proportions of undocumented migrants were traditionally employed in the fishing industry, especially in Ranong and Samut Sakhon provinces. However, before ascribing this finding to a change in employment patterns, the impact of policy changes (particularly relating to counter-trafficking measures and registration opportunities for workers in these sectors) should be further analysed while also taking into account the broader challenges in estimating numbers of irregular/undocumented migrants.

When looking at the number of working hours per day across documentation status (Figure 28), most respondents worked 8 hours each day. A slightly larger percentage of migrants with temporary documents worked under eight hours per day. Proportionally, fully documented migrants more often worked between 9-12 hours each day. The largest percentage of those working over 12 hours each day was found among undocumented migrants, although the difference with fully documented migrants was minimal.
As presented in Figure 29, the majority of migrants were not provided with either food or accommodation by their employers; those holding temporary documents were the least likely to receive either. Migrants holding coloured cards were most often provided with both food and accommodation (13.46%), followed closely by undocumented migrants (12.95%) and fully documented migrants (12.67%). Very similar proportions of fully documented and undocumented migrants were provided with accommodation by their employers.
Close to half of the fully documented migrants and those with coloured cards surveyed earned enough income from their employment to cover their necessary expenses, while over two thirds of undocumented migrants and those with temporary documents did not always earn enough to cover their expenses. As shown in Figure 27 above, respondents were generally satisfied with their jobs. The majority of respondents report either feeling “neutral” or “satisfied” with their current jobs across all documentation statues. Small, but similar, percentages of migrants in all categories fell into the extremes of either “very unsatisfied” or “very satisfied” with their work. Levels of satisfaction between migrants with full documentation and no documentation were virtually identical, while those with temporary documents were on average the most satisfied with their jobs. While it is not possible to provide a single explanation to such satisfaction, pre-migration expectations likely play a role. As almost 50% of the migrants in this sample were driven to Thailand by the possibility of earning a better income, with an additional 28% motivated by lack of employment at home, data indicates a positive correlation between job satisfaction and the economic motivation to migrate.

Living conditions were not significantly related to the legal status in Thailand, findings being fairly similar across the different categories of documentation. Most migrants described their current conditions as adequate or good. While the highest proportion of migrants who rate their current conditions as “very good” were fully documented, this still represented less than 6 percent of all migrants in that category.

Adequate living conditions and job satisfaction were closely related: for most migrants, positive migration experiences primarily derived from employment satisfaction. Dissatisfaction with life in Thailand drops sharply from 36% of those having bad employment conditions to 5% of migrants reporting good experiences in their jobs. Employment and having access to healthcare,
together with the ability to sustain families are likely mutually reinforcing factors that contribute to explaining the overall satisfaction of migrants with conditions in Thailand.

While most migrants can easily access healthcare, those with no documentation experience difficulties or no access to a higher degree. Holders of coloured cards reported the easiest access to healthcare. As for access to education, the highest proportion of those with temporary documents could easily access education. Migrants with full documentation or no documentation were more likely to have no access to education. It is worth noting that the results for both access to education and access to health services were strikingly similar for fully documented migrants and undocumented migrants.

Figure 30 Living Conditions in Thailand by Documentation Status
Figure 31 Access to Healthcare by Documentation Status

How would you describe your access to healthcare in Thailand?
- Easily
- With difficulties
- No access
- Don't know

Percent

Documentation Status
- Full Documentation
- Temporary Documentation
- Coloured Cards
- No Documentation
4.2 Remittances

Myanmar migrants in Thailand reported sending back an average of USD 952 of remittances to Myanmar every year (see table 5), and 75 per cent of the entire sample reported having sent remittances at some point since arriving in Thailand. The annual inflow of remittances from Thailand and Myanmar is estimated to be USD 2.8 billion, which accounts for roughly 5 per cent of Myanmar’s gross domestic product (GDP). Of this total, USD 2.26 billion (around 81%) is sent to Mon, Shan, Thanintharyi and Kayin states (See Table 5).vi

Table 5. Annual Remittances Flow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/region</th>
<th>Average (those who send)</th>
<th>% non-sender</th>
<th>% of total pop.</th>
<th>Est. amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>1,185</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26.70%</td>
<td>961,840,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shan</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>323,076,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanintharyi</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
<td>435,047,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayin</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
<td>539,330,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bago</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>217,634,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangon</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>142,660,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>987</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>268,029,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>2,887,619,560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*vi* How would you describe your access to education in Thailand?

- Easily
- With difficulties
- No access
- Don’t know
Overall, the most common channel through which remittances are sent was via an informal agent while the least common was through employers (Figure 33). There are barriers to transmitting money through formal channels, including the need for an identity card and/or a bank account and the remoteness from urban centres. It must be noted that the banking system in Myanmar is still far from being fully developed, and this could affect the ability and/or willingness of migrants to send money through formal channels. The mapping of available channels for remittances, Myanmar migrants' preferences, associated cost and barriers fell outside the scope of this research but previous research suggests that the preference for informal channels among Myanmar migrants in Thailand is linked primarily to their convenience and ease of use. Figure 33 shows preferred methods for remitting.

Data about the use of remittance channels across documentation status (Figure 34), indicate that informal agents are the most popular channel for remittances, especially for those holding full documentation or colored cards, who may have additional options available (formal channels usually require ID cards for access).
Not surprisingly, undocumented migrants are more likely to remit through friends or relatives than any other documentation category, likely due to challenges in accessing banking services and other formal channels. Furthermore, their irregular status may reduce trust in informal channels, as they may be not able to activate legal remedies in case of fraud and misconduct on the part of agents. From a policy perspective, this leads to limited accuracy in gauging the actual size of remittances and their development impact in Myanmar. On the other hand, those holding temporary documentation were slightly more likely to send remittances through bank transfers than other documentation statuses.

Data on annual remittances demonstrate similar findings, with marked differences across documentation statuses. In general, undocumented migrants and those with temporary documentation were far less likely to remit than those with full documentation or coloured cards (Figure 35). These low figures are most likely linked to the generally low incomes earned, especially by migrants holding no documentation.
The present report adds to existing knowledge on Myanmar migrants, in line with general theories on remittances, by demonstrating that remittances are clearly linked to return plans. Among those planning to eventually return to Myanmar, over 76% are sending remittances; conversely, for those who do not intend to return, the percentage falls to about 56%. This is also reflected in the frequency of sending, as clearly shown in figure 36 (reporting grand total percentages).
4.3 Entry to Thailand

The largest proportion of migrants, regardless of documentation status, entered Thailand with friends and/or relatives. The next most common method of entry to Thailand for those with full documentation, temporary documentation and coloured cards was through a broker in Myanmar. The least common means of entry was via the bilateral MOU or through formal recruitment (see Figure 37). In fact, less than one per cent of the surveyed migrants with full documentation entered Thailand through the MOU or formal recruitment processes.
4.4 Return Considerations
As shown in Figure 38, considerations of return among those with coloured cards or full documentation were most greatly affected by the political and economic changes in Myanmar. Those with temporary documents or no documents more frequently responded that their considerations of return were unaffected by the changes in Myanmar. Overall, however, most migrants thoughts on return were affected to “a certain extent” by the ongoing economic and political changes.
Figure 38 Effects of Economic and Political Changes on Considerations of Return by Documentation Status

The figure illustrates the effects of economic and political changes on the considerations of return by documentation status. It shows the percent of respondents in each documentation status category who reported being affected by recent political and economic changes in Myanmar. The categories are:

- Full Documentation
- Temporary Documentation
- Coloured Cards
- No Documentation

Respondents were asked how well these changes affected their decision to return. The categories for their responses are:

- Yes, very well
- Yes, to a certain extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

The diagram uses different colors to represent each response category, with the length of the bars indicating the percentage of respondents in each category.
Conclusions and Recommendations

On the gender dimension:

- The analysis of the situation of Myanmar migrants did not reveal substantial gender-based differences, with the exception that certain sectors employ predominantly male migrants (e.g. fisheries) and female migrants (domestic workers). Therefore, efforts to protect workers in these sectors should explicitly take into account the gendered aspect of migration for work into these sectors.

- The results also provided some indication that female migrants were slightly more likely to travel home to Myanmar frequently, and were more likely to spend a higher portion of their income on remittances, although these differences were not large. Therefore, the ‘circular’ elements of labour migration to Thailand can be seen as slightly stronger for female migrants to Thailand than male. This can have important implications in terms of maximizing the positive developmental impacts of remittances and skills circulation on countries and communities of origin. For example, interventions aiming to maximize these positive impacts may consider taking into account the slightly stronger linkages found through this survey for female migrants.

- There is scope to further engage male migrants and raise awareness and understanding of their potential to contribute to positive outcomes in their communities or origin.

On the displacement dimension:

- The slightly lower willingness and longer timeframe among displaced migrants to return to Myanmar reflect the need to ensure efforts to facilitate voluntary return among the displaced persons population in Thailand are carried out in a collaborative manner that fully integrates the preferences and needs of the displaced persons population in Thailand.

- The slightly lower levels of acknowledgement of the political and economic changes in Myanmar emphasize the need to discuss fully these changes with displaced persons in Thailand when considering the possibility of return in the near future.

- The proportion of displaced migrants who indicated a willingness to return home, as well as the proportion who acknowledged the changes in Myanmar, was still a significant majority, indicating that a voluntary and sustainable return is likely to be the most appropriate solution for a large portion of displaced persons in Thailand in the long-term.

- Levels of job satisfaction were lower, particularly in the ‘wholesale retail trade and vendor’ sector, among displaced than non-displaced migrants in Thailand. This indicates the continued need to recognize migrants who have fled situations of insecurity or persecution in particularly difficult situations, specifically with regard to work. Based on this finding, efforts to support displaced persons’ access to labour rights, decent employment opportunities and working conditions may be more needed and effective than, for example, efforts to promote access to education and services, which was reported by displaced persons as easier than for non-displaced persons.

- Although the weighted amount of remittances and number of remittance senders was lower among the displaced persons population than non-displaced, the amount of
remittances and proportion of remittance senders still indicate strong ties between the displaced population and their home communities.

- The amount of remittances and the proportion of remittance senders was lower amongst displaced migrants than non-displaced, highlighting the stronger connections that economic migrants maintain with their homes in Myanmar and the potential to engage them, before or after the eventual return, in the development process. This link is less strong among displaced persons, but still substantial (64% of displaced migrants reported sending remittances) and so should also be incorporated into development planning in Myanmar.

- Furthermore, within the displaced population, there are more individuals sending higher portions of remittances (relatively to other displaced) relative to non-displaced migrants, manifestly linking this behaviour with the intention to return. Furthermore, this is motivated by the willingness to reunite with their families and community, rather than living in a safer area of Myanmar. This testifies to a strong commitment among a large proportion of displaced persons, if not yet through remittances, to positive developmental outcomes in their country of origin. This aspect could be further strengthened through appropriate support both during the migrants’ continued stay in Thailand, and upon their eventual return.

**On documentation status:**

- Firstly, there is the need to carry out further research on the extent and sectors of employment of irregular migrants.

- The results reveal that there is no clear association between having full documentation and improved living and working conditions in Thailand as measured through indicators such as hours of work, job satisfaction, living conditions and access to health and education. In fact, results indicate slightly more favourable situations across several of these indicators for migrants with temporary documentation as compared to migrants with full documentation.

- Therefore, it is essential that the Royal Thai Government (RTG) takes the necessary steps to ensure migrant workers with full documentation have full access to the rights and services that are linked with regular status in Thailand. If the RTG is to be successful in providing an incentive for migrant workers to regularize their status in Thailand, it is recommended that easier access to services and improved living and working conditions should be more actively facilitated.

- The documentation status of migrant workers across sectors varies considerably, with a larger proportion of undocumented migrants working in the agricultural sector and labour work than in other sectors. Therefore, it is recommended that the RTG and its implementing agencies pay particular attention to these sectors when implementing regularization processes for migrant workers. Furthermore, as it is likely that a substantial portion of migrant workers in the agricultural sector are seasonal workers, introducing an effective seasonal work permit for these workers will also support efforts to ensure migrant workers in all sectors can be regularized.

- Documented migrants are more likely to send remittances back to their countries and communities of origin than undocumented or temporary documented migrants.
Therefore, from the perspective of the country of origin, ensuring migrant workers can have access to full documentation is one means to strengthen the linkages between migration and development and thereby maximize the benefits of migration for communities in countries of origin.

- As demonstrated by data on remittances, there is a close link between their frequency and intention to return. However, the developmental impact of remittances is hindered by the limited use and/or availability of formal channels. As such, a thorough mapping exercise of remittance channels and behaviours would represent a first step to more efficiently leverage such financial transfers.

Footnotes


vii Remittance figures are based on the estimate of there being 4 million Myanmar migrants in Thailand.

viii Deelen, L. and Vasuprasat, P, *Migrant workers’ remittances from Thailand to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar*, (Bangkok, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2010).