



RAPID ASSESSMENT: COVID-19 RELATED VULNERABILITIES AND PERCEPTIONS OF MYANMAR MIGRANTS IN MAE SOT DISTRICT, TAK PROVINCE, THAILAND

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)
MARCH 2021



IOM 2021



BACKGROUND

In light of the outbreak of COVID-19 in Thailand, migrants and non-Thai populations, irrespective of their legal status, face a new set of challenges and vulnerabilities. Movement restrictions and the disruption of many income-generating activities pose a significant burden on migrants and non-Thai populations employed in both the formal and informal sectors. With limited or no access to technology, limited capacity to cope and adapt, limited or no savings, inadequate access to social services, and uncertainty about their legal status and potential to access healthcare services, hundreds of thousands of migrants and non-nationals have left Thailand since late March 2020.

However, the full extent to which these challenges and vulnerabilities are affecting migrant communities and non-nationals who have opted to remain in Thailand, or had no choice but to remain in Thailand, remains unknown. It is also unclear whether migrant communities and non-nationals are receiving sufficient information about COVID-19 or have access to the resources which will allow them to maintain the hygiene and sanitation standards required for effective protection. To fill these data gaps and inform possible responses, IOM initiated a number of data collection exercises to collect information on the COVID-19 knowledge and related vulnerabilities of non-Thai populations in Thailand, including several rounds of rapid assessments undertaken with key informants from April 2020 to February 2021.

Building on these data collection exercises, and in order to obtain more specific and targeted information, IOM also initiated an individual migrant survey in July 2020 which was undertaken in the district of Mueang Ranong in the border province of Ranong, and has now been replicated in the district of Mae Sot, in the border province of Tak, Thailand. The survey focuses on six thematic areas: 1) Migrant profiles; 2) Drivers of migration; 3) Employment; 4) Impacts of COVID-19; 5) COVID-19 related vulnerabilities; and 6) Return intentions.

DATA LIMITATIONS

This data analysis only provides information on Myanmar migrants living in Mae Sot district at the time of assessment. The data does not provide information on migrants living in any other part of Thailand.

STATISTICAL NOTE

General note: For the purpose of this assessment, respondents were included in the sample if they identified as Myanmar nationals, did not hold Thai citizenship, were resident in Mae Sot district at the time of the survey and had been in Thailand for a duration of at least one month.

Multiple answer: When the label "multiple answers possible" is found next to a graph or a question it indicates that a single respondent was allowed to provide more than one answer. For this reason, totals do not add up to 100%.

DISCLAIMER - The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this report can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of IOM, its Member States, the United States, or other donors. The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the work do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

METHODOLOGY

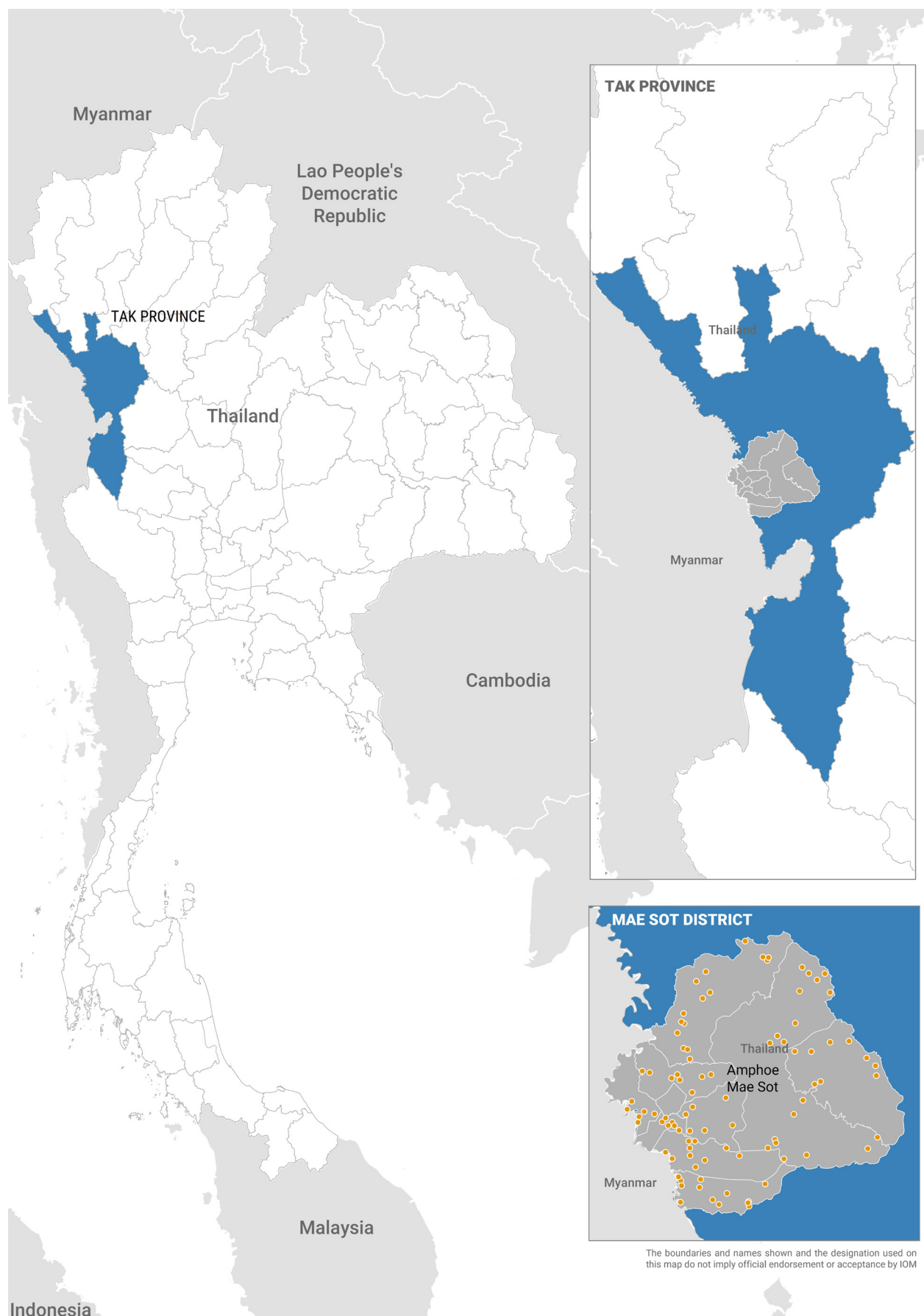
The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a set of tools and methodologies, which enable systematic and regular primary data collection, analysis and dissemination of population movements, human mobility and forced migration (both internal and cross-border). Originally designed to serve the humanitarian community during crises, DTM has been implemented to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

By using a key informant master list for Mae Sot district which includes village leaders, representatives from local administration, representatives from local health institutions and migrant community representatives, IOM used a snowball sampling method to identify a participant sample that would be representative at the district level of the Myanmar migrant population in Mae Sot with a 90 per cent confidence level and 5 per cent margin of error. The Myanmar migrant population was determined on the basis of a village-level assessment undertaken by IOM Thailand in Mae Sot district in April 2020.

Data was collected in person with a total of 316 migrants by 5 trained enumerators (40% female) between 11 and 22 January, 2021.

Due to the sampling method being non-randomized, external validity of the study is limited, and generalizations should be avoided. Nonetheless, the results of this assessment can provide insight into the challenges and vulnerabilities facing Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot district of Tak province.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE



THEMATIC AREA 1 - MIGRANT PROFILES



316

RESPONDENTS SURVEYED



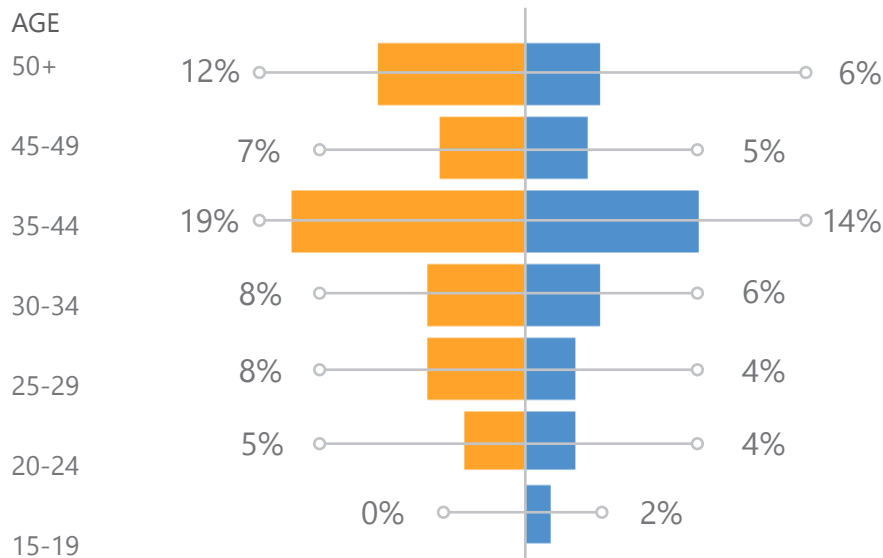
187 (59%)
FEMALE



129 (41%)
MALE

In total, 316 respondents were interviewed for this assessment. The average age of respondents was 38 years and females (59%) represented the majority of the sample population.

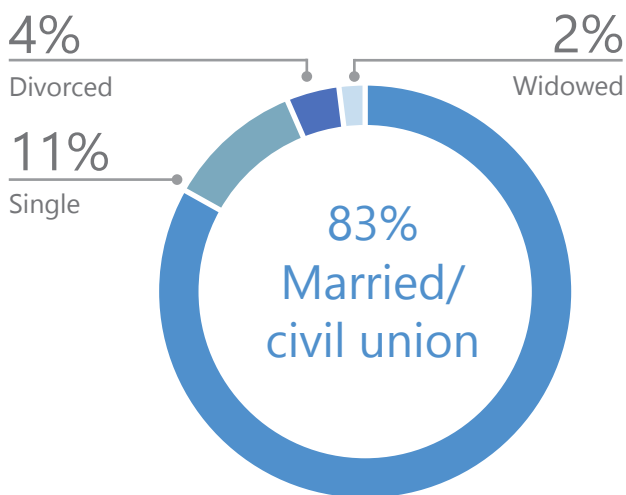
Population Pyramid



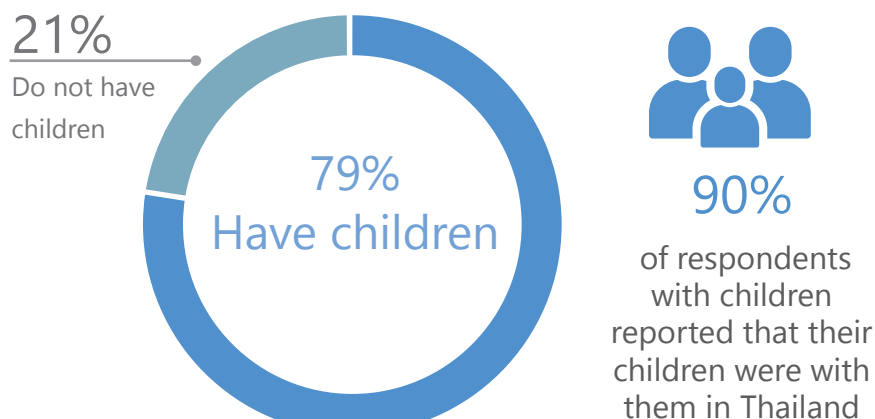
FEMALE

MALE

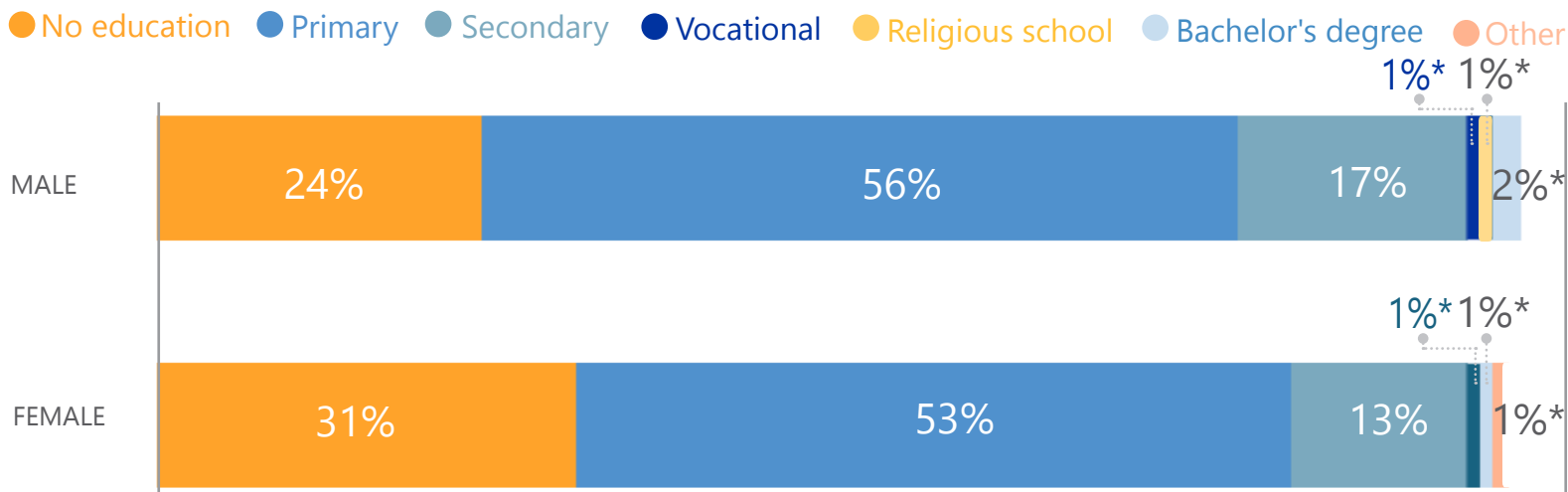
Marital status



Respondents with children

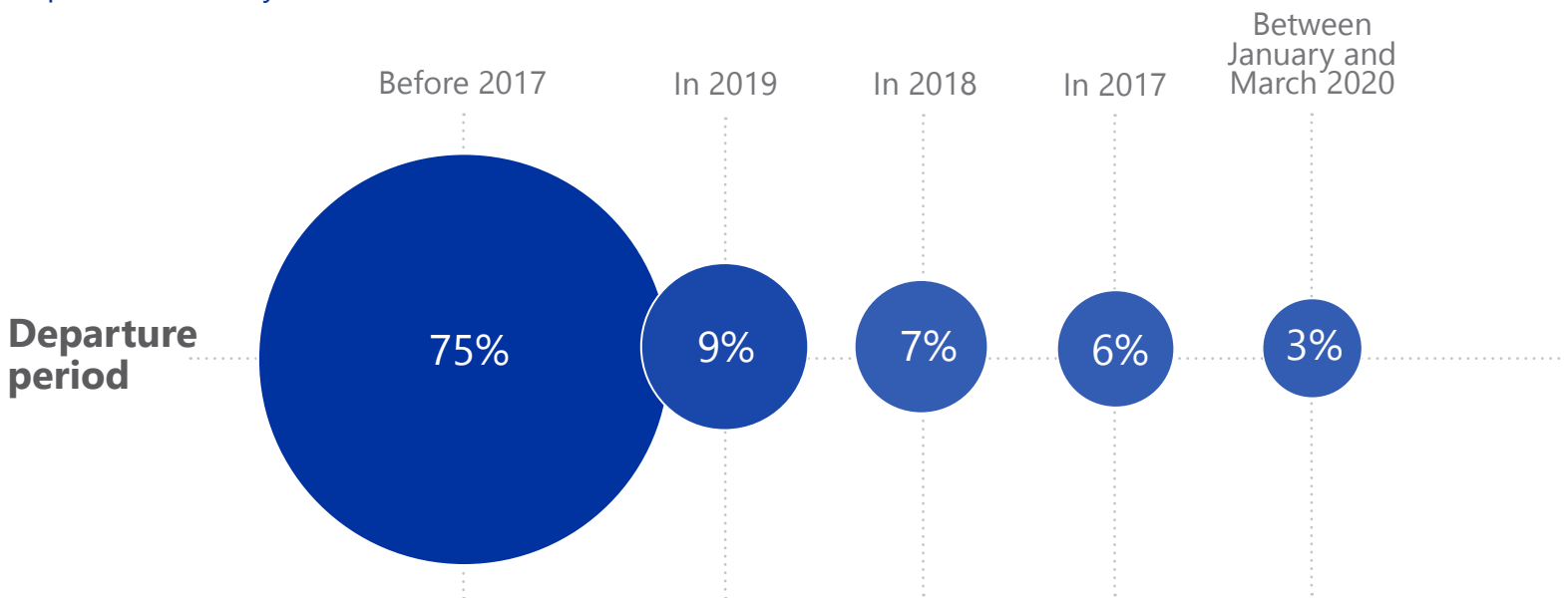


Education level by sex



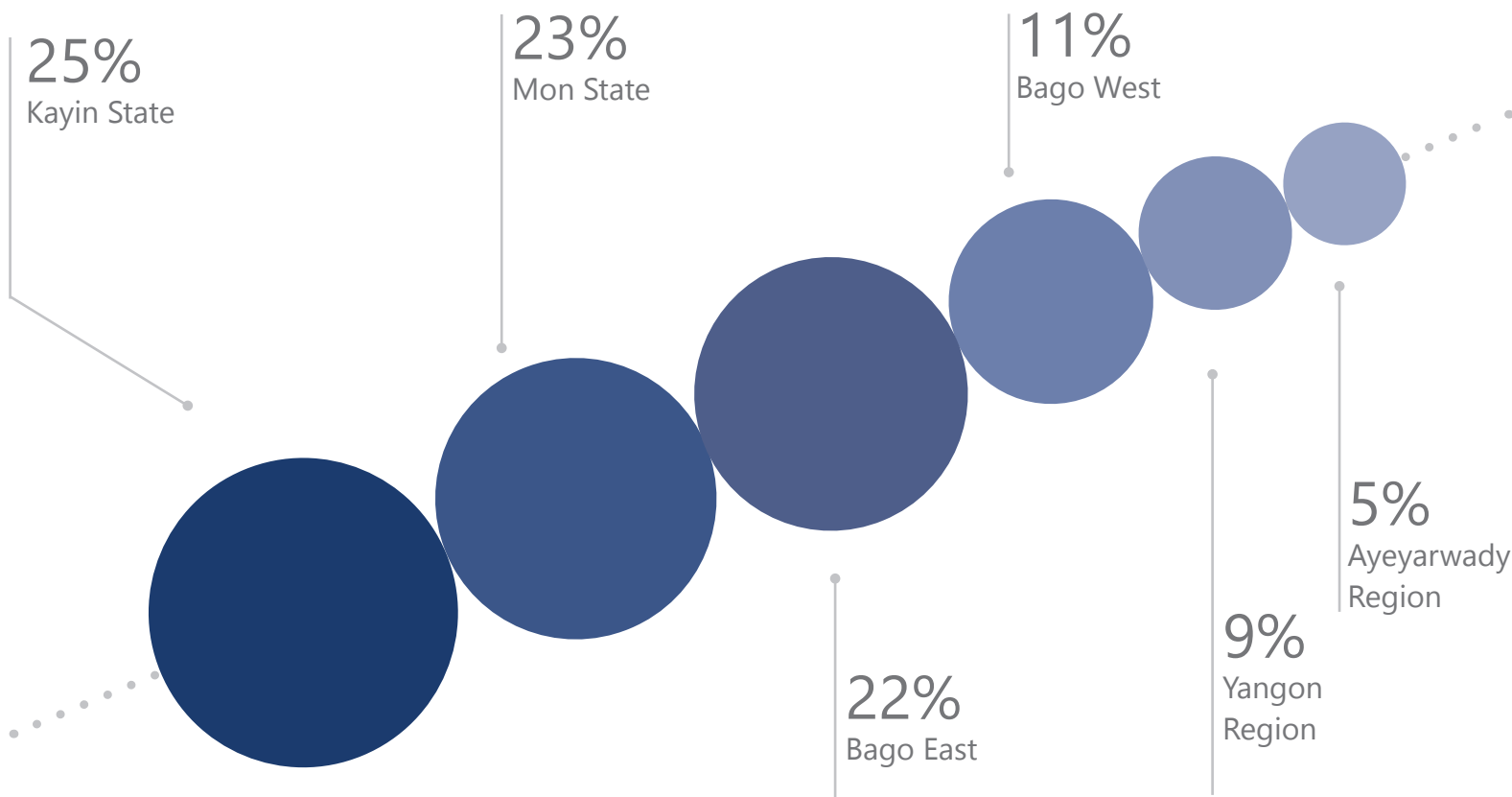
*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

Departure from Myanmar



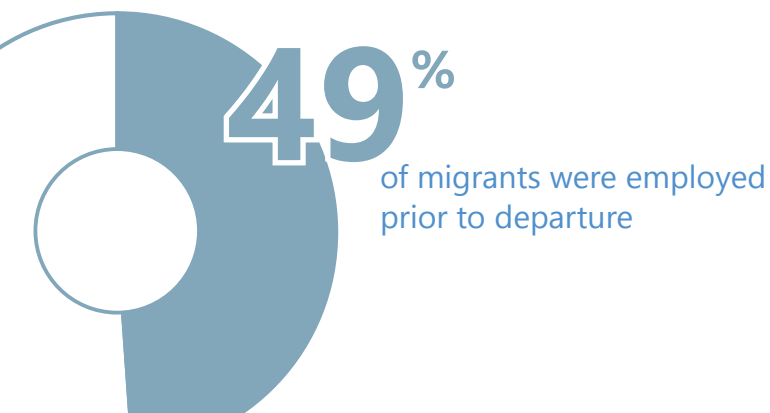
Last place of residence in Myanmar

(Top 6 answers only)

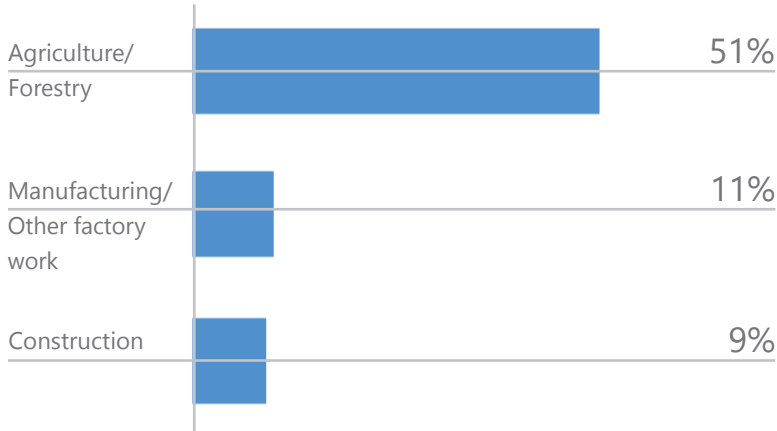


Employment status prior to migration by sex

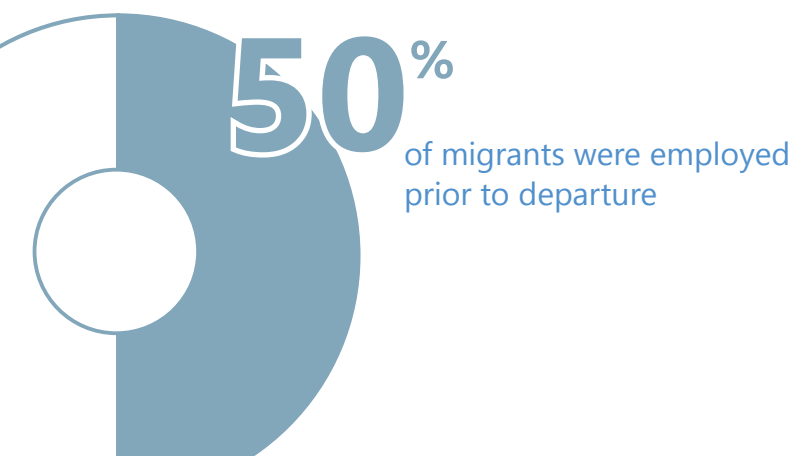
TOTAL migrants who were employed before migrating to Thailand



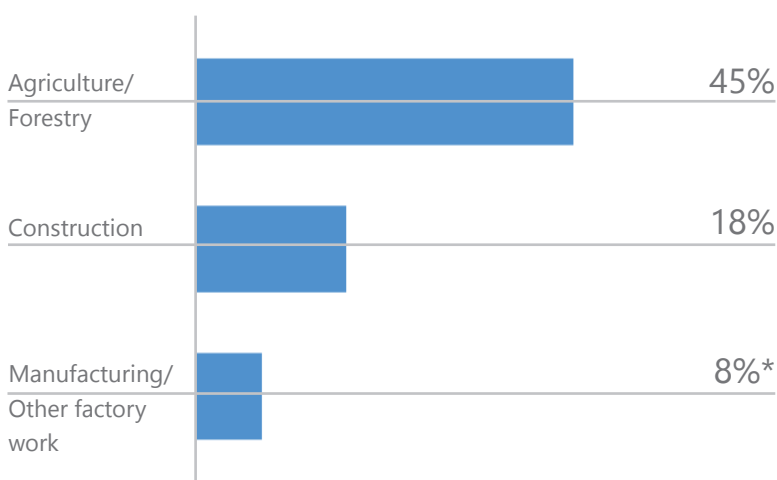
Sector of employment prior to migration to Thailand (Top 3 answers only)



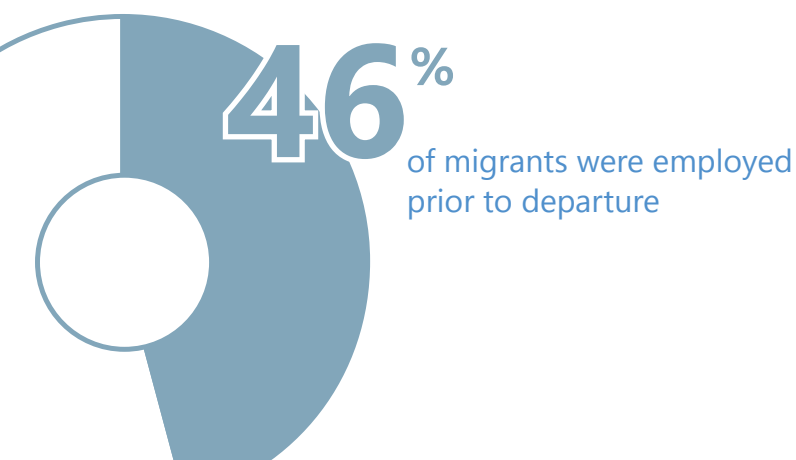
MALE migrants who were employed before migrating to Thailand



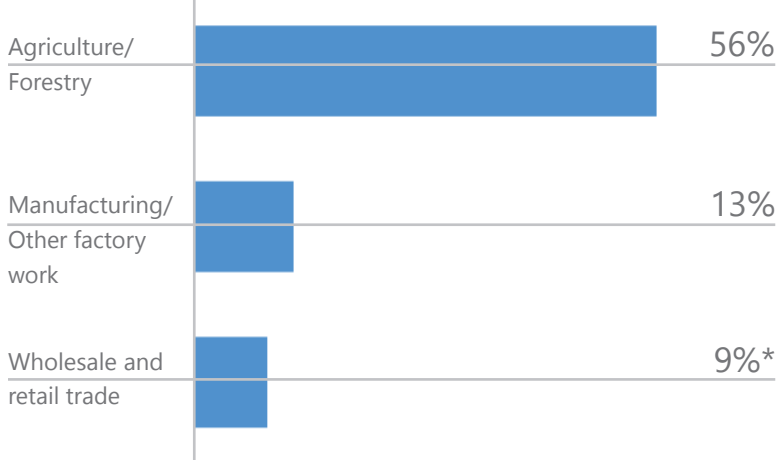
Sector of employment prior to migration to Thailand (Top 3 answers only)



FEMALE migrants who were employed before migrating to Thailand



Sector of employment prior to migration to Thailand (Top 3 answers only)



*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

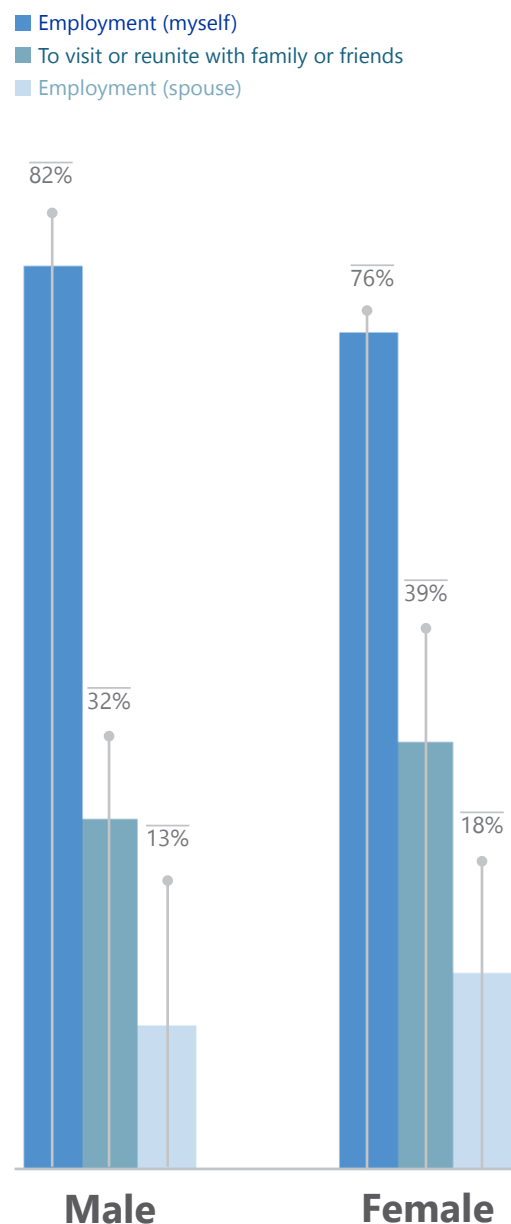
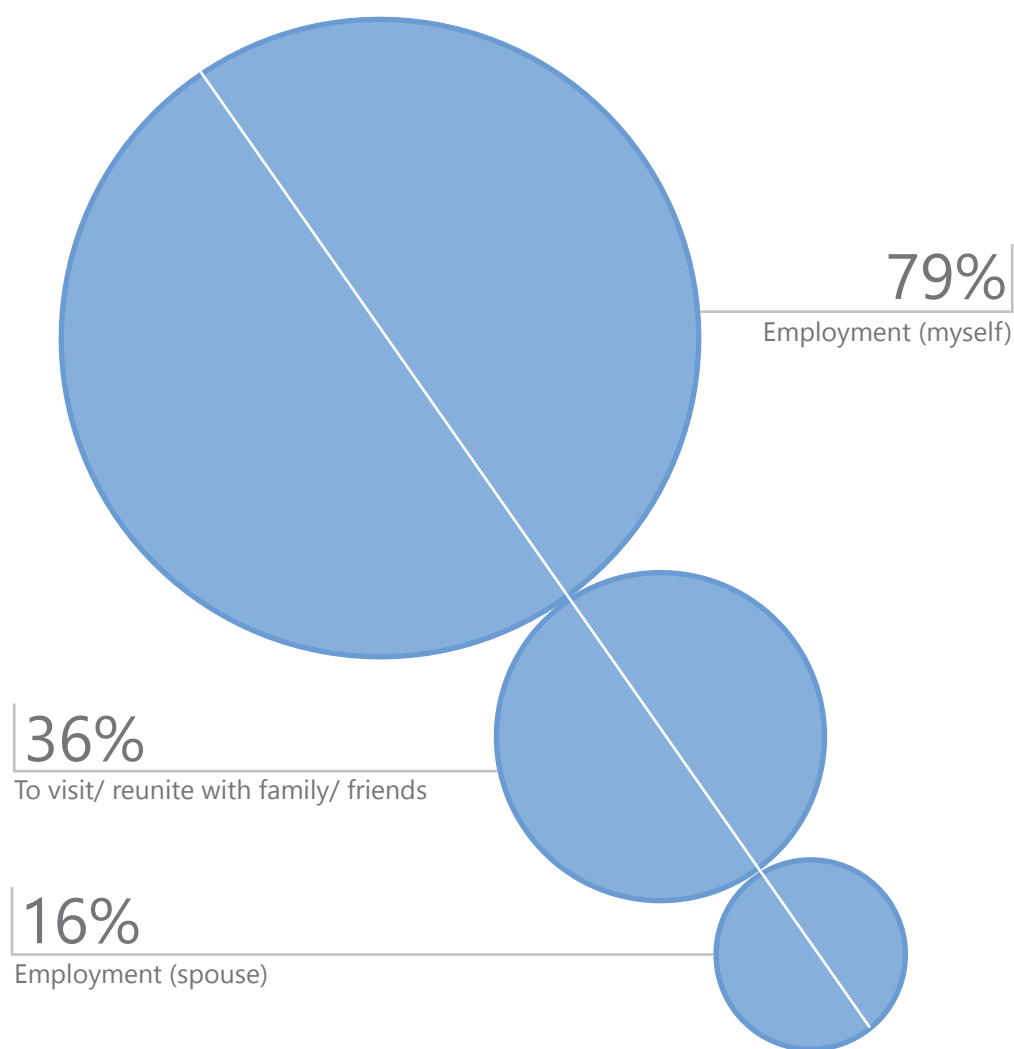
THEMATIC AREA 2 - DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

Respondents were asked a series of questions related to their reasons for migration to Thailand. One of the primary reasons for migration is economic opportunity; 79 per cent of respondents reported migrating to Thailand for employment and 16 per cent reported accompanying a spouse who intended to work in Thailand.

When looking at the main reasons for migration by sex, the findings indicate that a larger share of female respondents migrated to Thailand to visit or reunite with family or friends (39%) and to accompany spouses beginning employment (18%) while a larger share of male respondents left Myanmar for employment in Thailand (82%).

Main reasons for migration by sex (Multiple answers possible; top 3 answers only)

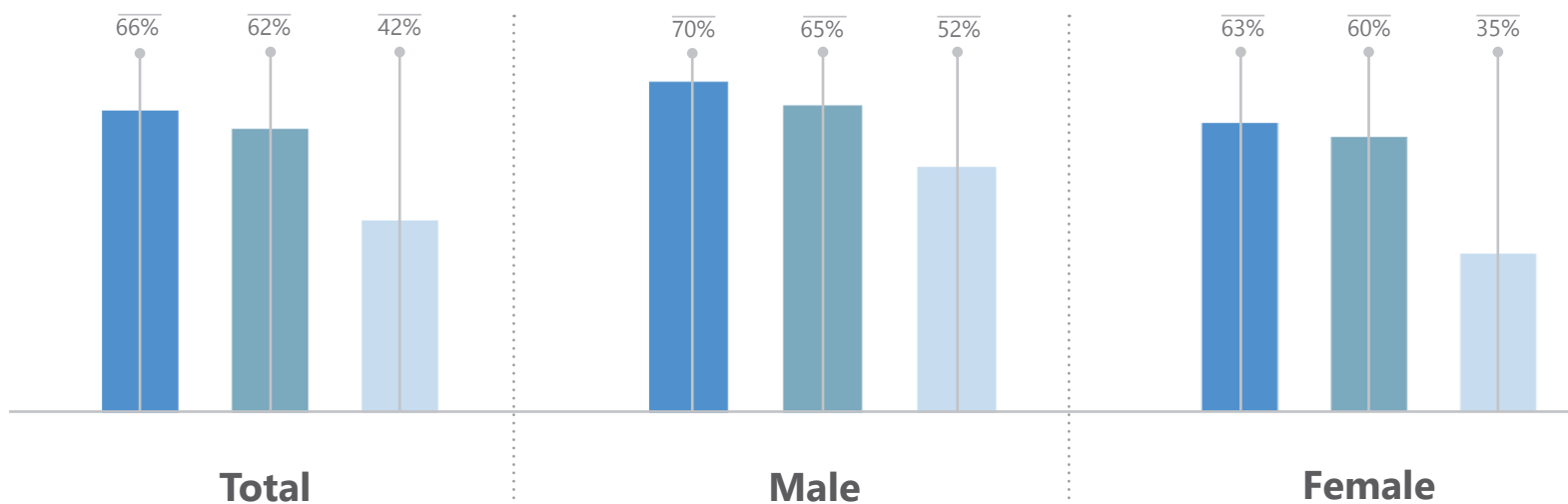
Total



Reasons for choosing Thailand over another country in the region by sex

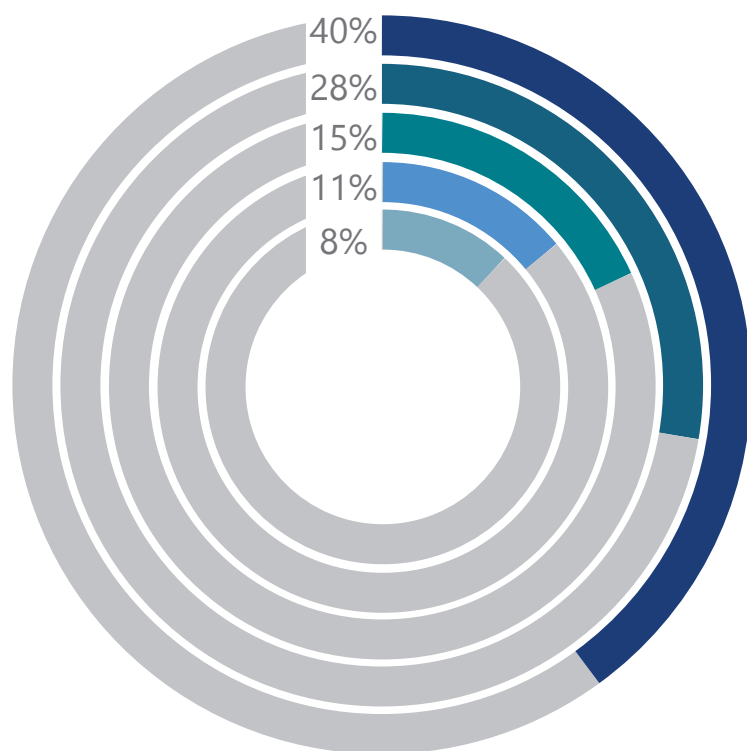
(Multiple answers possible; top 3 answers only)

● Thailand is easier to access ● Access to jobs ● Family in Thailand



Ways to finance the migration journey

(Multiple answers possible)



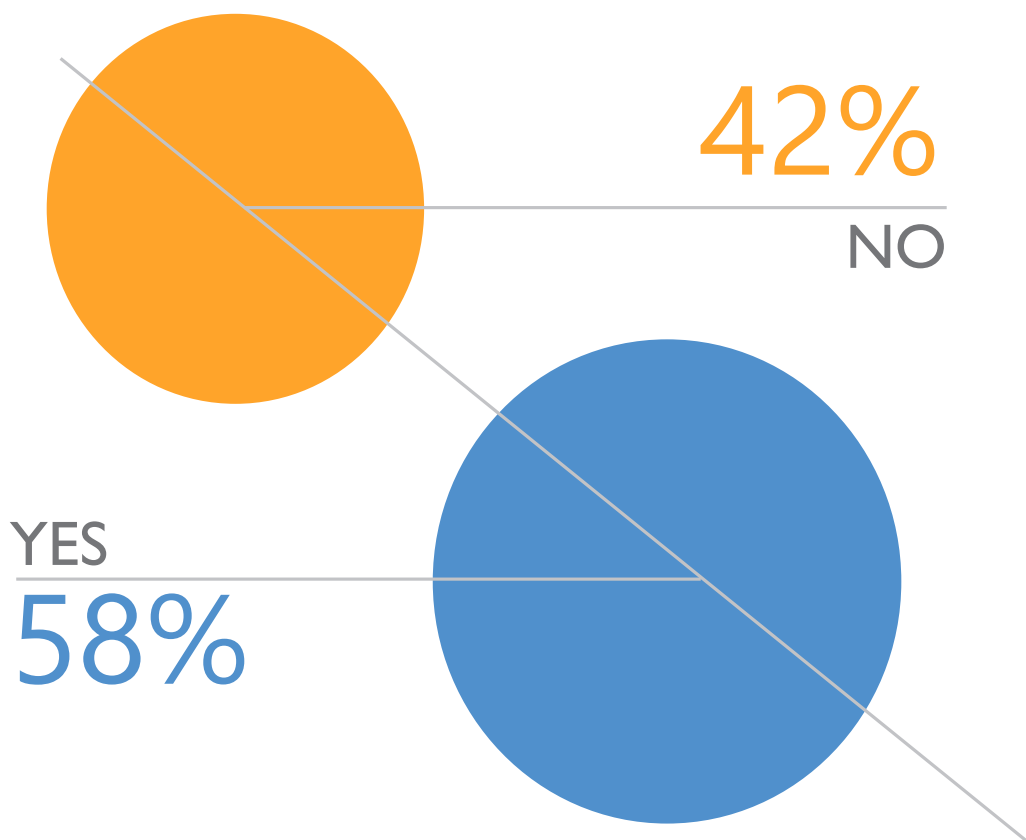
- Savings
- Borrowed money from friends/family in Myanmar
- Paid by friends/family in Myanmar or Thailand
- Borrowed money from friends/family in Thailand
- Sold assets

When considering drivers for migration to Thailand, most Myanmar migrants (66%) chose to migrate to Thailand because of its geographical proximity to Myanmar. Other significant reasons include comparatively easier access to the labour market (62%) and the presence of family in Thailand (42%). To learn more about the migration journey, migrants were also asked how they paid for the expenses of migration. The two most commonly cited sources of financing journeys were savings (40%) and loans from friends or family in Myanmar or Thailand (39%). Fifteen percent of the sample also reported that the migration journey was paid for by friends and family in Myanmar or Thailand.

THEMATIC AREA 3 - EMPLOYMENT

Are you currently working in Thailand?

TOTAL



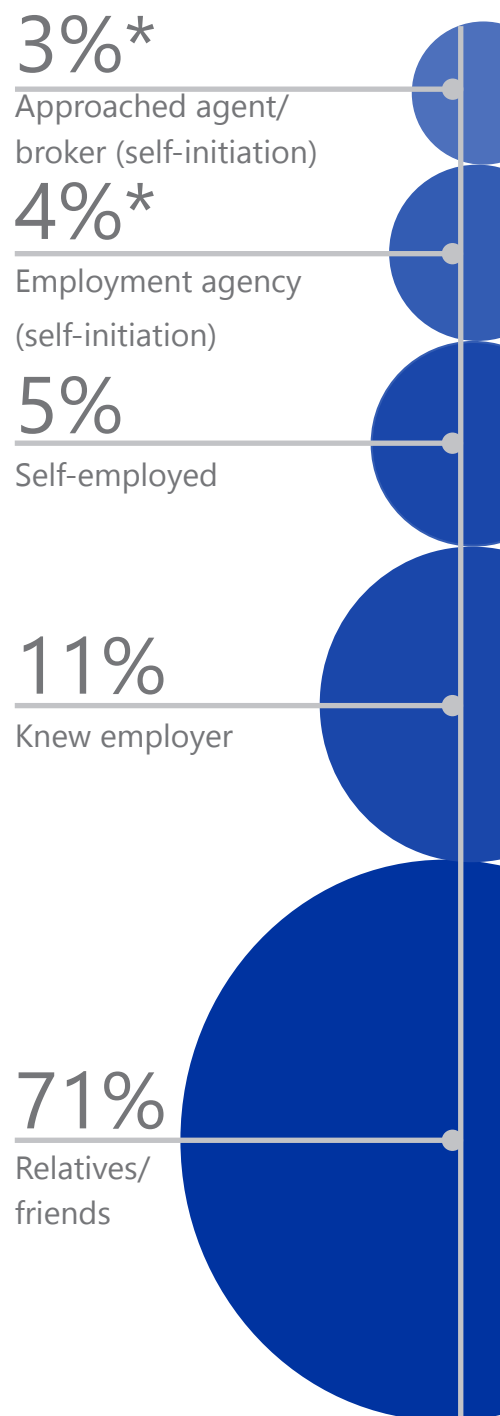
In order to better understand the work-related challenges of Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot district - and in particular to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on migrant employment - respondents were asked questions about their employment situation.

In total, 58 per cent of the sample was employed during the data collection period. On the whole, male respondents were more likely than female respondents to be employed (80% versus 43%).

Seventy-one per cent of the respondents who were employed reported that they obtained employment with the support of relatives or friends in Thailand (66%) and Myanmar (5%). Eleven per cent knew the employer and five per cent were self-employed or worked for family. Obtaining work directly through an employment agency (4%) or an agent and broker (3%) were also cited as ways in which employment was obtained. The data also indicates that 51 per cent of the sample currently employed in Thailand reported having legal permission to work in the country.

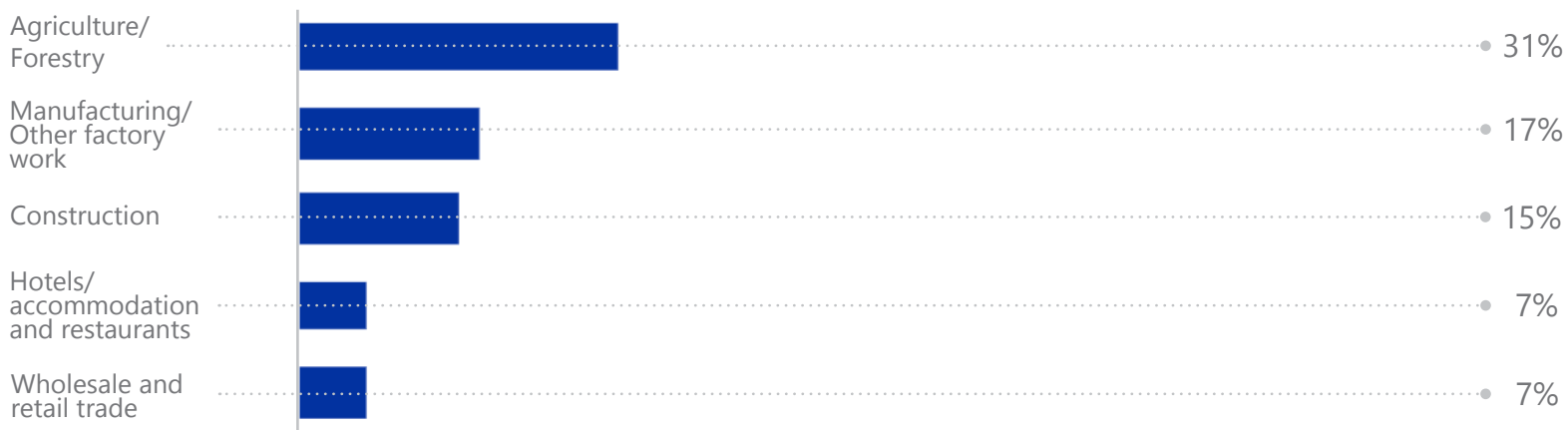
How did you find your job?

(Top 5 answers only)



*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

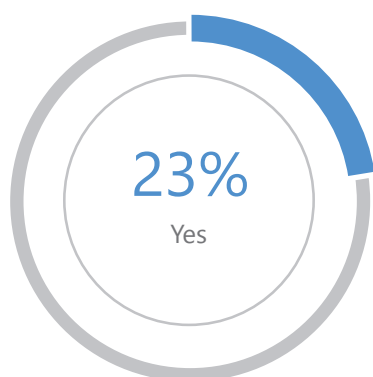
Primary sectors of current employment in Thailand (Top 5 answers only)



The findings indicate that the two leading sectors of employment in Mae Sot district are agriculture and forestry (31%) and manufacturing and other factory work (17%). The leading sector of employment for female respondents was manufacturing and other factory work, with 19 per cent of females employed in this sector. The leading sector of employment for male respondents was agriculture and forestry, with 35 per cent of males employed in this sector.

In order to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot district, respondents were asked a series of questions related to their salary and working hours both before and after the outbreak of COVID-19. In total, 77 per cent of those who were employed reported getting paid less than 315 THB, the minimum daily wage in Tak province. Among migrants who saw a reduction in their wages after the outbreak of COVID-19, only 17 per cent were previously being paid equal to or above the provincial minimum wage of 315 THB. This indicates that employers who were not paying their workers minimum wage prior to COVID-19 were more likely to further reduce the salaries of their employees than employers who were paying minimum wage prior to COVID-19. Forty-one per cent of respondents who are currently employed reported reduced working hours after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Thailand.

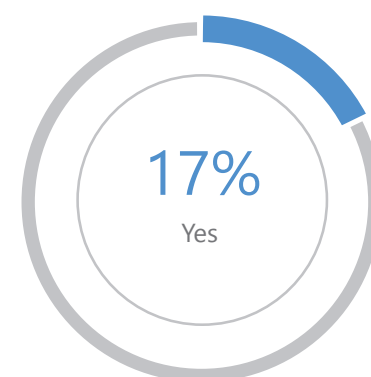
Do you currently make equal to or above 315 THB?



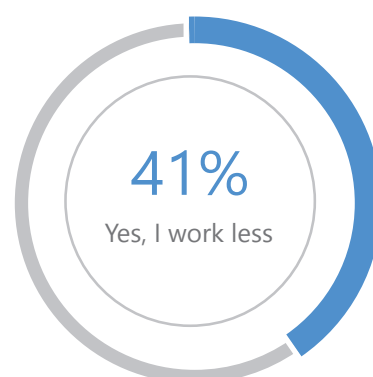
If you have a job, has your salary changed since the COVID-19 outbreak?



If you now earn less, was your previous daily wage equal to or above 315 THB?



If you have a job, have your working hours changed since the COVID-19 outbreak?

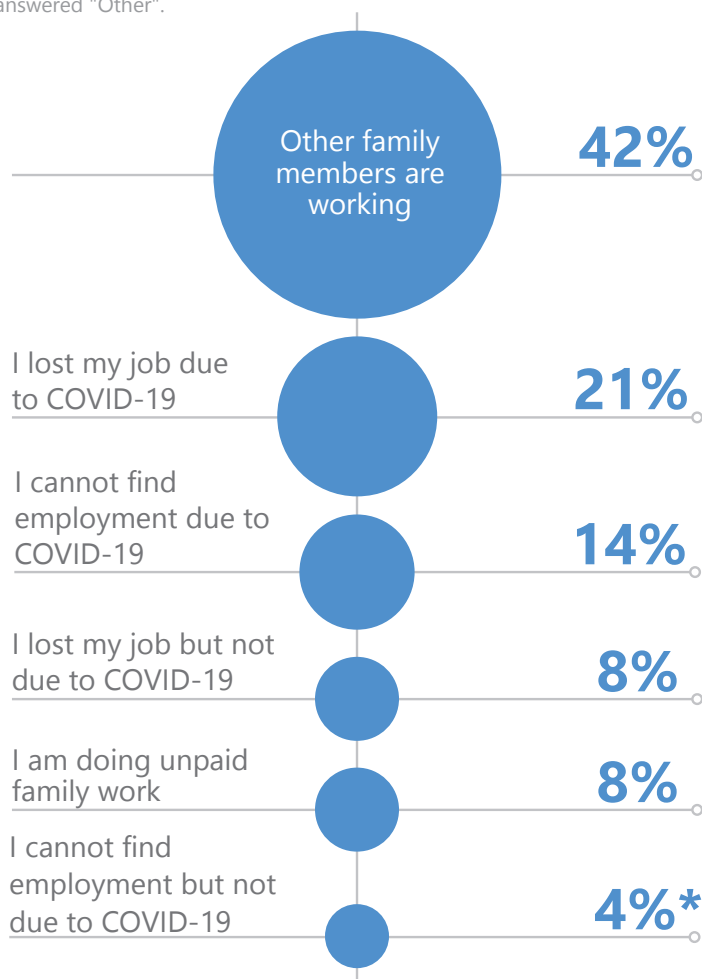


Note: 2% of respondents now earn more

Note: 1% of respondents now work more hours

Main reason migrants do not have a job

Note: Question asked only to persons who are not currently employed. Three per cent answered "Other".



*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

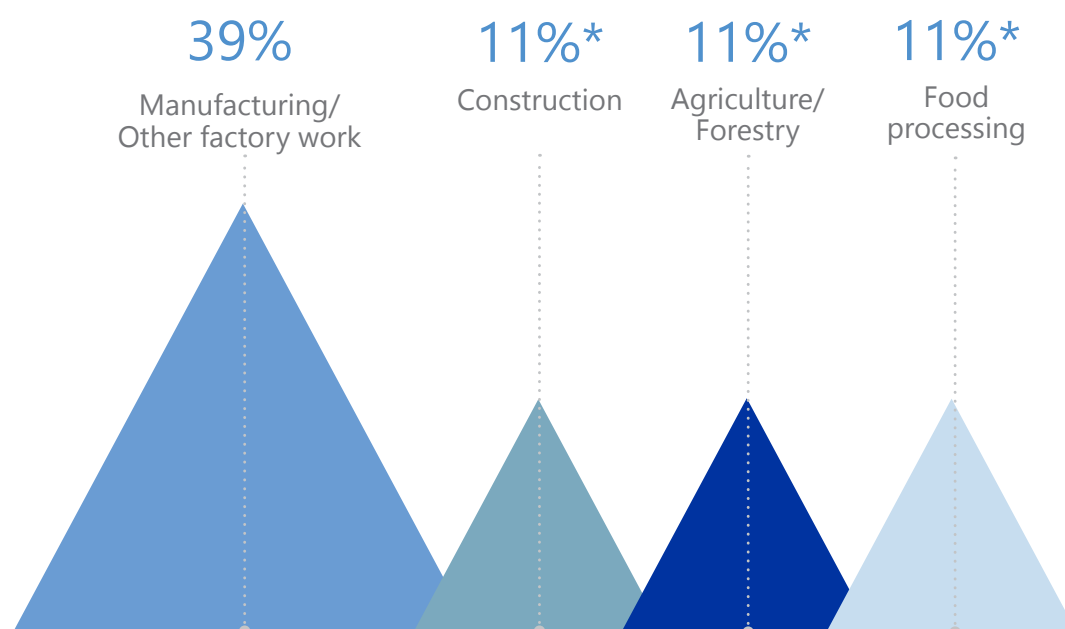
Among the 42 per cent of respondents who indicated being unemployed at the time of assessment, 80 per cent were female and 20 per cent were male. To further explore the impact of COVID-19 on the employment of Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot district, respondents were asked the main reason for their unemployment.

The findings indicate that 65 per cent of respondents reported that their unemployment was not related to the outbreak of COVID-19. Forty-two per cent of the sample opted not to work because other family members were working. This was more often the case for female respondents than male respondents (89% versus 11%).

Eight per cent of respondents also reported losing their jobs for reasons unrelated to COVID-19. However, 35 per cent of the sample reported that they lost their job (21%) and were not able to find employment (14%) due to COVID-19.

Sector of employment prior to COVID-19-related job loss

(Top 4 answers only)



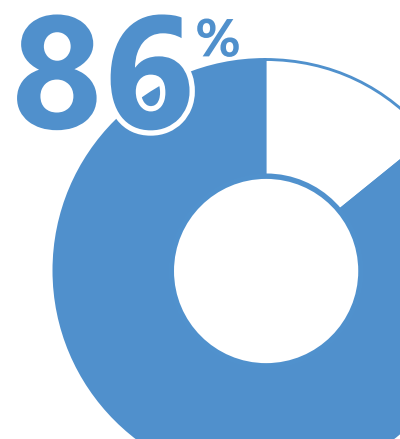
*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents



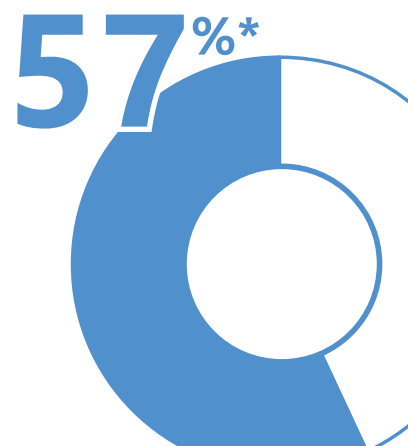
IOM 2021

If you lost your job due to COVID-19, how had you obtained that job?

of female migrants who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 had originally obtained employment through friends or relatives in Thailand.



of male migrants who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 had originally obtained employment through friends or relatives in Thailand.



Migrants who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 were asked how they had originally obtained their prior employment and if they were being paid minimum wage in those jobs.

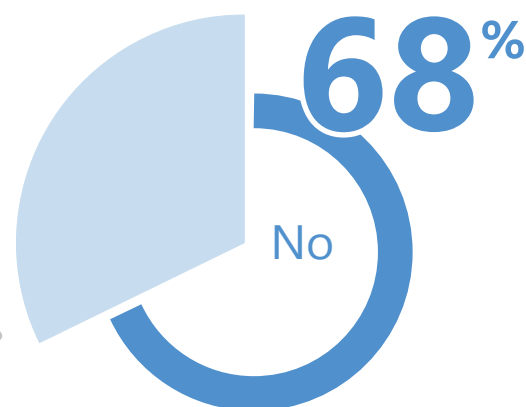
In total, 79 per cent of migrants who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 found their previous employment through relatives or friends in Thailand, 7 per cent through knowing the employer and 7 per cent through job vacancies or advertisements. When asked if they were being paid equal to or above 315 THB in their previous employment, over two-thirds of the sample (68%) reported having a salary below the provincial minimum wage.

However, it's important to note that the sample size of migrants who lost their jobs due to the outbreak of COVID-19 is relatively small and these findings should not be considered representative.

If you lost your job due to COVID-19, was your daily wage in that job equal to or above 315 THB?

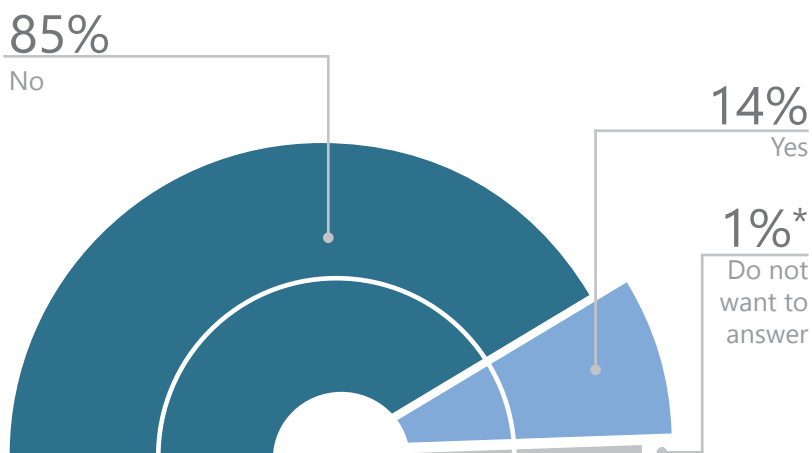
32%*

Yes



*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

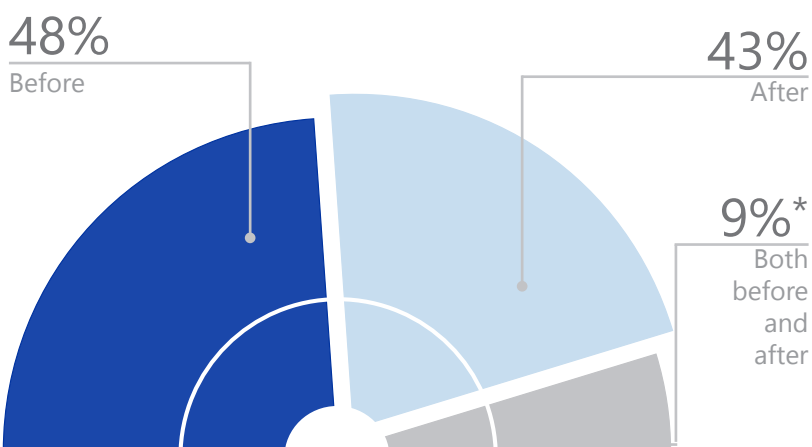
Have you experienced any challenges at the workplace?



When asked if they had experienced any challenges or problems at the workplace in Thailand, 14 per cent of the sample population reported that they did. The data indicates no significant differences in facing challenges between male and female migrants.

*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

If yes, was it before or after the outbreak of COVID-19?

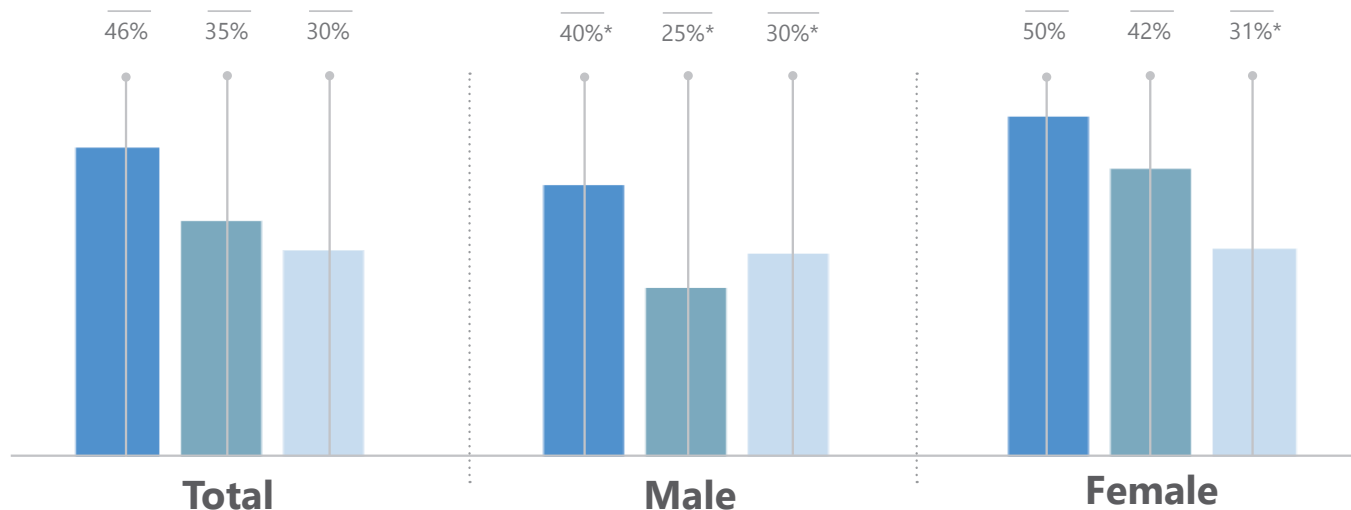


To further unpack COVID-19 related vulnerabilities, respondents who faced challenges were asked to specify when the problem at their workplace occurred. The data reveals that almost half of the sample population (48%) encountered challenges at their workplace prior the COVID-19 outbreak with 43 per cent facing challenges after the outbreak and 9 per cent reporting challenges both before and after the outbreak of COVID-19.

*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

Type of challenges at the workplace in Thailand by sex (Top 3 answers only)

● Psychological stress ● Paid below minimum wage ● Problems changing employer



*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

In case of problems at the workplace do you know how to get support?



of migrants reported that they are aware of available support mechanisms; 48 per cent did not know how to get support when they face problems at work and 13 per cent reported they never thought about it. Local NGOs, CBOs or diaspora organizations (79%) and friends and family in Thailand (35%) were identified as the primary support actors respondents would reach out to in case of problems.

If yes, from whom? (Multiple answers possible)



Local NGOs, CBOs or diaspora organizations

79%



Friends/family in Thailand

35%



International NGOs or UN agencies

16%



Myanmar government authorities (including Embassy representatives and labour attaches)

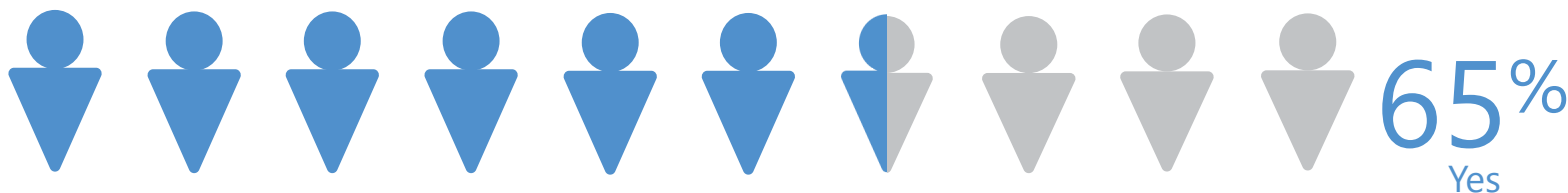
7%*

*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

Among migrants who reported facing challenges at the workplace, the most commonly faced problem is psychological stress (46%). Thirty-five per cent reported being paid below minimum wage and 30 per cent experienced difficulties in changing employers. When comparing the type of challenges experienced before and after the outbreak of COVID-19, a notable increase is observed in migrants reporting being paid below minimum wage. While, among workers who reported challenges, 23 per cent stated being paid below minimum wage prior to COVID-19, 55 per cent complained of being paid below minimum wage after the outbreak of COVID-19.

Sixty-five per cent of the respondents who reported facing challenges at the workplace sought help from available support mechanisms. Local NGOs, CBOs or diaspora organizations and friends and family in Thailand were identified as the primary support actors. When asked if the support actors were able to resolve their problems, 50 per cent of respondents indicated 'yes', 40 per cent indicated 'partially', and 10 per cent responded 'no'.

Share of respondents facing challenges who sought help



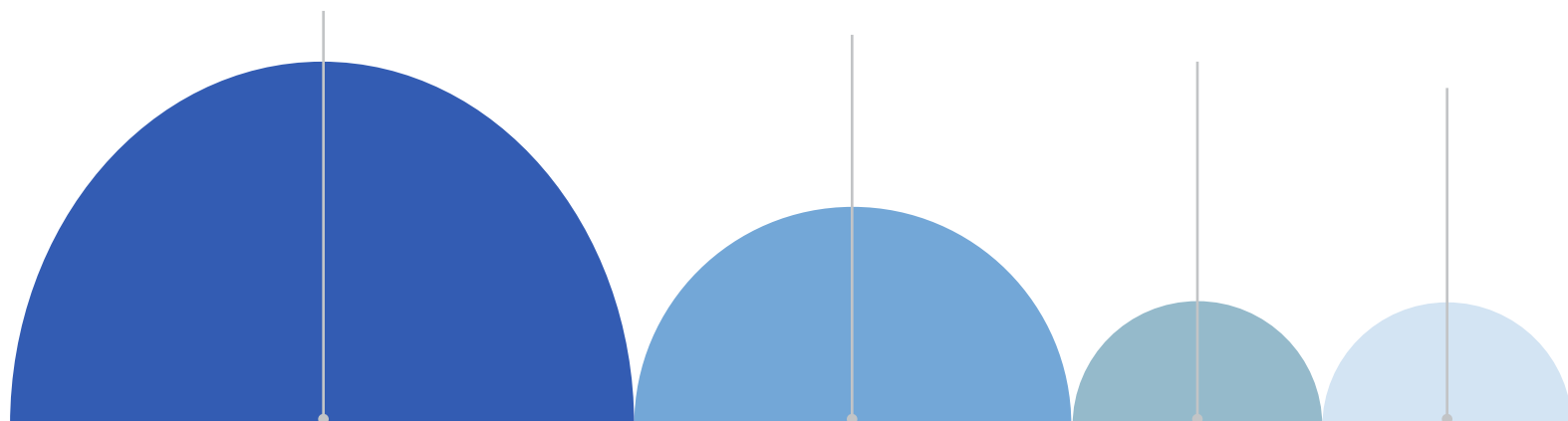
Main reasons for not seeking help (Multiple answers possible; top 4 answers only)

73%
Did not know
any support actors

20%*
Fear of
repercussion

13%*
Fear of
deportation

13%*
I don't know



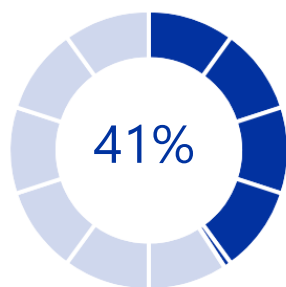
*The sample size for this percentage is lower than 10 respondents



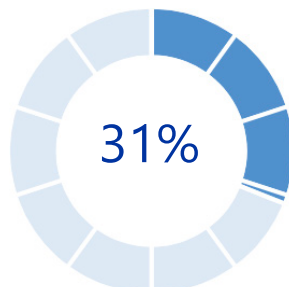
THEMATIC AREA 4 - IMPACTS OF COVID-19

What is the main way in which your financial situation has changed due to COVID-19?

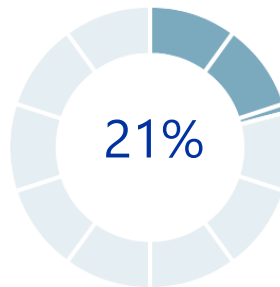
Note: 1% of the respondents answered "Do not want to answer".



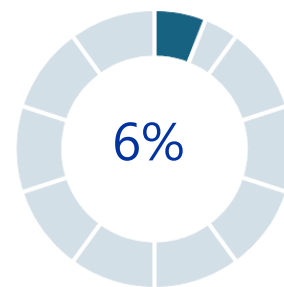
Less income and face financial challenges



It did not change

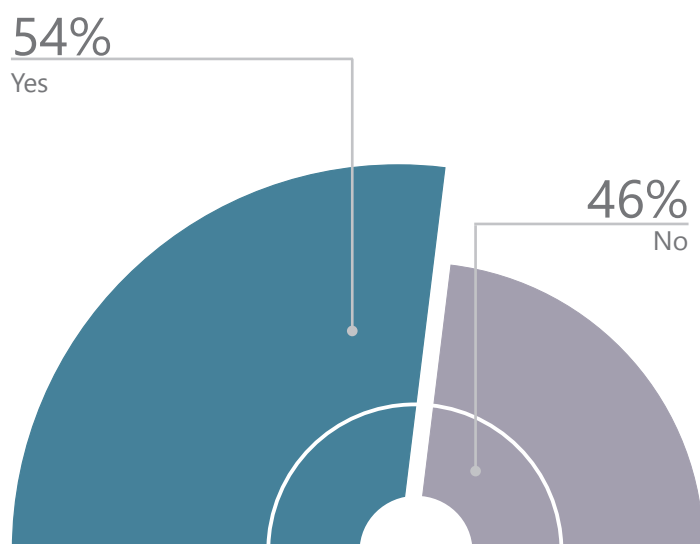


Less income but do not face financial challenges



Lost all income and face challenges in meeting basic needs

Are you in debt?



Share of respondents who have debt by employment status in Thailand

Unemployed migrants who have debt



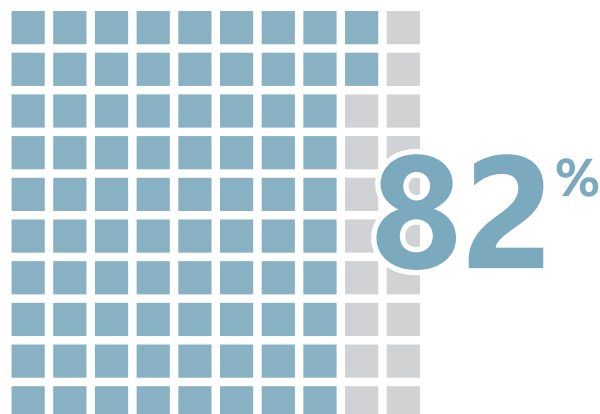
Employed migrants who have debt



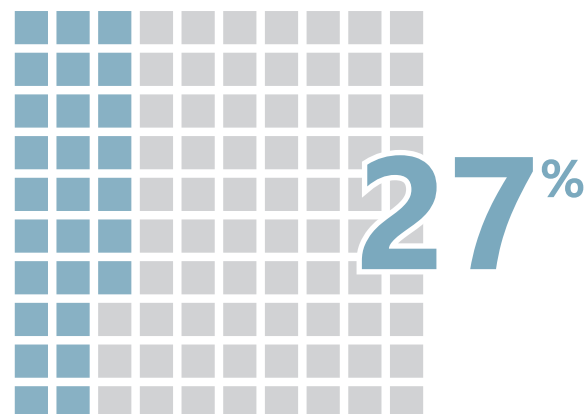
To assess the extent of COVID-19's impact on Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot district, respondents were asked a series of questions related to their financial situation, food consumption and challenges since the outbreak of COVID-19. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents reported experiencing either a reduction in income (62%) or a loss of all forms of income (6%) while 31 per cent reported that their financial situation remained the same.

Fifty-four per cent of the sample reported being in debt at the time of data collection. Among those in debt, 49 per cent were employed and 51 per cent were not. However, a clear correlation between income and debt was observed with 66 per cent of unemployed migrants reporting being in debt versus 45 per cent of employed migrants. Moreover, migrants earning below the provincial minimum wage were more likely to report indebtedness than those earning above the provincial minimum wage (47% versus 40%).

Impact of COVID-19 on food consumption of Myanmar migrants



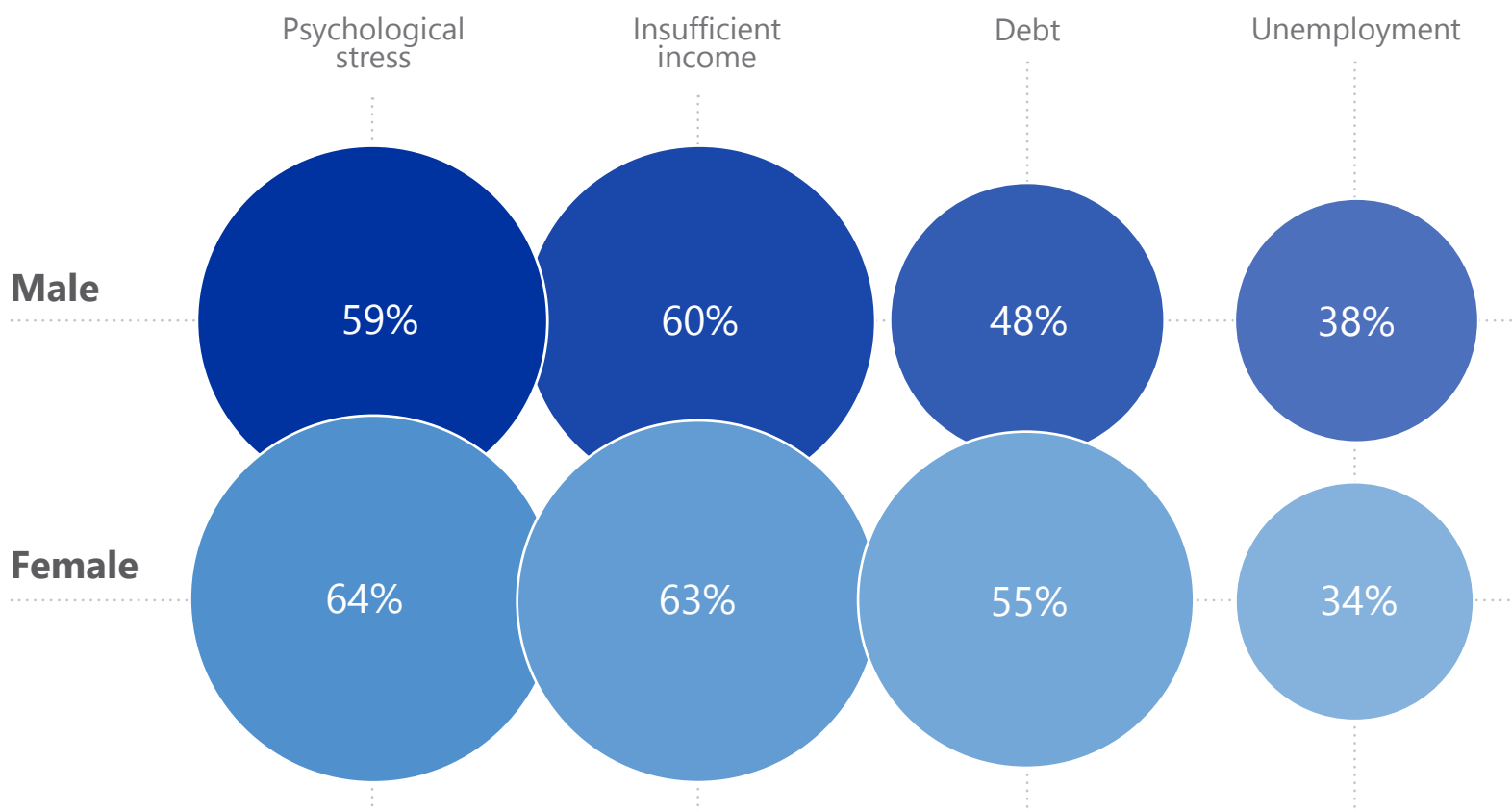
Eighty-two per cent of migrants reported that over the last month they worried about not having enough food to eat due to the consequences of COVID-19.



Twenty-seven per cent of migrants reported that over the last month they significantly reduced the amount of food they consume due to the consequences of COVID-19.

Main challenges faced by Myanmar migrants since the outbreak of COVID-19

(Multiple answers possible; top 4 answers only)



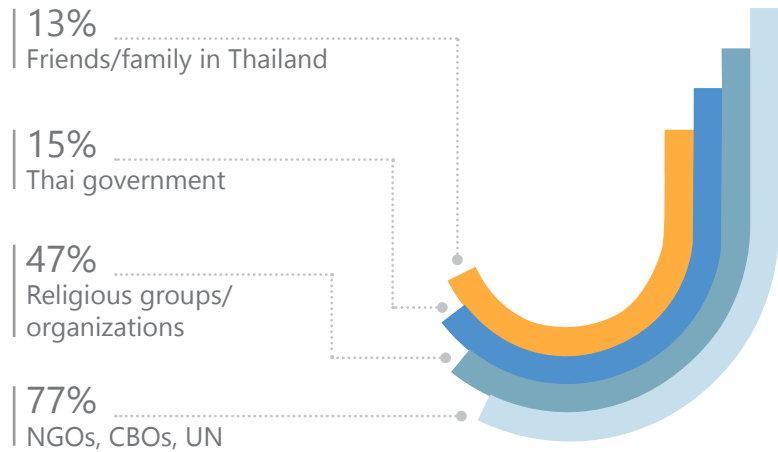
Migrants were asked what were the main challenges they encountered since the outbreak of COVID-19. Psychological stress was the most frequently cited challenge among female (64%) and male (59%) respondents. Sixty-three per cent of female and 60 per cent of male respondents also reported insufficient income as a result of COVID-19. Male and female respondents equally cited debt as a COVID-19 related challenge, although this was more commonly reported by female respondents than male respondents (55% versus 48%). Additionally, over a third of male and female respondents reported unemployment as a COVID-19 related challenge.

Share of respondents who received assistance related to COVID-19 challenges

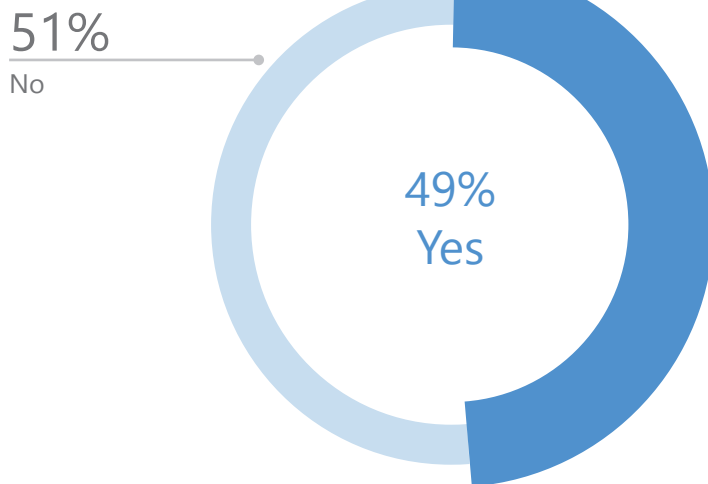


of migrants reported that they received assistance related to COVID-19 challenges while 70 per cent did not. NGOs, CBOs, or the UN (77%) and religious groups or organizations (47%) were identified as the primary actors who provided assistance to the sample population.

If yes, from whom? (Multiple answer question)



Share of respondents who sent remittances home prior to COVID-19

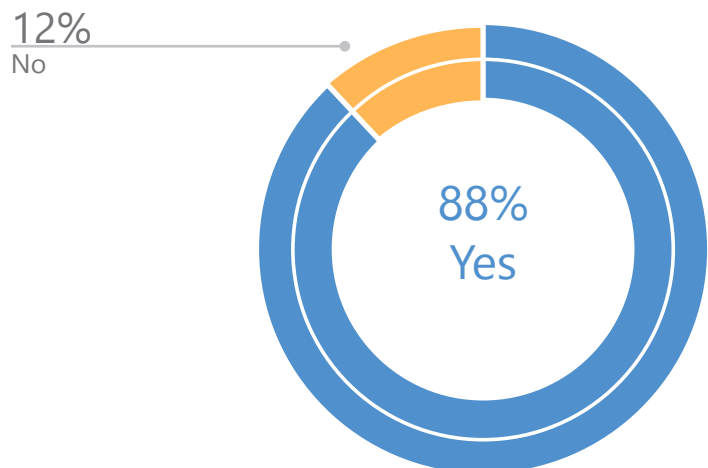


To further ascertain the effect of COVID-19 on Myanmar migrant populations, respondents were asked if they sent remittances during their time in Thailand and if the amount sent changed due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

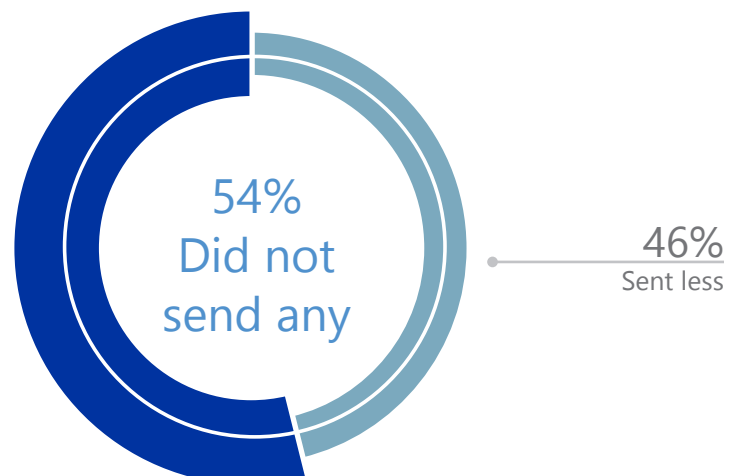
In total, 49 per cent of the sample population sent earnings back home prior to COVID-19 but for 88 per cent of respondents the amount now being sent has changed. For those who reported a change in the volume of remittances being sent, 54 per cent reported no longer sending any remittances and 46 percent reported sending less money.

These changes to the remittance flows imply that the economic consequences of COVID-19 on Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot district are not only impacting the migrants themselves, but also their friends and relatives dependent on incoming remittances.

If yes, did the amount of money you send change because of COVID-19?



If yes, how did it change?



THEMATIC AREA 5 - COVID-19 - RELATED VULNERABILITIES

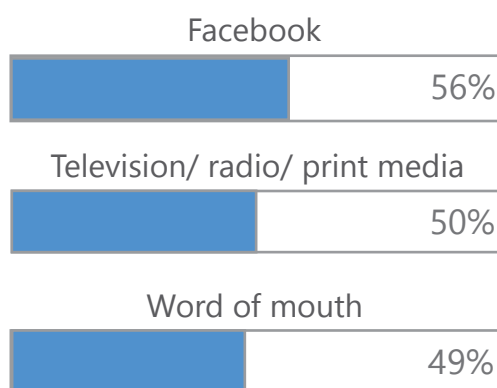
Share of respondents who have access to water, soap and personal protective equipment (PPE)



Eighty-four per cent of the sample population reported that they have access to water for domestic use; 87 per cent have access to soap; 42 per cent to hand sanitizer and 73 per cent to face masks. When compared to other assessments undertaken by IOM, the data would seem to suggest that Myanmar migrants in Mae Sot district have considerably less access to face masks and hand sanitizer than Myanmar migrants in Ranong district (73% versus 99% for face masks and 42% versus 68% for hand sanitizer)."

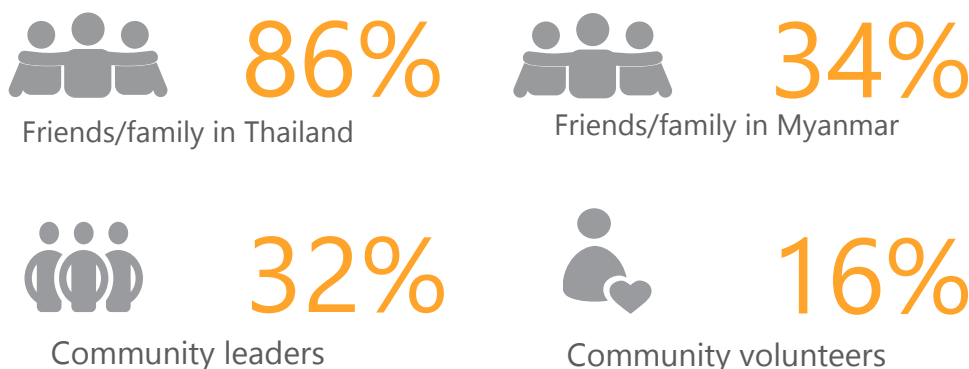
Main sources of information on COVID-19

(Multiple answer question)



Main sources for word of mouth

(Multiple answer question)



Are information, education and communication (IEC) materials on COVID-19 being distributed?

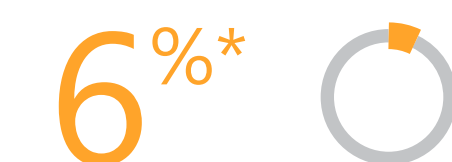
Note: 1% of the respondents answered "I do not know"



of migrants reported that information, education and communication materials on COVID-19 are not being distributed in their areas while 40 per cent reported receiving IEC materials from NGOs or CBOs (78%) and the government (31%).

Is IEC material on COVID-19 being understood?

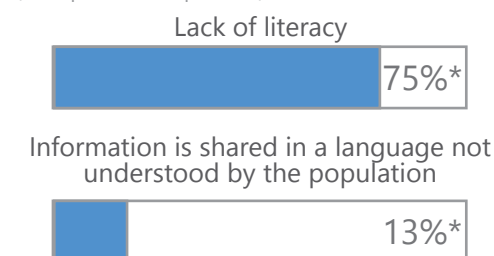
Note: 2% of the respondents answered "I do not know"



of migrants reported that information on COVID-19 is difficult to understand while 73 per cent reported understanding the material easily. Nineteen per cent of respondents reported average levels of understanding.

Reasons why information on COVID-19 is not being understood

(Multiple answer question)

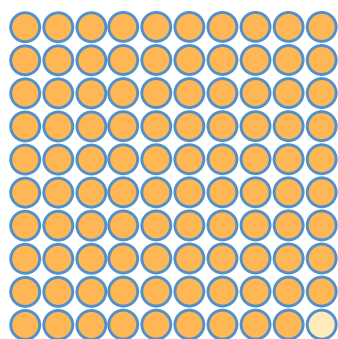


Among migrants who reported difficulties in understanding COVID-19 IEC materials, 75 per cent reported that this was due to their inability to read written information provided while 13 per cent reported that the materials are provided in a language they do not understand.

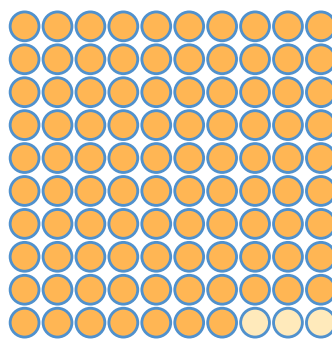
*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

Thai language abilities

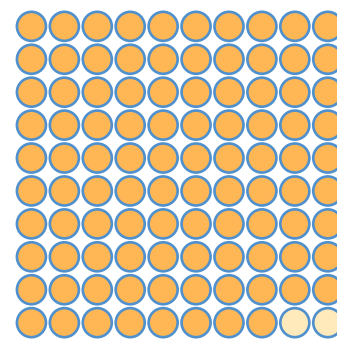
Speaking



Comprehension



Reading



Scale of 1-5, where 1 = lowest level of ability and 5 = highest level of ability

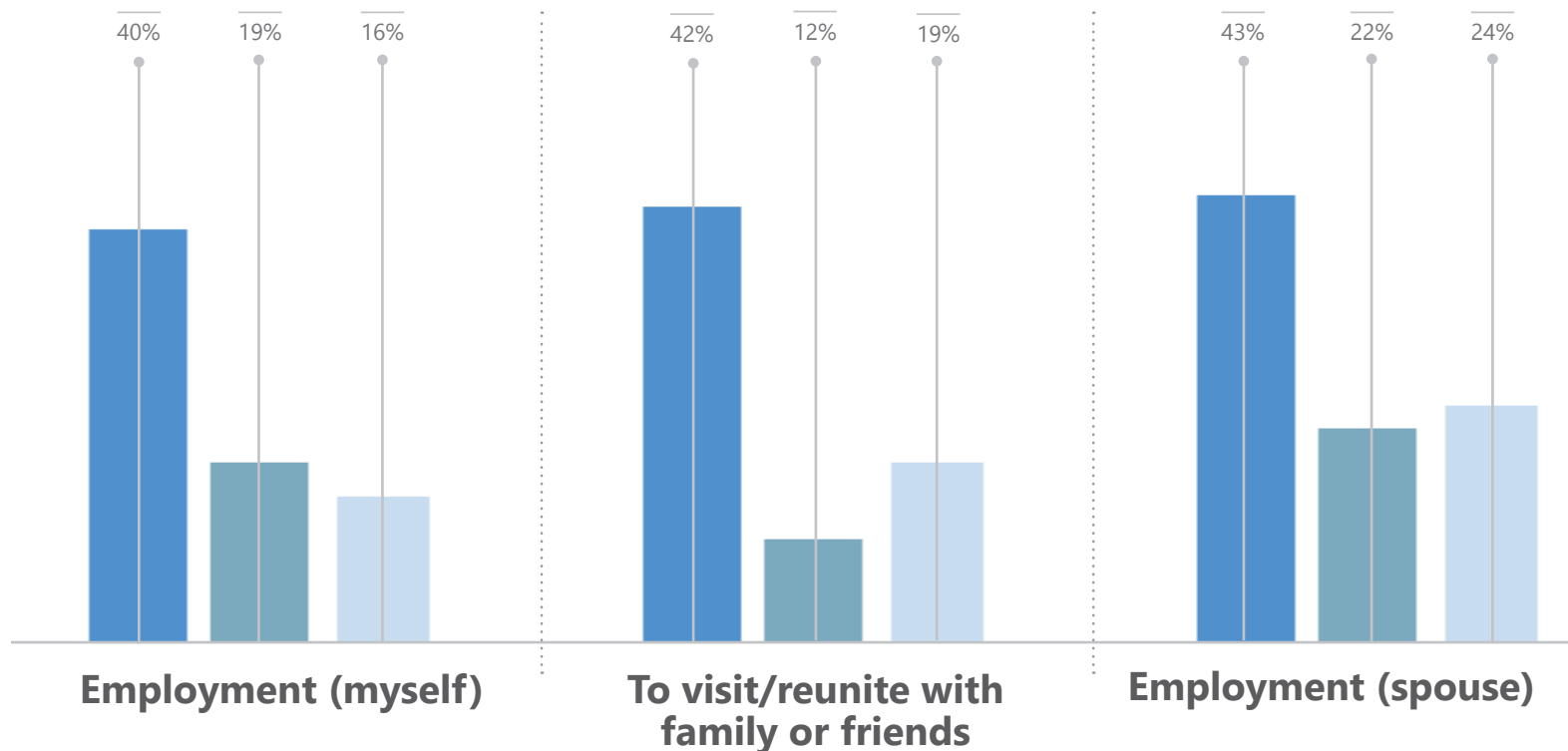
● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5

One of the main indicators that can be used to identify vulnerability is language proficiency. Respondents were asked to evaluate their abilities to speak, understand, and read Thai when they first arrived in Thailand on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 corresponds to the lowest level of ability and 5 to the highest. The data shows that upon arrival in Thailand, a significant majority of the sample ranked their ability to speak (99%), read (98%), or understand (97%) Thai at the lowest level on the scale. However, when asked if their Thai has improved, 14 per cent indicated high levels of improvement, 64 per cent indicated a bit of improvement and only 22 per cent reported no improvement at all in their Thai language abilities.

Main form of documentation for living in Thailand by reason for migration

(Multiple answers possible; top 3 answers only)

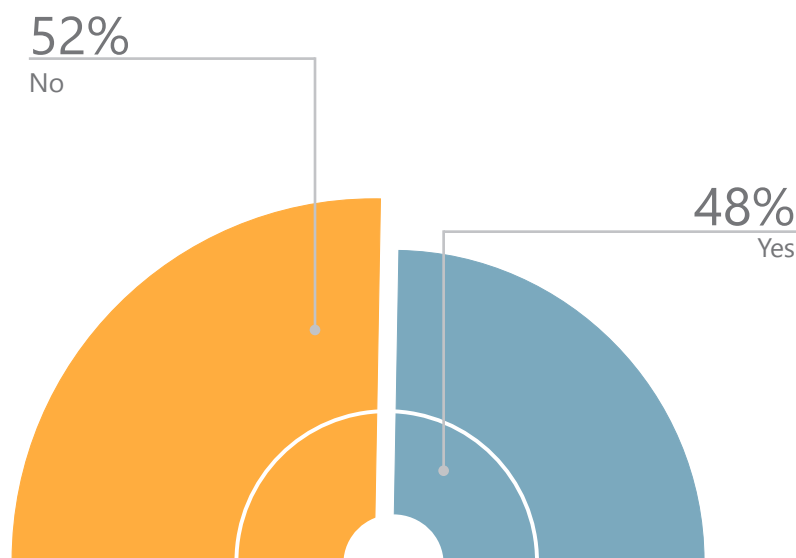
● No document ● Certificate of Identity (CI) ● White card



Share of respondents with legal permission to work in Thailand

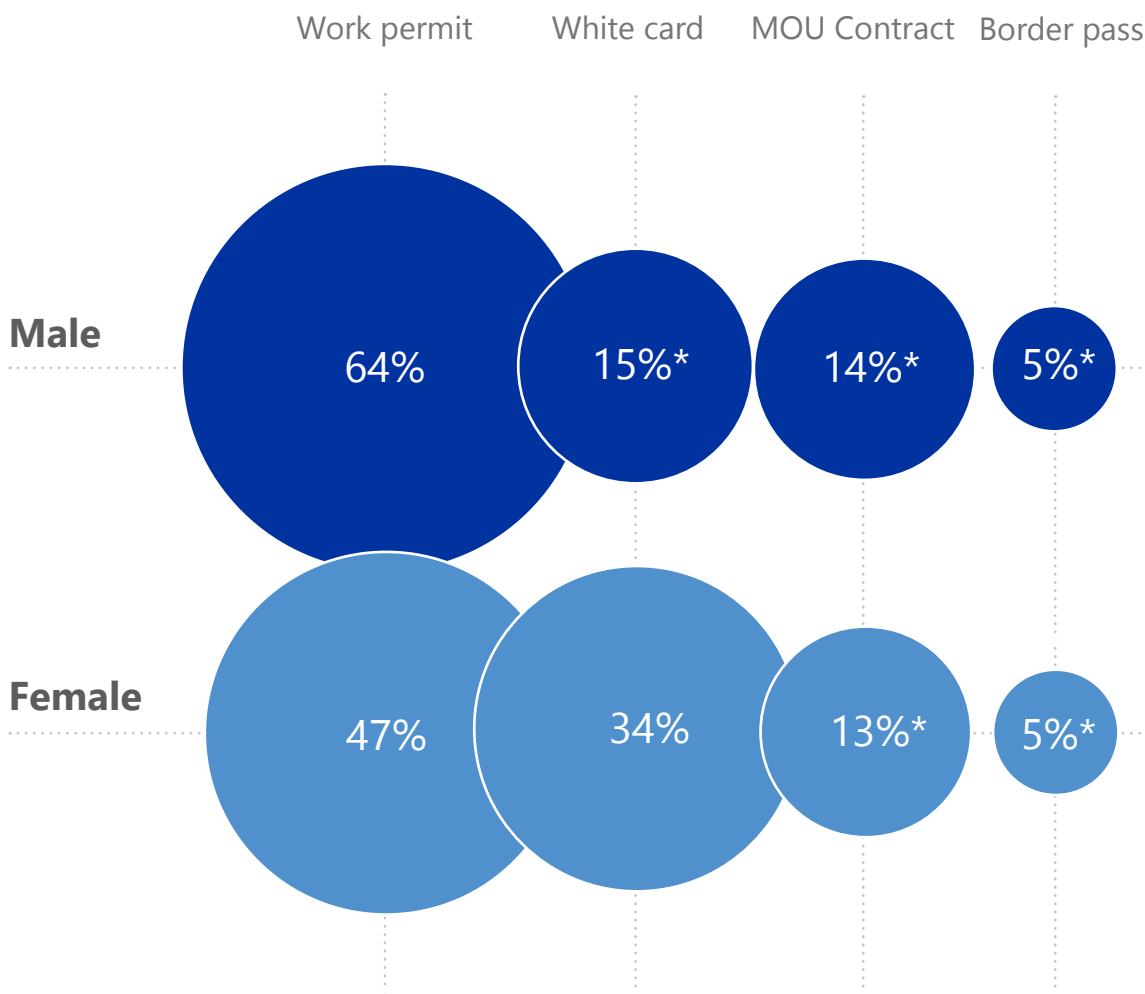
After the Emergency Decree was announced on 23 March 2020, Thailand began to close its border checkpoints with neighbouring countries, leaving some migrants facing uncertainty over their immigration status and right to work in the country.

Overall, 52 per cent of the respondents who are employed, lost work or are seeking work reported having the right to work in Thailand while 48 per cent did not. The data also indicates that 50% of female respondents who had worked, were working or were seeking to work in Thailand had legal permission to do so compared to 46% of male respondents.



Main type of work document by sex

Note: Question asked only to respondents who reported having legal permission to work. Two per cent of male respondents and one per cent of female respondents answered "Other".



Among the 48 per cent of respondents who reported legal permission to work in Thailand, their primary work document was their work permit (55%). Sixty-four per cent of male migrants reported having a work permit.

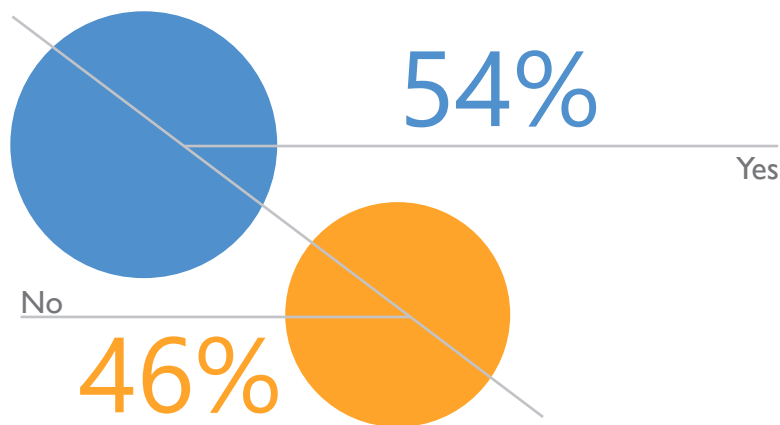
Other types of work documentation reported by migrants include white cards, MOU contracts and border passes. More female respondents reported holding white cards than male respondents (34% versus 15%).

*The sample size for this percentage is fewer than 10 respondents

THEMATIC AREA 6 - RETURN INTENTIONS

Share of respondents with concrete plans to return to Myanmar in the coming year

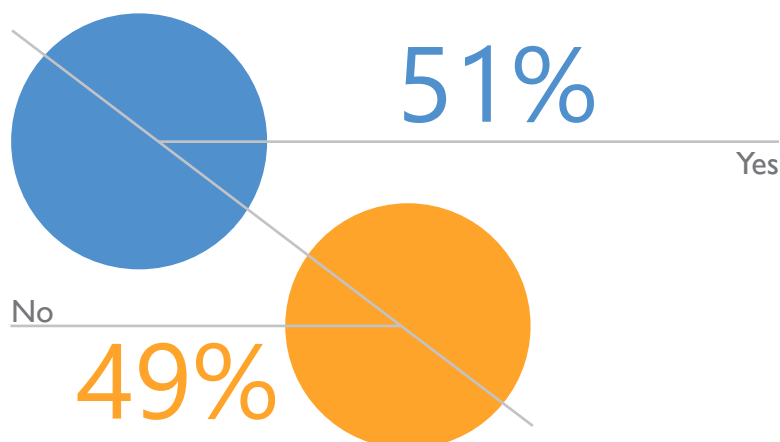
Note: 3% of respondents did not want to answer this question



With Thailand's borders still closed as a result of COVID-19, respondents were asked a series of questions about their plans to return to Myanmar and whether their plans had changed due to COVID-19. Respondents were also asked about expected challenges upon their return.

When asked if the respondents had concrete plans to return to Myanmar in the upcoming year, 46 per cent of respondents reported that they had no plans to go back to Myanmar. Women were more likely to report plans to return to Myanmar than men (52% versus 38%).

Share of respondents who changed their return plans due to COVID-19



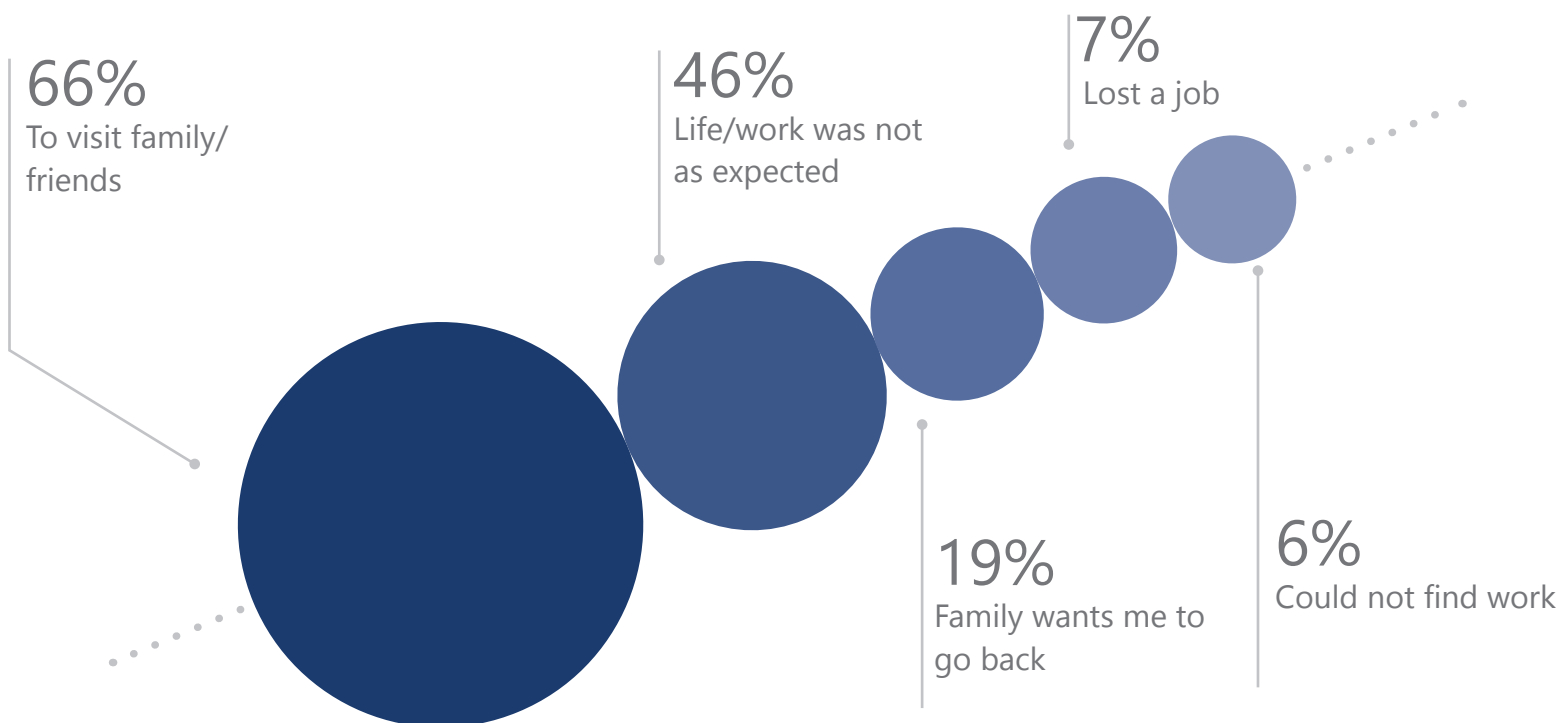
How did your plan change?



of migrants whose plans have changed due to COVID-19 reported that they wanted to go back to Myanmar but were now unable to do so due to mobility restrictions imposed by Myanmar and Thai governments along the border.



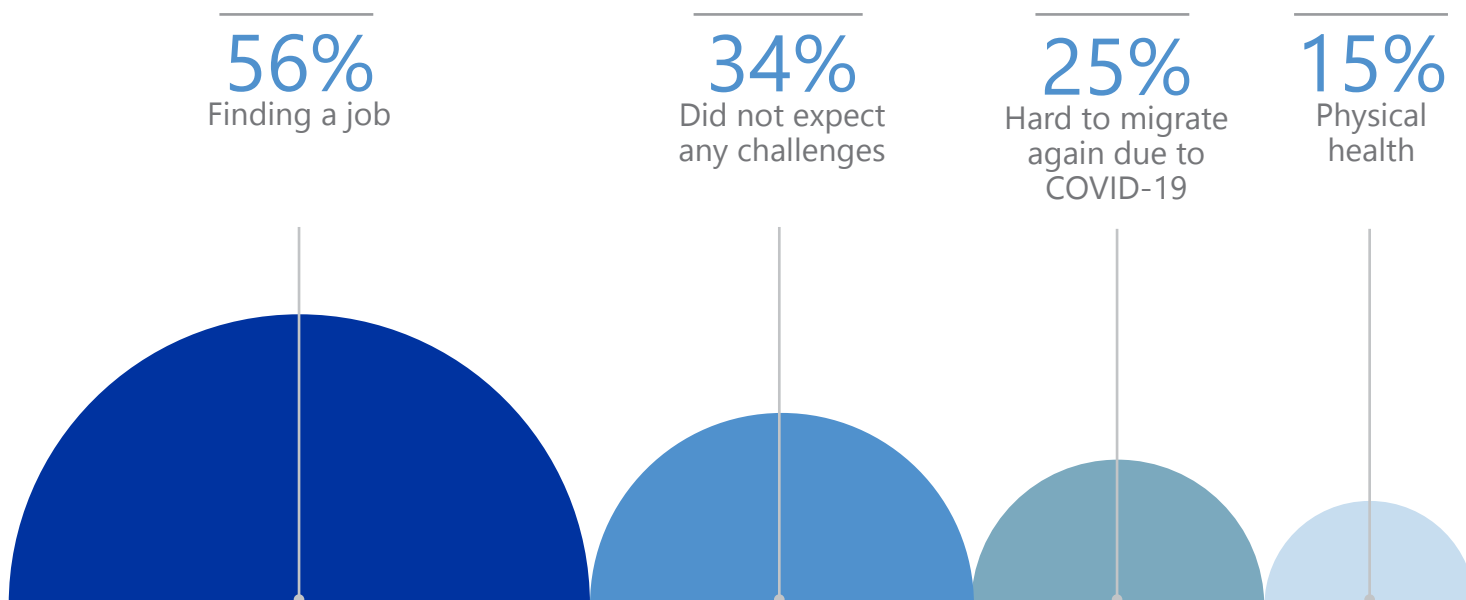
Main reasons for wanting to return to Myanmar (Multiple answers possible; top 5 answers only)



When asked why respondents wanted to return to Myanmar, several reasons were given. The most common reasons included wanting to visit family and friends (66%); life or work in Thailand not being as expected (46%); family wanting them to return home (19%); losing employment (7%) and not being able to find work in Thailand (6%). Respondents planning to return for reasons other than a short-term visit were also asked if they expected to face any challenges on return to Myanmar. Challenges expected included finding a job (56%), difficulty to remigrate due to COVID-19 (25%), and physical health challenges (15%).

Main challenges expected upon return to Myanmar

(Multiple answers possible; top 4 answers only)





IOM Thailand
18th Floor, Rajanakarn Building
3 South Sathorn Road
Bangkok 10120

Tel: (+66) 2-343-9300
Fax: (+66) 2-343-9399
Email: iomthailand@iom.int
Website: www.iom.int

