

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC FLOW MONITORING REPORT 2020

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)
DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX (DTM)



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Cover Photo: Bus Station in Vientiane Capital. © 2020 IOM

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TABLE OF CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY	iii
Introduction and Background	1
Methodology	2
Data Limitations	2
FINDING	
Section 1 – International Migrants	4
Demographics	4
Migration Journey	8
Challenges Experienced	9
Financial Status	10
Knowledge Attitude Practices of COVID-19	11
Future Aspirations	13
Section 2 – Internal Migrants In and Out of Vientiane Capital	14
Demographics	15
Migration Journey	17
Challenges Experienced	18
Financial Status	19
Knowledge Attitude Practices of COVID-19	21
CONCLUSION	23
REFERENCES	24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report adapted IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) flow monitoring tool to gather information on internal migrants travelling in and out of Vientiane, the capital city of Lao People's Democratic Republic from other provinces as well as migrants returning from Thailand due to COVID-19 mitigation measures. The information collected include their demographics, migration journey, challenges, financial status and knowledge, attitude and practices related to COVID-19. The results should be taken as anecdotal knowledge to gauge the pandemic's potential effects on the two groups of migrants.

There are equal proportion of men and women for internal migrants, and also for returning migrants. In terms of education level, both groups reported slightly more than 50 per cent having less than secondary education. Internal migrants are much younger with an average age of 24 years, while the average age of returning migrants is 27 years. For both groups of migrants, close to 70 per cent were not earning any income (which includes supporting family work like business or agriculture) prior to migrating. Most of those who were working prior to migrating are predominantly in construction (13%). Upon migrating to Thailand, most of them found employment in hospitality (14%), agriculture (6%), manufacturing (6%) or domestic work (5%) - similar to the flow monitoring results in 2019.

Amid the pandemic, internal migrants had reported that job opportunities in Vientiane Capital are mostly found in the construction sector. As such, it is anticipated that growth in Lao People's Democratic Republic will continue to be driven by the construction sector,ⁱ which is supported by investments in large transportation projects for improved connectivity and logistics. These projects include the Laos-China railway,¹ power transmission lines and upgrades to road networks as part of the Asian Highway Network which links the Lao People's Democratic Republic to neighbouring countries, in addition to within the country.

This report found that provinces with the highest number of returning migrants were (i) Xayaboury in the North; (ii) Vientiane Capital and Bolikhamxay in Central region; and (iii) Savannakhet and Salavan in the South, whereas provinces with the highest number of internal migrants were (i) Oudomxay in the North, (ii) Vientiane Province and (iii) Khammouan, Savannakhet, Salavan and Champasak in the South. Based on these findings and the earlier studies², we could infer that Savannakhet and Salavan have the highest number of out migrants (both international and internal).

Given the predicted fluctuations and uncertainty in the labour market,³ the risk of labour exploitation of the individuals in these provinces could be exacerbated whether they migrate within or outside the country, as their economic situation could be made more dire.

The average wage of migrants working in Thailand (USD 300-399) is double of those who are working in Vientiane Capital (USD 100-199). Although returning migrants reported earning more, recruitment fees and the cost of travel logistics make it more difficult for them to save. At the same time, returning migrants are generally also more vulnerable as only 6 per cent of those who were interviewed (n=161) are currently employed, as compared to slightly more than 50 per cent of interviewed internal migrants (n=186) are employed. This could be one of the key reasons that two times more returning migrants from Thailand had reported to be more worried about the pandemic situation as compared to the internal migrants. Given the challenges of finding a job upon their return to Lao People's Democratic Republic, 70 per cent of respondents stated they hope to migrate again once the borders reopen. Among those who return from Thailand, one in four reported not having appropriate travel documents and work permits, placing them in a situation where they may lack labour rights and protection.

In regards to awareness about COVID-19, internal migrants were less informed about the virus (68%) compared to returnees (98%). Internal migrants reported that they rely on information from social media (71%) and their social network (54%) while returnees reported that their source of information are their social network (89%) and traditional media (50%).

In conclusion, this pandemic could be an opportunity for the government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to improve cross-border labor migration governance with Thailand while translating it to operational perspectives at the national levels on matters pertaining to skills development, fair recruitment and decent work, legal status and adequate labour rights protection, and sustainable reintegration of labour. There is a need for a shift in migration policy as too much emphasis has been placed on the macroeconomic importance of remittances at the cost of a more balanced and migrant-centred understanding of labour migration outcomes. Additionally, this report highlights the need to improve labour standards for workers in the construction sector within Lao People's Democratic Republic to ensure adequate protection is in place. There may also be a need for large scale public awareness campaign in the Southern provinces to combat human trafficking and exploitation.

ⁱ Enumerators informal conversations with internal migrants

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY



Picture 1 - Enumerator Interviewing Migrants at Bus Station / © IOM 2020

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Regional labour migration has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth and development in countries of origin and destination within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region.⁴ However, the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting migrants, who constitute one of the most vulnerable population in the region. Economic downturns, restrictions on recruitment and travel, and lack of access to social welfare systems are hitting them hard.⁵

As a landlocked nation sharing borders with five countries, Lao People's Democratic Republic is best known as an origin country in migration, and to a lesser extent, a transit and destination country. Internal and cross-border human mobility is an important issue. With rapid regional and domestic infrastructure development, well-governed migration has become increasingly crucial in the country's development.⁶

Migrant workers play a key role in the economy of Lao People's Democratic Republic. People decide to migrate for work based on stories they hear about the city life, jobs and cash income from their friends and neighbours. A majority of them are employed in domestic work, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and entertainment work, mainly in neighbouring border provinces and larger cities.⁷ Around 9 per cent of households receive remittances from abroad, and this income constitute 60 per cent of their household income. The effects of COVID-19 on livelihoods and income abroad imply a reduction in recipient household income.

The wave of returning migrants is likely to alter the local economic landscape. The pandemic and the resulting restrictions have abruptly halted human mobility, as well as economic activities in key sectors, exacerbating financial vulnerabilities for migrant workers and their families all over the world. According to the World Bank's Lao Economic Monitor,⁸ the return of more than 100,000 migrants will result in a reduction of up to USD 125 million in remittances, equivalent to 0.7 per cent of the national GDP. This is likely to significantly limit the money available for community recovery and development, as more than 200,000 Lao migrants are reported to have crossed the border from Thailand back to the Lao People's Democratic Republic since the COVID-19 pandemic began.⁹ The economic shock will adversely impact many migrants and push their families into poverty.

At the same time, the internal migration patterns are likely to be influenced by these mass returns of international migrants, depressed social economic changes leading to lower demand for migrants within the country and abroad, as well as the resettlement of rural populations during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰ The primary destination for rural-urban migrants, especially those from Vientiane province and the north of the country, is Vientiane Capital, of which, four in ten people in Vientiane reported they recently (within the last 10 years) migrated to the city.¹¹ World Bank estimated that the magnitude of COVID-19 effects on internal migration is about two-and-a-half times that of international migration.¹² Job loss particularly among internal migrants who are working day-to-day as casual labourers can result in surging food and housing needs as these are often being offered as a form of payment by employers.¹³

While the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on migration are uncertain, the short to medium term challenges affecting this migrant population could be addressed by including them in social protection system and safeguarding them from discrimination and exploitation. On this front, together with the Skills Development and Employment Department (SDED) under Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), IOM has partnered with local stakeholders and developed inclusive approaches in assisting vulnerable populations affected by the pandemic - including cross-border coordination, tailored risk communication and community engagement.

Although cross-border migration, specifically between Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and internal migration are critical issues and by no means a new phenomenon, there continues to be a dearth of reliable data that can be used for the development of evidence-based policy and programming. To maximize the efforts for safe migration, and to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on both types of migration, the IOM established a Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring data collection exercise under the Asia Regional Migration Program funded by the United States Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) between August and November 2020.

METHODOLOGY

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system that tracks and monitors displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations, whether on site or en route. A diverse range of tools and data collection methodologies are employed, including baseline and location assessments, surveys, in-depth research, flow monitoring and registration. More information is available at displacement.iom.int.

Flow monitoring is one component of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), a system that tracks and monitors displacement and population mobility. It is conducted at locations that are identified, with assistance of key informants, as being key transit locations along a migration route. Diverse data collection methodologies are employed according to the context and often include (i) flow monitoring registry: tracking the number of migrants arriving at, passing through or departing from the flow monitoring points; and (ii) flow monitoring surveys: regular surveys of a sample of those migrants to obtain information on their place of origin, intended transit points and destination, demographic profiles and transport modalities. More information is available at migration.iom.int.

For this flow monitoring survey conducted in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, data was collected through face-to-face surveys by 10 Lao nationals who were recruited as enumerators (four women, six men) to collect data between 3 August to 4 November 2020.

The enumerators stationed themselves at the Northern and Southern Bus Stations within Vientiane Capital; they also travelled along bus routes 8 and 29 to meet with (i) returning cross-border labour migrants (from Thailand) who might be travelling back to their home provinces on public transport after leaving the quarantine centres, and (ii) internal labour migrants travelling in and out of Vientiane Capital. With the help of three screening questions, the enumerators were able to identify the two different target groups of migrants. Convenience sampling was applied based on migrants' willingness to be interviewed and their availability in terms of time.

Two different quantitative survey tools were adapted to capture the following information from the two different groups: (i) Demographics, (ii) Migration Journey, (iii) Challenges Experienced, (iv) Financial Status, (v) Knowledge, Attitude and Practices on COVID-19 and (vi) Future Aspirations.

The DTM methodology was designed with the support of IOM's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok. Additional inputs were provided by IOM's Migrant Protection and Assistance Division and the IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic country mission.

The first section of this report presents the survey finding from 161 returned cross-border migrants and the second section presents the survey finding from 186 internal migrants who were travelling in and out of Vientiane Capital for work.

LIMITATIONS

Data presented in this report are representative of the individuals captured at the flow monitoring points during the months of August to November 2020. The data do not represent a full picture of inter- and intra-regional migration, but rather of migration flows at specific locations monitored. While IOM aims to establish flow monitoring points at locations or times with high transit flows (based on information from informed stakeholders), flows are fluid and specific locations and time provide an incomplete picture.

The monitoring of flows in an assessed location should not lead to assumptions about flows in a non-assessed location or area without monitoring points. Migrants adjust their routes according to opportunities and obstacles they encounter along their journey. Their intended transit and destination locations are often subject to change. This renders the systematic assessment of their mobility throughout the region complex. Therefore, data collected in destination locations may not always coincide with flows detected in transit locations.

SECTION I RETURNING MIGRANTS



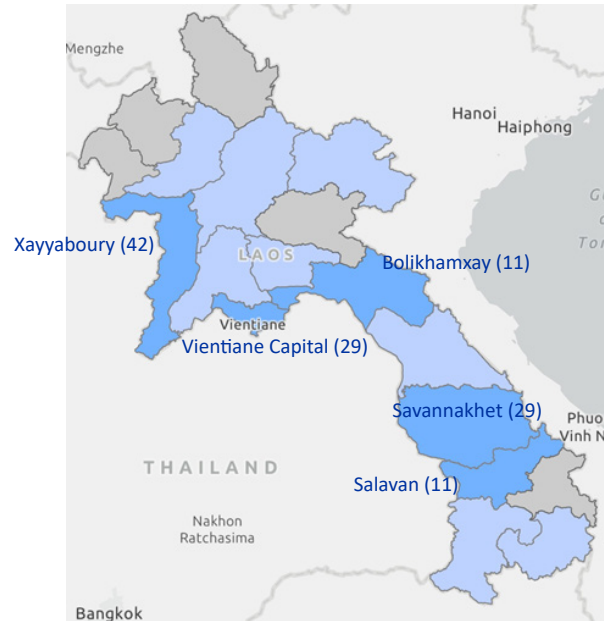
Picture 4 - Passengers and Migrants waiting at Bus Station / © IOM 2020

161 TOTAL RESPONDENTS

BY PROVINCES OF DESTINATION

Attapeu 3 Respondents	Bolikhamxay 11 Respondents	Champasak 6 Respondents
Houa Phan 4 Respondents	Khammouan 7 Respondents	Luang Prabang 8 Respondents
Oudomxay 4 Respondents	Salavan 11 Respondents	Savannakhet 29 Respondents
Vientiane Capital 29 Respondents	Vientiane Province 6 Respondents	Xayyaboury 42 Respondents
	Xaysomboun 1 Respondents	

RETURNING MIGRANTS' HOME PROVINCES IN LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



Base map source: OCHA. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM

- Top 5 provinces with the highest number of returning migrants from Thailand
- Provinces with returning migrants from Thailand

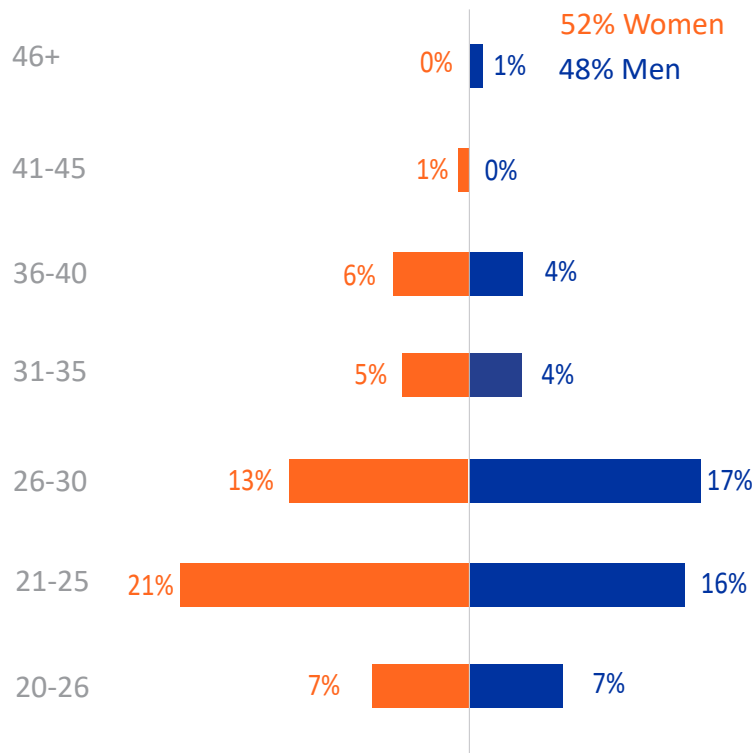
Among the surveyed respondents, most returned migrants' home town are in Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet and Xayyaboury where the Land official borders are situated including First Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge, Second Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge and Pangmon International Border Crossing.



Picture 3 - Migrants Boarding A Public Bus / © IOM 2020

DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION PYRAMID*



52% Women
48% Men



Respondents who are ethnic minority 17%



Respondents who are from Central region (Vientiane Capital, Vientiane Province, Bolikhamxay, Savannakhet and Xaysomboun) 52%



Respondents who are married 34%



Respondents who have children 31%



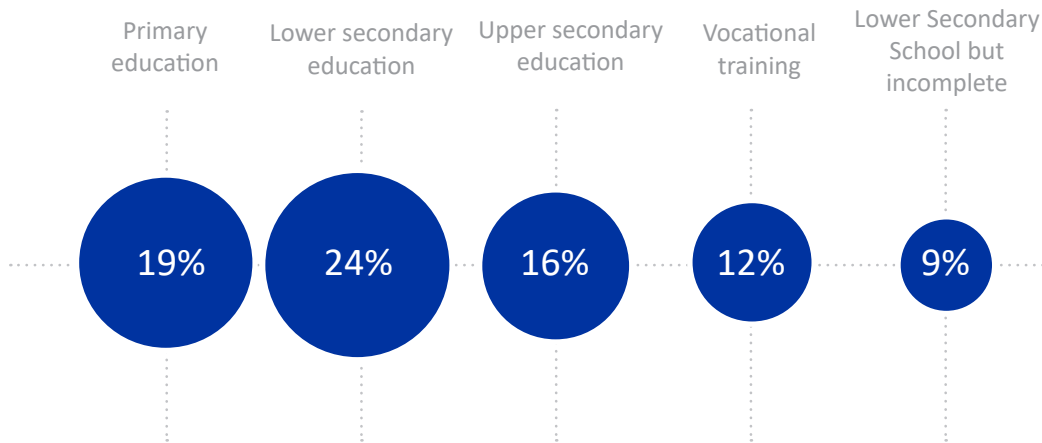
Respondents who had some formal education 98%



Respondents travelling with children 5%

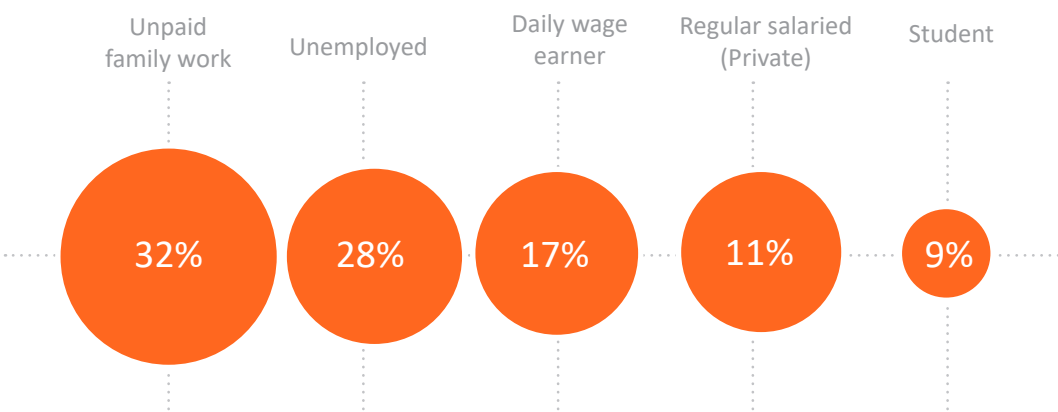
*The population pyramid is only representative for the respondents to this survey.

EDUCATION LEVEL (top 5 answers)



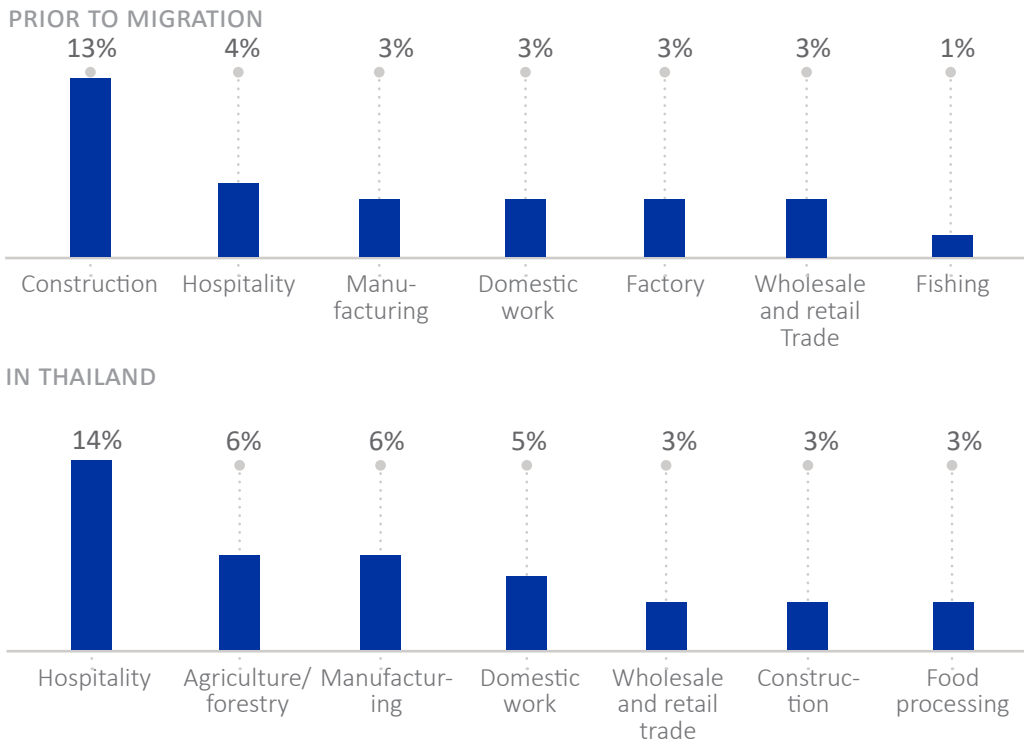
The proportion of respondents who are men (52%) was slightly higher than women (48%). The highest proportion included adults between the age of 21 to 25 years old. Most migrants returning from Thailand were low skilled labour workers, with primary education (19%), lower secondary education (24%), upper secondary education (16%), vocational training (12%) or incomplete lower secondary education (9%).

EMPLOYMENT STATUS BEFORE MIGRATION (top 5 answers)



Nearly 70 per cent of respondents reported having no income prior to migrating, with those reported engaging in unpaid family work (32%), were unemployed (28%) or were a student (9%).

OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR* (top 7 answers)

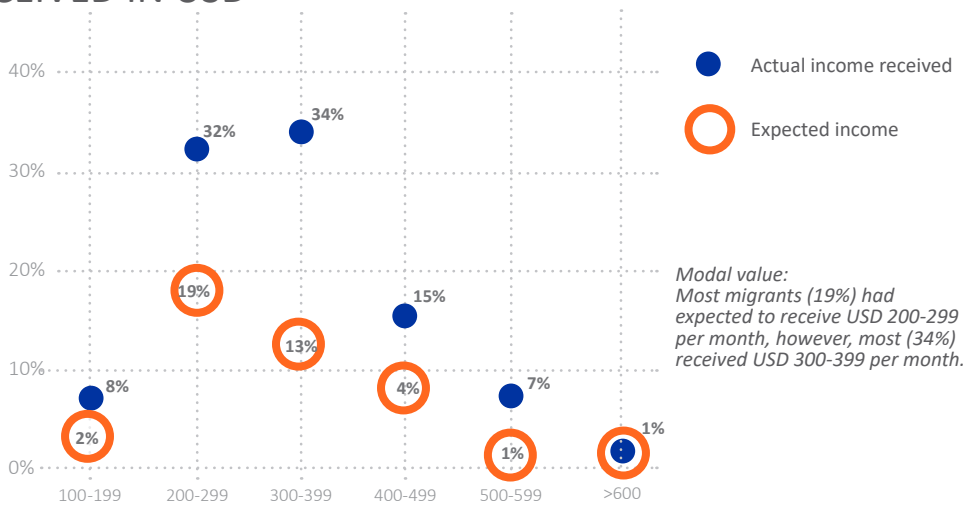


Those who were employed prior to migration were asked about their occupational sector before and after migration.

Prior to leaving Lao People's Democratic Republic, 13 per cent reported that they worked in the construction sector. After migrating to Thailand, the respondents reported they acquired new skills while working in hospitality (14%), agriculture/forestry (6%), or food processing (3%).

These migrants will require reskilling, up-skilling and certifying their skill sets so that it could pave the way for them to enter the local job market or to find better opportunities abroad.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXPECTED AND ACTUAL INCOME RECEIVED IN USD

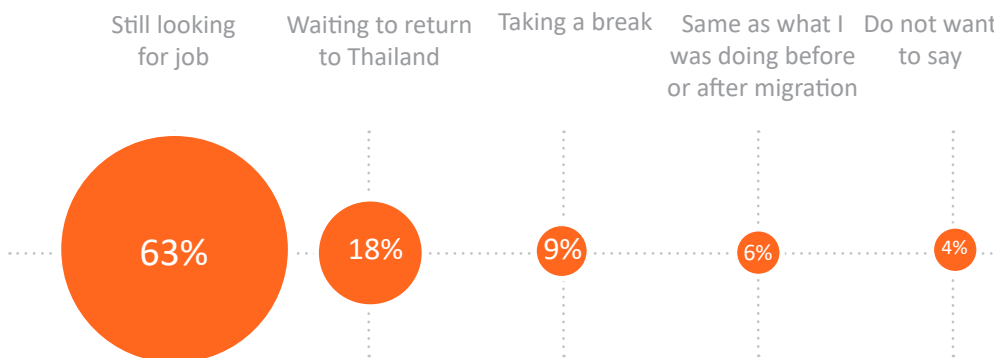


Note: Not all respondents were able to provide an amount in terms of expected income (based on contract). As such the percentage doesn't add up to 100 percent for those graphs. This figure only provides a broad idea on the difference in percentage of migrants on their expected and actual income received.

In this survey, a high proportion of migrants reported that their average monthly income in Thailand ranged between USD 200–500, with a smaller proportion of respondents reporting a monthly income which is less than USD 200 and above USD 500. Almost all migrants reported to be earning at least double of their expected salary (based on what was stated in the contract).

This reflects a good wage differential for migrants as the monthly minimum wage in Lao People's Democratic Republic is LAK 900,000 (approximately USD 110). The minimum wage in Thailand is more than double this amount.

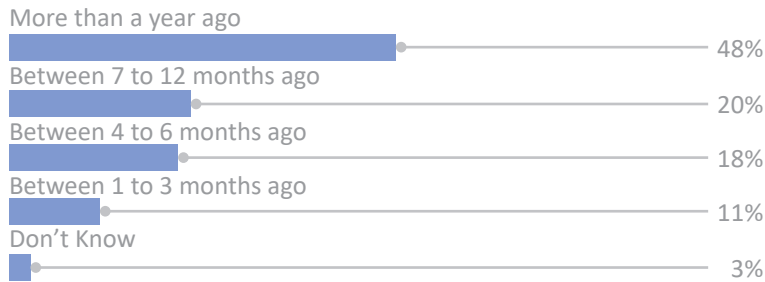
CURRENT OCCUPATION OF RETURNING MIGRANTS



At the time of the survey, only 6 per cent of the returning migrants reported that they are working - either in the same job prior to migration (5%) or in the same occupation they were previously in while in Thailand (1%). The remainder of respondents reported that they were not working either because they could not find a job (63%), were waiting to return back to Thailand (18%), or were taking a break (9%).

MIGRATION JOURNEY

WHEN DID YOU LEAVE YOUR HOME PROVINCE?

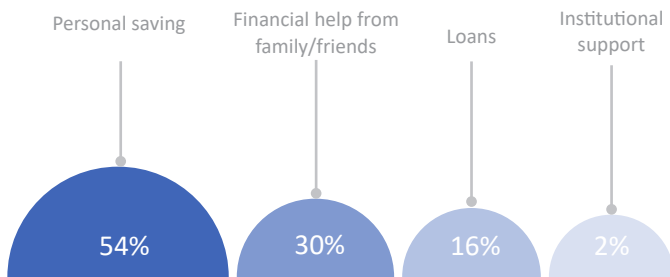


DID YOU GO ABROAD THROUGH A PRIVATE RECRUITMENT AGENCY (MOU PROCESS)?

34% YES

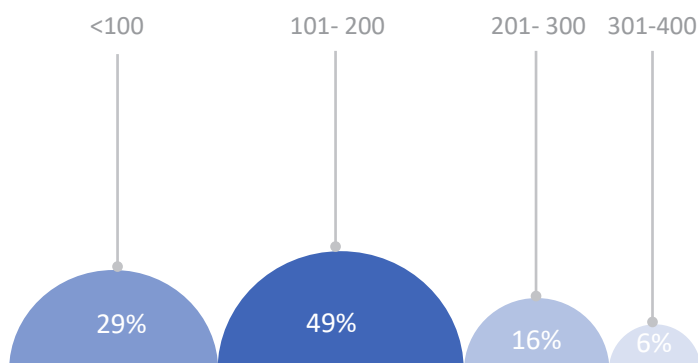


HOW DID YOU OBTAIN MONEY FOR MIGRATION FACILITATION (multiple answers possible)



REMITTANCES (USD) (top 4 answers)

70% Of respondents sent money home every month, of which slightly less than 50 per cent send USD 101 - 200



FROM WHICH COUNTRY DID YOU RETURN?

100% Thailand



HOW MUCH DID YOU PAY FOR THE FACILITATION OF MIGRATION?

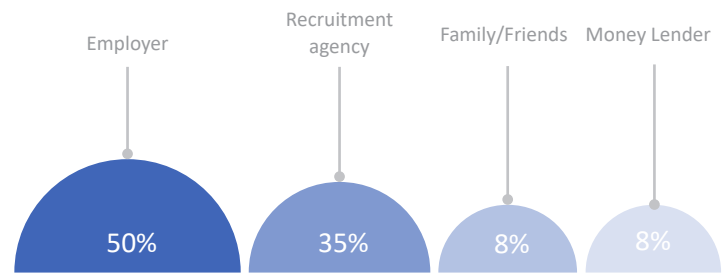
USD 1,087

Average amount paid by those who used a Recruitment Agency to go abroad

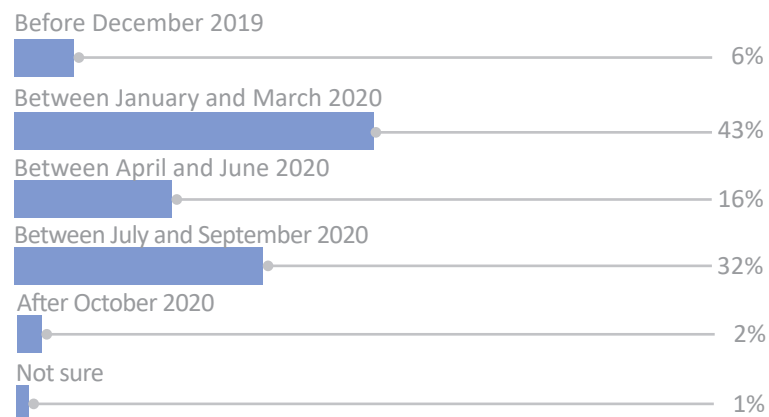
USD 964

Average amount paid by those who did not use a Recruitment Agency to go abroad

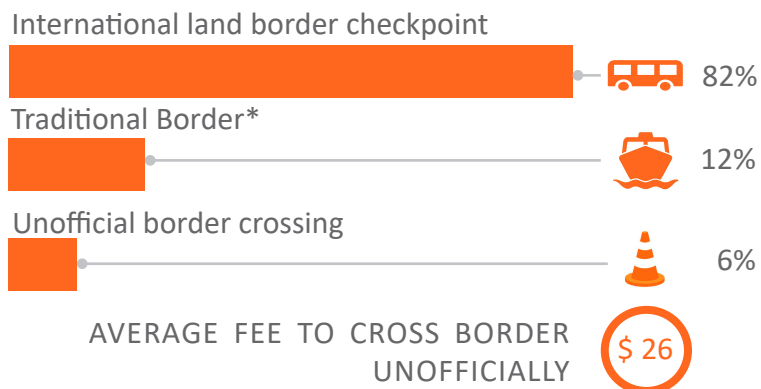
IF YOU USED A LOAN TO OBTAIN MONEY, WHAT WAS THE SOURCE OF THE LOAN? (multiple answers possible)



WHEN DID YOU RETURN TO LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC?



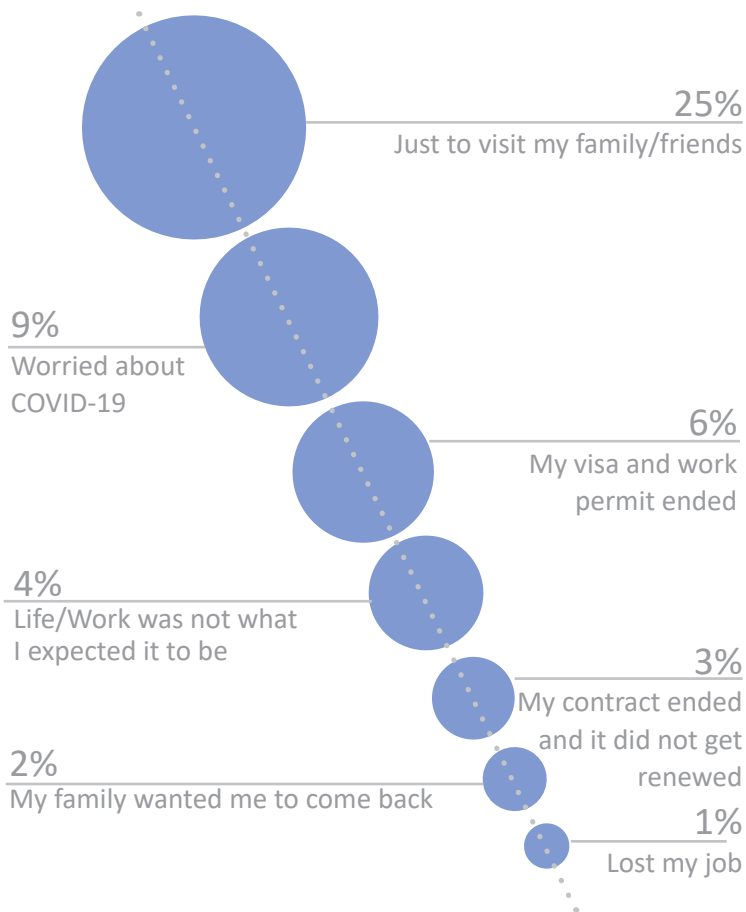
WHAT WAS YOUR POINT OF ENTRY?



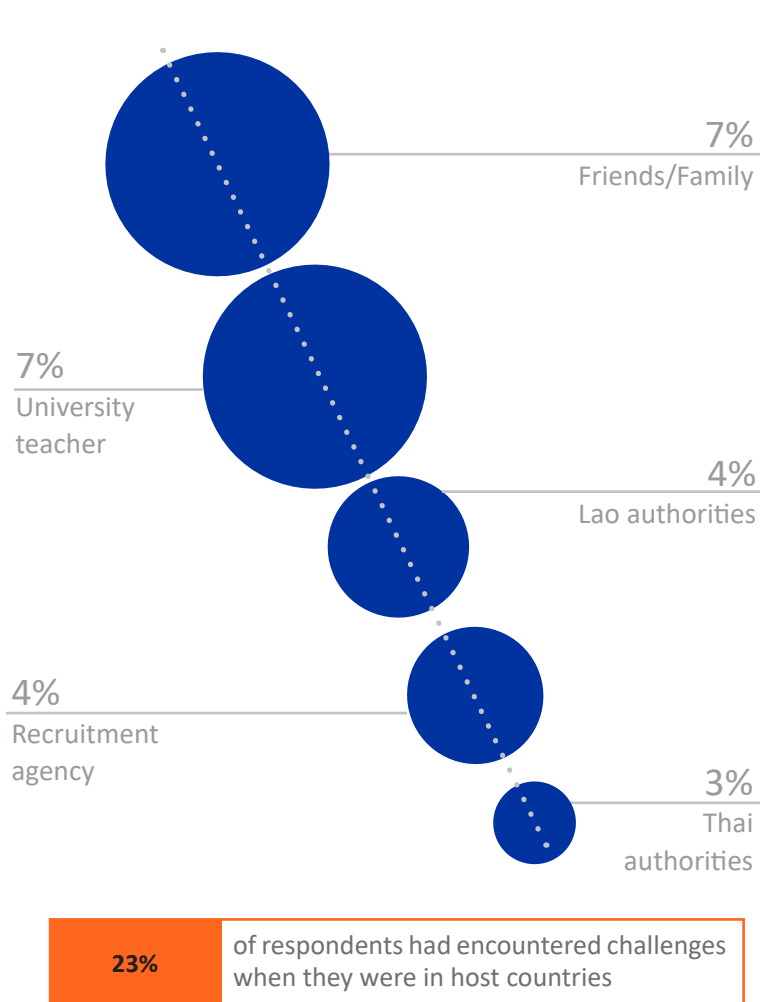
WHO TRAVELLED WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY?



WHY DID YOU RETURN TO LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC?



WHEN YOU WERE IN HOST COUNTRY, WHO DID YOU TURN TO WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER PROBLEMS?



*Traditional border checkpoints of Lao PDR consist of inland border checkpoints and water ports. Traditional border checkpoints are places where only Lao citizen and the citizen of neighboring country who have permanent residence nearby the border of the districts across from each other can pass through by the agreement of both parties. (Prime Minister's Office Decree, 2018).¹⁴

Twenty-three per cent of respondents reported that they encountered challenges while they were in Thailand. They were most likely to first reach out to family and friends (7%) or their university teacher who had referred them to the job in Thailand for help (7%). Other respondents reported that they sought help from Lao authorities (4%), recruitment agency (4%), and Thai authorities (3%). All respondents reported that their challenges were resolved.

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED

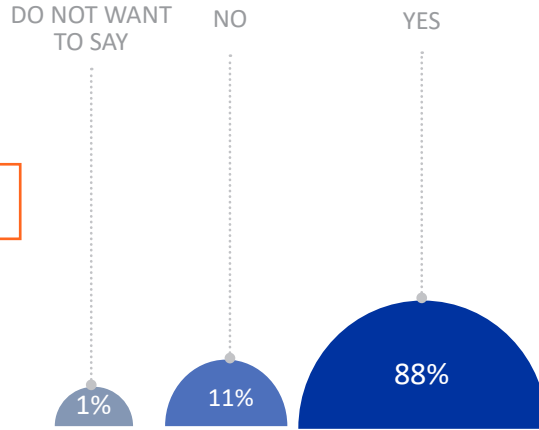
HAVE YOU FACED ANY CHALLENGES SINCE YOUR RETURN?

68% YES



Percentage of respondents who experienced challenges upon returning to their community.

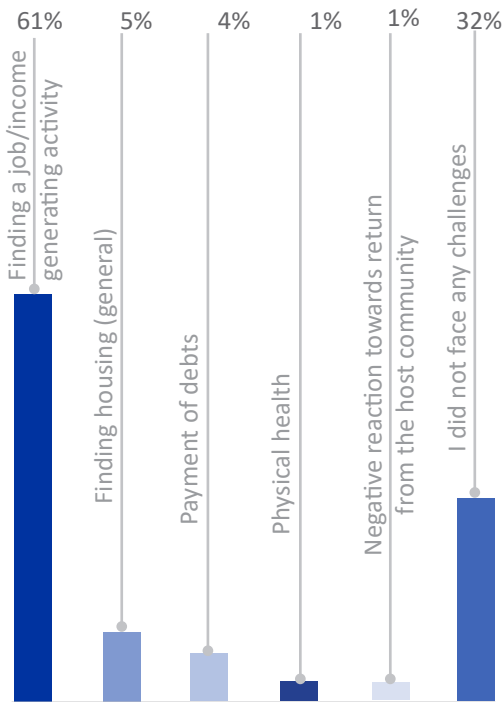
WAS IT DIFFICULT TO FIND A JOB SINCE RETURN?



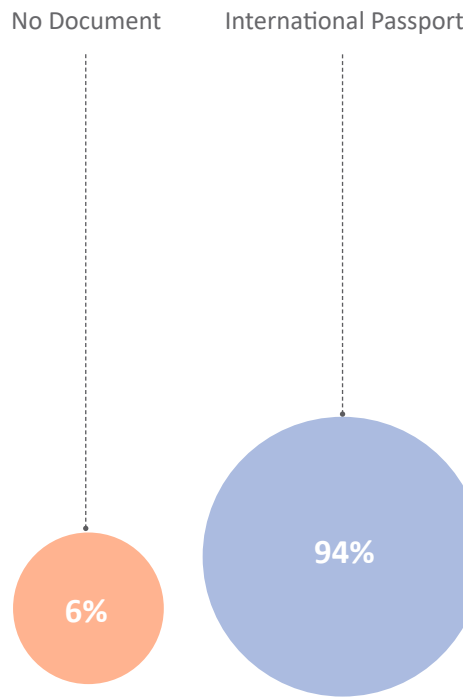
Sixty-eight per cent of respondents indicated that they experienced challenges since they returned to their community. Finding a job was unmistakably the biggest challenge faced by returning migrants.

When asked about challenges after their return in general, besides not being able to find a job, other challenges mentioned were finding housing (5%), payment of debts (4%), physical health (1%) and negative reactions from host community (1%). There is no notable difference between men and women in terms of challenges faced.

IF YOU EXPERIENCED CHALLENGES SINCE YOUR RETURN, WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU EXPERIENCE? (top 6 answers)



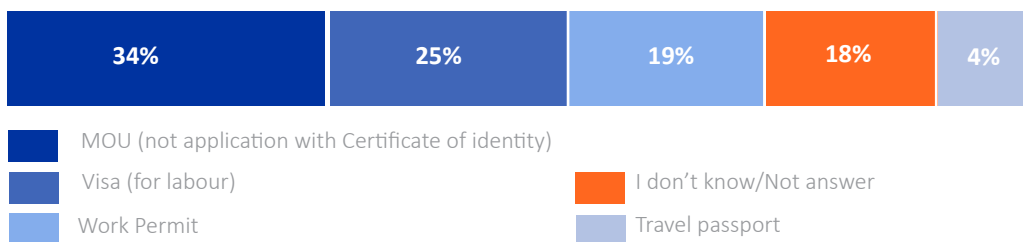
WHAT KIND OF DOCUMENTS DID YOU USE TO CROSS THE BORDER?



Returned Lao migrants are valuable human capital for the country if they are able to use their skills in new jobs in their home country. Due to the challenges, they face securing employment upon return, accessible national employment schemes, registration procedures and other services are critical to their success back in the country.

Respondents were also asked about the type of documents they used to cross the border and to work in Thailand. Majority of migrants crossed legally with an international passport, while 6 per cent reported to have no documents. As for the document they used to work in Thailand, most mentioned MOU (34%), visa for labour (25%), work permit (19%) and passport (4%). One in five migrants reported that they either were not informed about the type of documents they had or they did not have any official work documents.

WHAT KIND OF DOCUMENTS DID YOU USE TO WORK ABROAD?



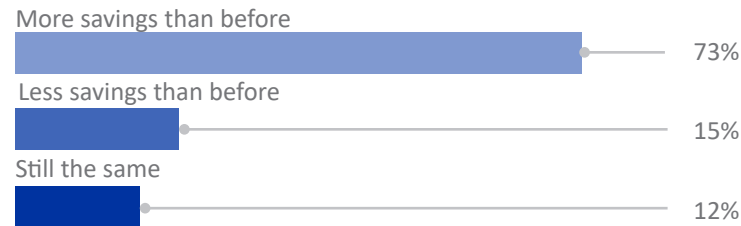
Many stated that they would migrate again once the situation is normalized. Therefore, safe and orderly re-migration arrangements should be part of a comprehensive approach for economic and social recovery in the medium term.

FINANCIAL STATUS

73%

OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED HAVING MORE SAVINGS AFTER WORKING ABROAD

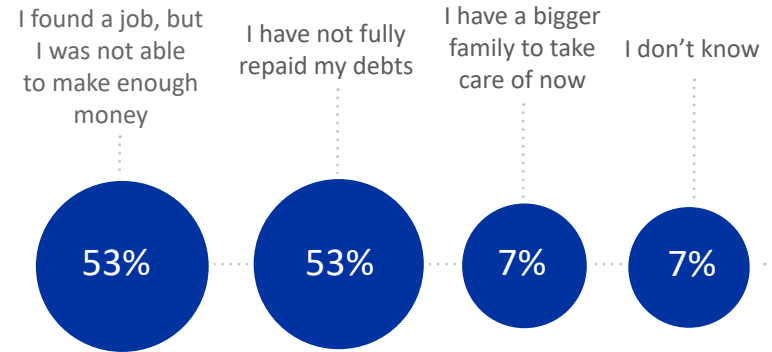
DO YOU HAVE MORE OR LESS SAVINGS THAN BEFORE MIGRATION?



9%

OF RESPONDENTS' FINANCIAL SITUATION HAVE WORSEN BECAUSE

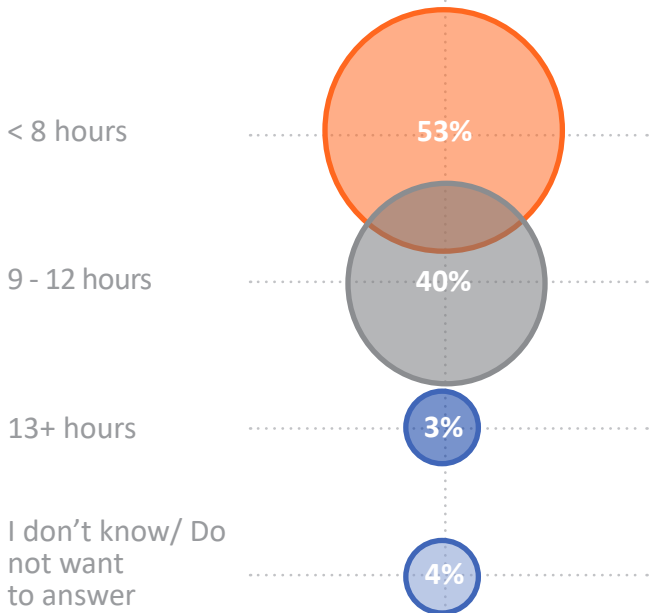
(top 4 answers, multiple answers possible)



42%

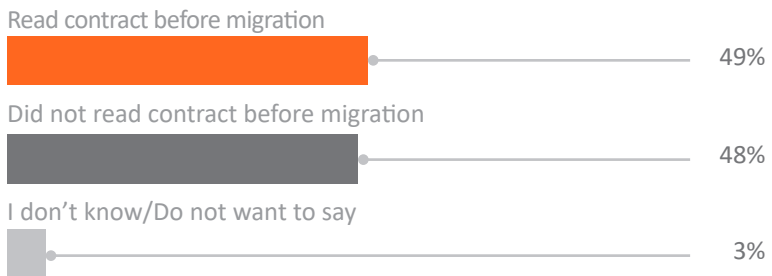
Of respondents reported to work for more than 8 hours per day

No. of working hours

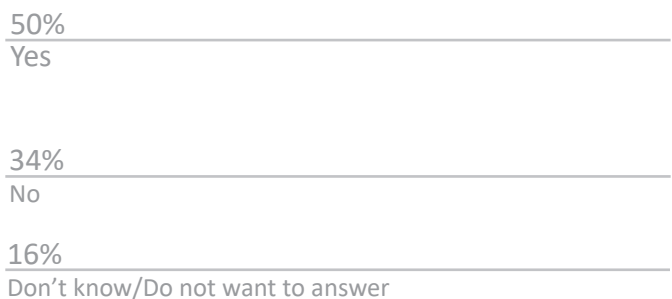


18%

of migrants kept a copy of the contract which they signed before migration



DO YOU GET COMPENSATED WHEN YOU WORK EXTRA HOURS?



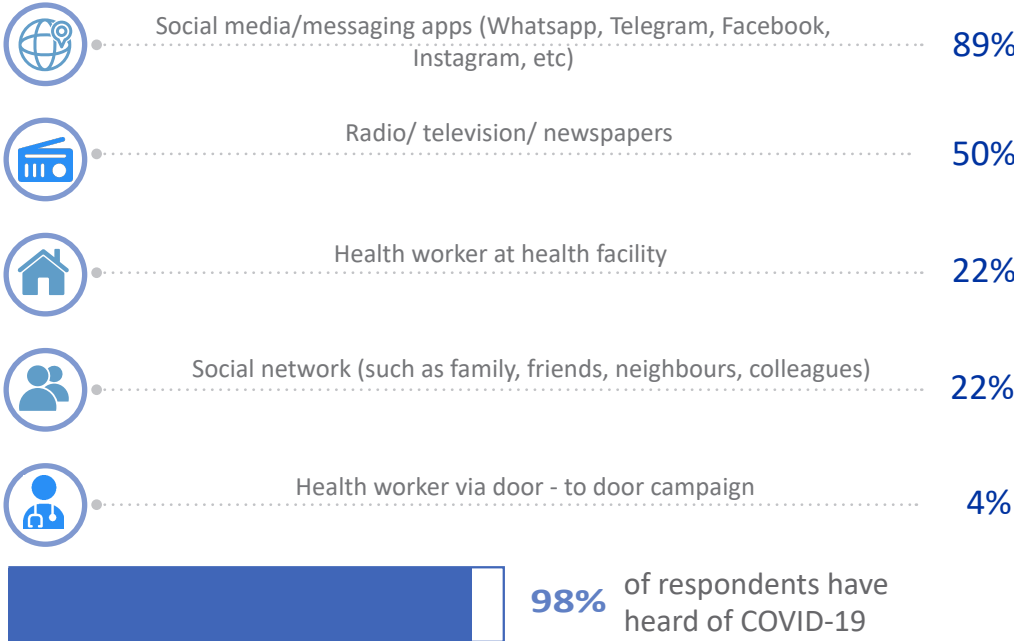
More than 70 per cent of the migrants reported having more savings after working abroad. Of those whose financial situation had worsened, it was either because they were not making sufficient income despite having a job (53%) or they have not fully repaid their debts (53%), while the remaining respondents stated that they have a bigger family to care for, compared to before migration (7%). Additionally, more than 40 per cent of migrants reported that they work for more than eight hours a day,

with only 50 per cent reported that they were compensated for the extra working hours. The survey also found that slightly less than 50 per cent of migrants were aware of their contractual terms before migrating to Thailand. This reinforces the findings of the survey conducted earlier this year among returning migrants in quarantine centres - that more resources are needed to provide information on the recruitment process to ensure migrants have access to protection while working abroad.

KNOWLEDGE ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE OF COVID-19

SOURCES OF INFORMATION RELATING TO COVID-19

(top 5 answers)



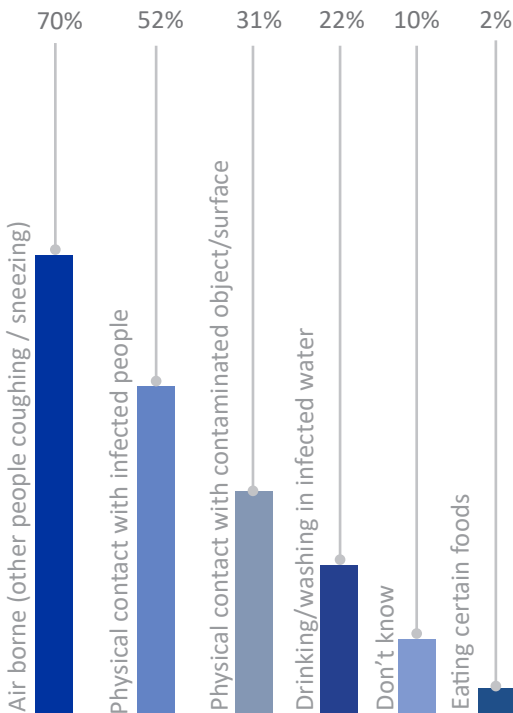
Ninety-eight per cent of respondents reported that they have heard of COVID-19.

Both social media and traditional media (radio/television/newspaper) are the main sources of information for a majority of the respondents. As such, it is important to ensure that the media is well informed and accurate in its reporting of the pandemic as they are powerful communication tools; and essential for countering misinformation.

Word-of-mouth communications through health workers (26%) and family/friends (22%) were also cited by respondents.

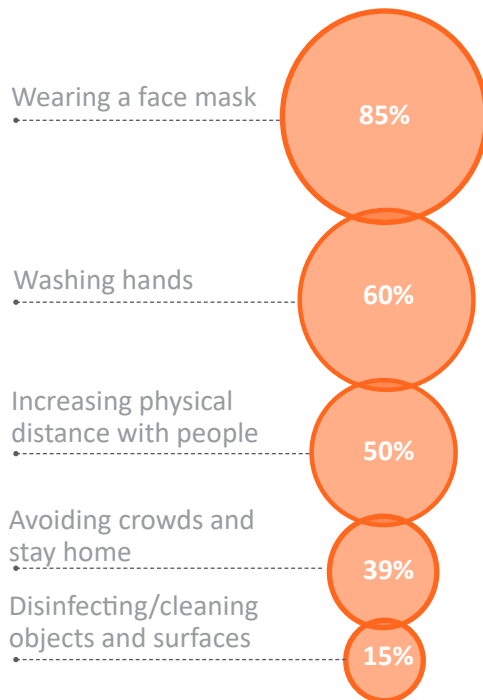
PERCEPTION OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

(top 6 answers)



MOST COMMONLY KNOWN COVID-19 PREVENTION MEASURES

(top 5 answers)



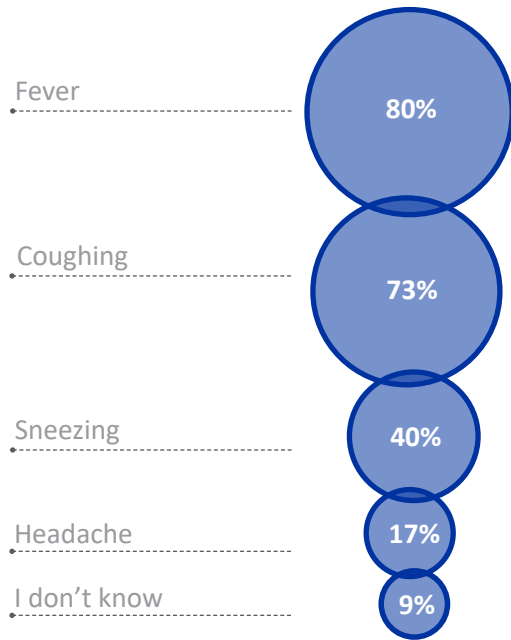
The survey also intended to capture the perception of respondents on COVID-19 transmission and prevention. Up to 70 per cent of respondents perceived that the virus is airborne and are transmitted through proximity to people (52%) and contaminated objects/surface (31%).

It appears that some respondents perceived that drinking/washing in infected water (22%) and eating certain foods (2%) are also modes of transmission. One in ten respondents admitted that they do not know what is the transmission mode of COVID-19 despite knowing about the virus.

Most respondents perceived wearing of face masks (85%) to be the key prevention measure; followed by washing hands (60%), increasing physical distance with others (50%), avoiding crowds and stay home (39%) and disinfecting/cleaning objects and surfaces (15%).

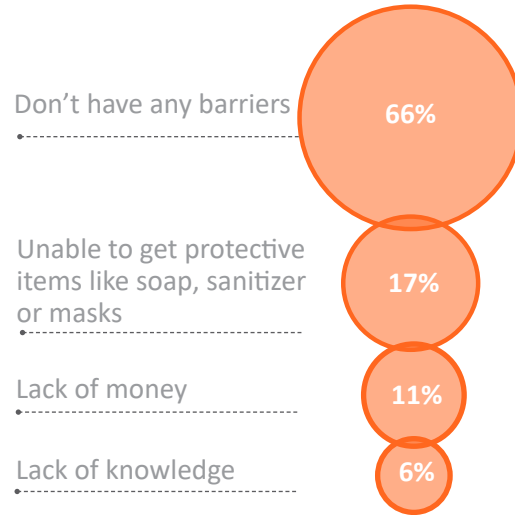
KNOWLEDGE ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE OF COVID-19

MOST COMMONLY KNOWN SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19 (top 5 answers)



98% of respondents had taken action to protect themselves from COVID-19, however...

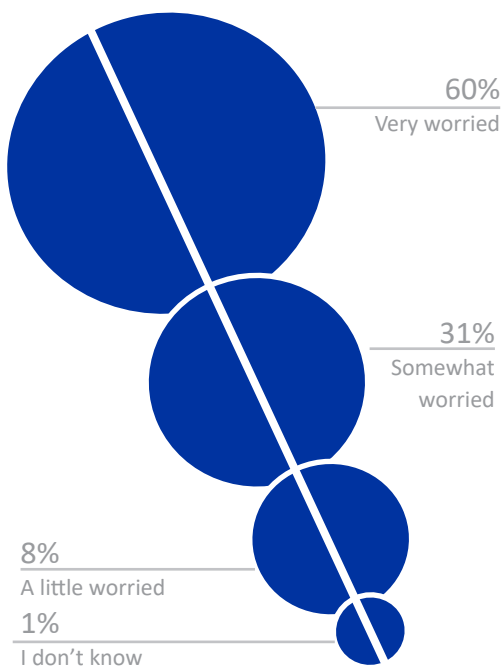
...34% faced barriers



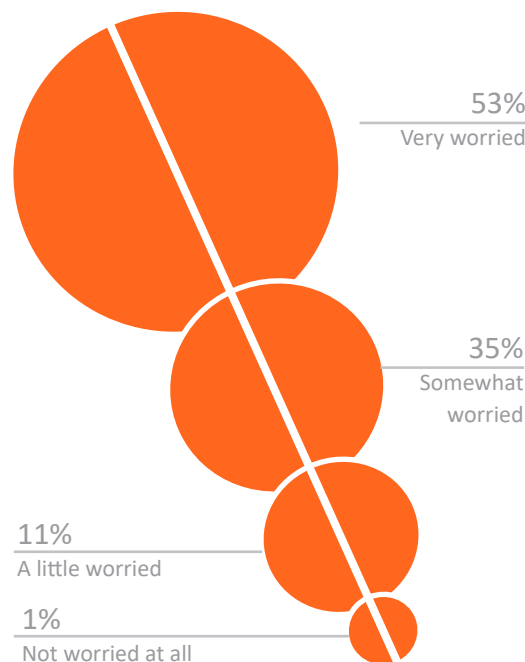
The most commonly known signs and symptoms of COVID-19 among the respondents were fever (80%), coughing (73%), sneezing (40%), and headache (17%). Similar to the findings on transmission of virus, one in ten respondents do not know what the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 are despite up to 98 per cent of them had heard of the virus.

Among respondents who had taken action to protect themselves from the virus, one in three faced barriers. Reasons cited were unable to get protective items (17%), lack of money (11%) and lack of knowledge (6%).

60% of respondents' family and friends are very worried about the pandemic



53% of respondents are very worried about the pandemic



The effects of COVID-19 on the returning migrants and their family/friends could be understood in a deeper level - the challenges they face, their anxieties about the present and the future. This survey found that 53 and 60 per cent of respondents and their family/friends, respectively, are very worried about the pandemic.

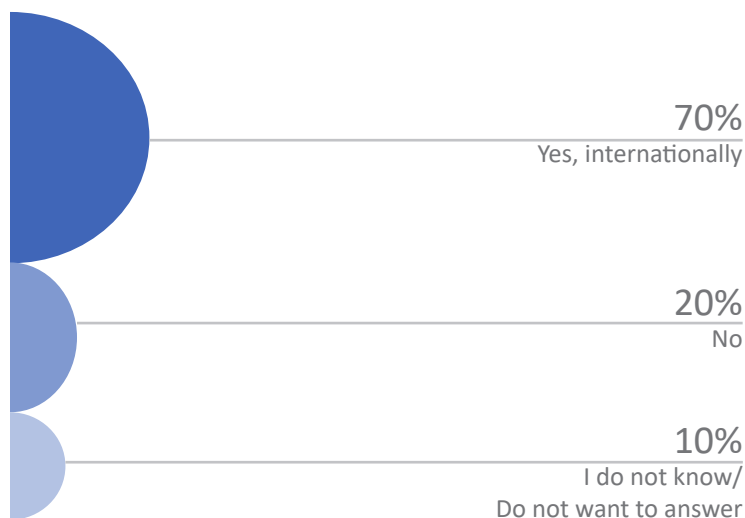
While an appropriate dose of fear and anxiety can motivate people to take action and stay safe, proper risk management and health communication that provides useful information to educate people is important so that people do not fall into panic mode when faced with adversity.

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

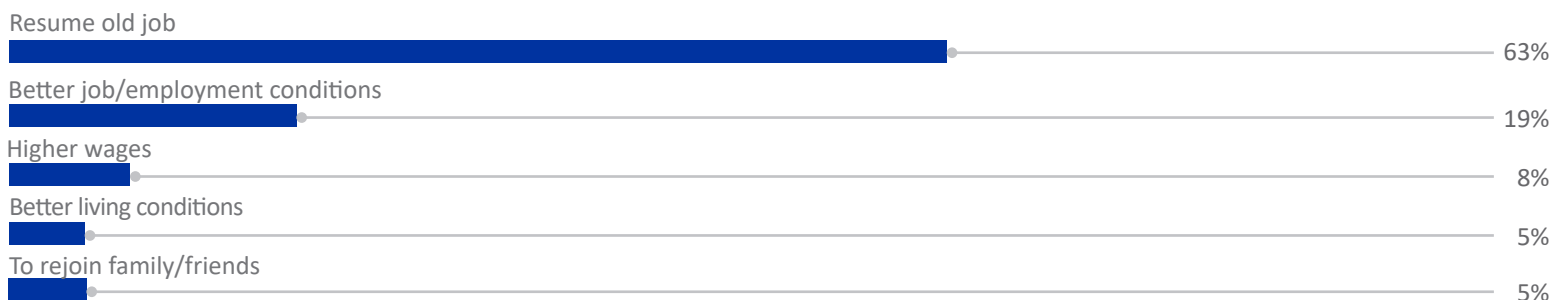
The survey found that 70 per cent of respondents expressed the desire to re-migrate internationally again, with 69 per cent wanting to return to Thailand and one per cent to Malaysia.

Most of them hoped to resume their old job in Thailand (62%), whereas the others reported that they want to continue working abroad, seek better job opportunities and employment conditions (19%). Some of the pull factors respondents reported to working abroad included higher wages (8%), better living conditions (5%) and being able to join their family and friends in Thailand (5%).

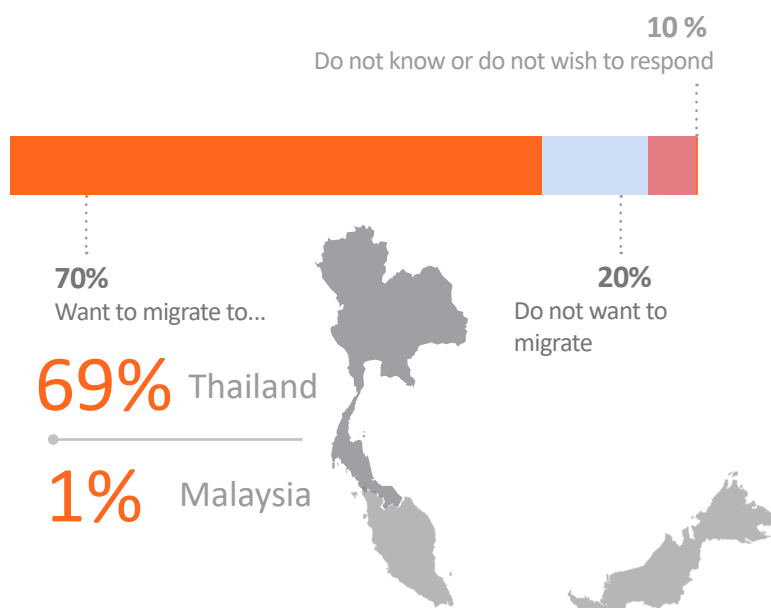
DO YOU WANT TO RE-MIGRATE?



WHY DO YOU WISH TO RE-MIGRATE?



WHERE DO YOU WANT TO RE-MIGRATE?



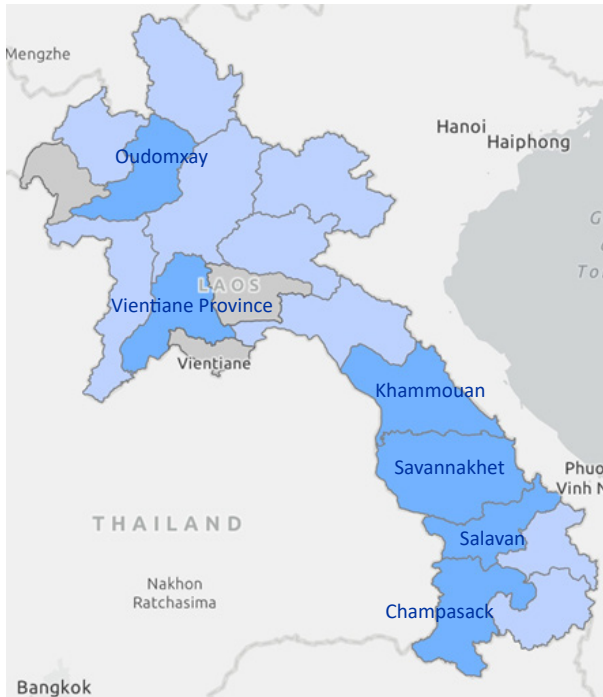
Picture 4 - Arriving At Bus Station / © IOM 2020

SECTION 2 INTERNAL MIGRANTS



Picture 5 - IOM Enumerator Sharing COVID-19 materials with Migrant / © IOM 2020

INTERNAL MIGRANTS TO VIENTIANE CAPITAL BY PROVINCES OF ORIGIN



Base map source: OCHA. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance

- Top 6 provinces with the highest number of internal migrants to Vientiane
- Provinces with internal migrants to Vientiane Capital

186 TOTAL RESPONDENTS

BY PROVINCES OF DESTINATION



In total, 186 internal migrants were interviewed, of which 96 per cent are labour migrants inside Vientiane Capital. The top 6 provinces of origin of the internal migrants are Oudomxay, Vientiane Province, Khammouan, Savannakhet, Salavan and Champasack.

The provinces, outside Vientiane Capital, where labour migrants were seeking for employment were Attapeu (n=1), Luang Prabang (n=1), Phongsaly (n=1), Salavan (n=2), Sekong (n=1) and Vientiane Province (n=2).

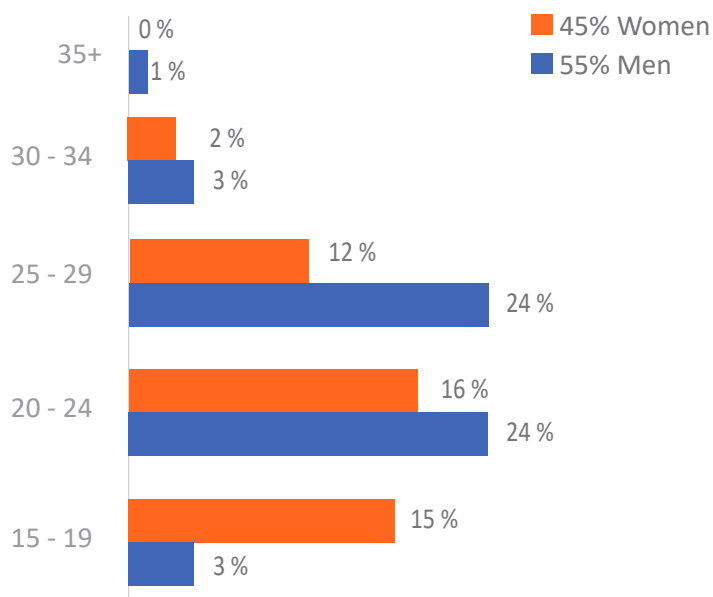


Picture 6 - Young Migrants and Passengers on a Public Bus / © IOM 2020

PROFILES OF INTERNAL MIGRANTS

The proportion of respondents who are men (55%) was slightly higher than women (45%).

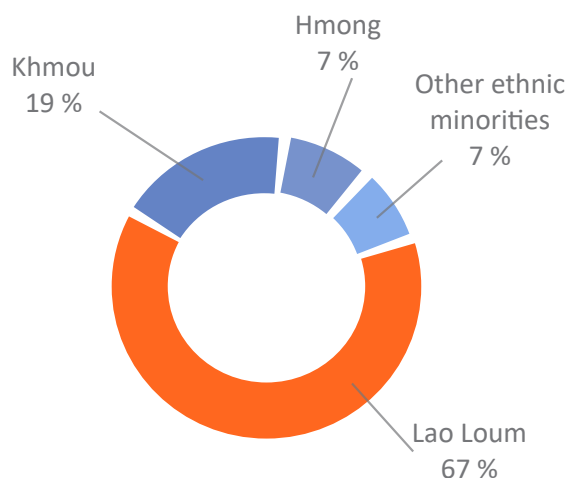
AGE RANGE



Compared to international migrants, internal migrants had a much younger profile, with more than 90 per cent of respondents below the age of 29. The average age of respondents who were men was 25 and women was 22.

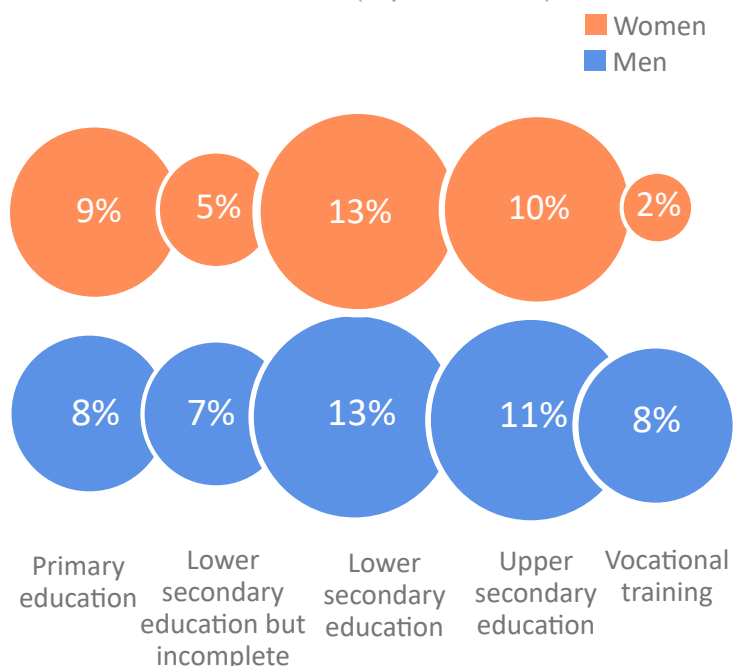
It is worth noting that 15 per cent of women and 3 per cent of men started working between the age of 15 and 19. While this is legal employment in the context of the national laws in Lao People's Democratic Republic, it also means that youth working between the age of 15 to 17 are not in school. Additionally, according to the Lao Labour Law 2003, children between 14 and 18 years of age are not allowed to work more than 48 hours per week.

ETHNICITY



Close to 70 per cent of the respondents were of Lao Loum ethnicity, while the rest were Khmu (19%), Hmong (7%), and other ethnic groups (7%) such as Akha, Katang, Makong and Phouthay.

EDUCATION LEVEL (top 5 answers)



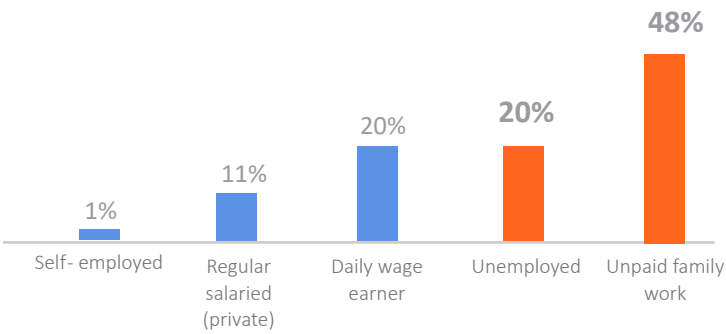
Similar to international migrants, internal migrants in Lao People's Democratic Republic were mostly low skilled workers with more than 86 per cent of respondents reported having received less than 10 years of education (upper secondary).

Among those with less than 10 years of education, one in three was a woman, whereas among those with vocational training, one in five was a woman.

MIGRATION JOURNEY

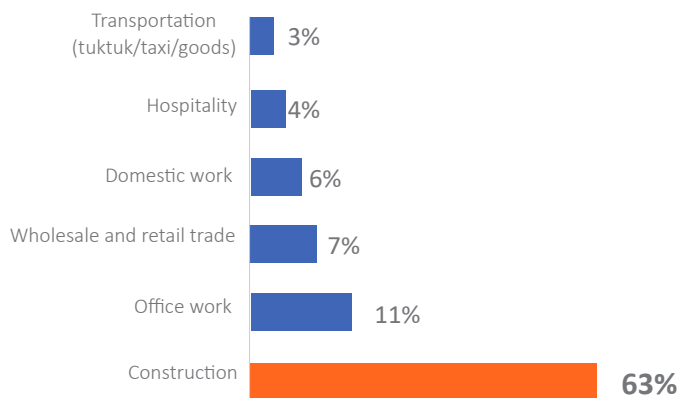
Close to 70 per cent of respondents reported to having no income prior to migrating to another province – they were either engaged in unpaid family work (48%) or was unemployed (20%). The rest were daily wage earners (20%), regular salaried employees in the private sector (11%) or self-employed (1%).

EMPLOYMENT STATUS PRIOR TO MIGRATION

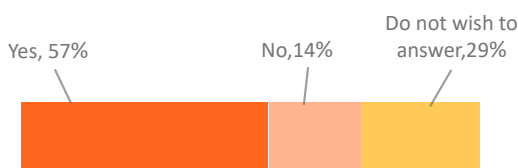


Among those who were employed (daily wage, regular salaried and self-employed) prior to migration, most reported to be working in the construction sector (63%). The remainder were employed in office work (11%), wholesale and retail trade (7%), domestic work (6%), hospitality (4%) and transportation (3%).

SECTOR OF EMPLOYMENT PRIOR TO MIGRATION



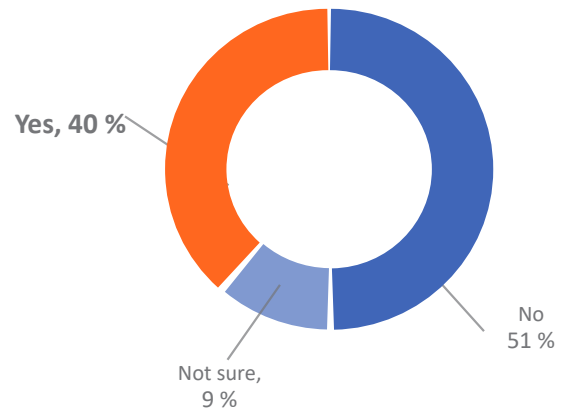
FIRST TIME MIGRANTS



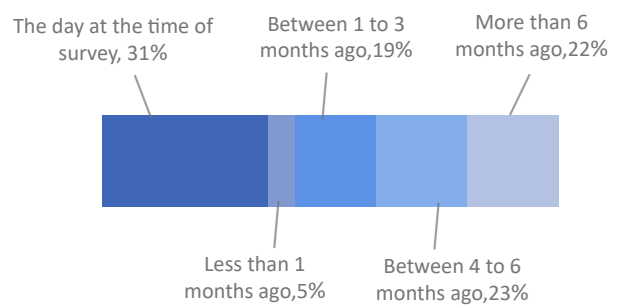
When asked if their migration to another province for work was COVID-19 related, 51 per cent of the respondents indicated no, while 44 per cent indicated yes. The remaining respondents were not sure (9%). Several reported that their contracts in Thailand were still valid, and they have been seeking jobs in Vientiane Capital while waiting for the border to be opened.

Among those who migrated due to COVID-19, 47 per cent migrated within the last six months while 23 per cent migrated more than six months ago. 31 per cent of respondents reported that they did not migrate but travelled daily from their home province to other provinces for work.

DID YOU MIGRATE BECAUSE OF COVID-19?



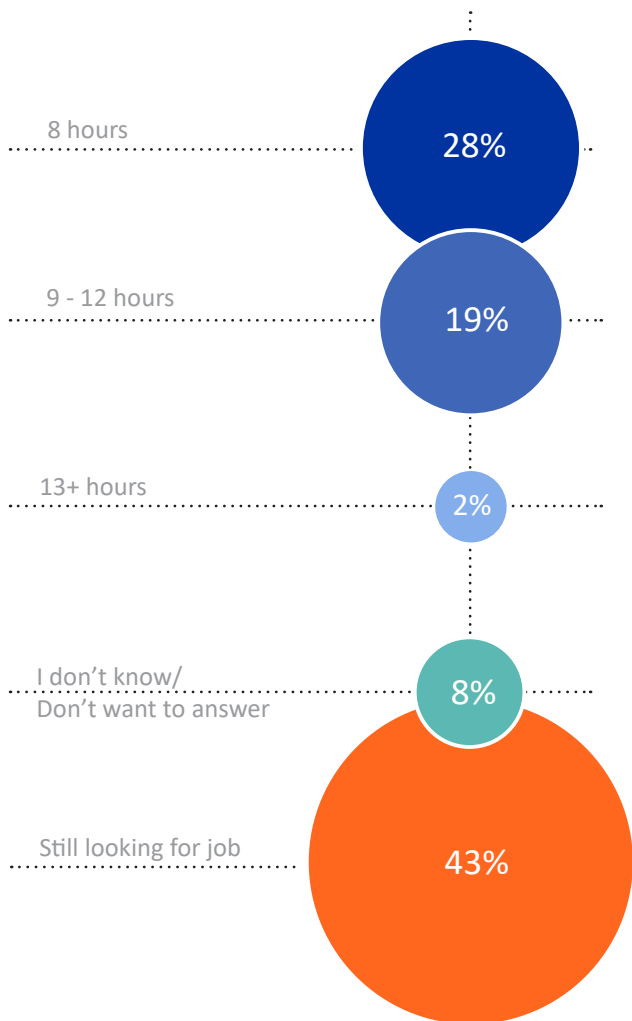
WHEN DID YOU MIGRATE?



Close to 60 per cent of the respondents were first time migrants whereas the rest were seasoned migrants (14%) or do not wish to answer (29%).

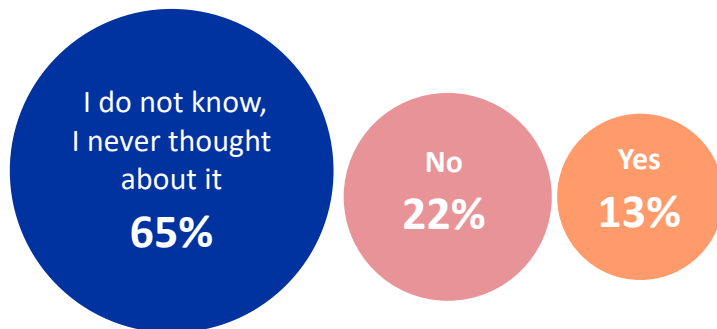
Up to 40 per cent of respondents migrated to another province for work due to COVID-19, while 51 per cent did not do so for the same reason. Up to one in three of them reported that they just travel on the day of survey for work while one in four migrated within the last three months; and one in two of them left more than three months ago.

21% of respondents reported working for more than 8 hours per day



CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED

DO YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT WHEN ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGES ON YOUR JOURNEY?



FOR THOSE WHO KNOW WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT, THEIR SOURCES OF SUPPORT ARE... (multiple answers possible)

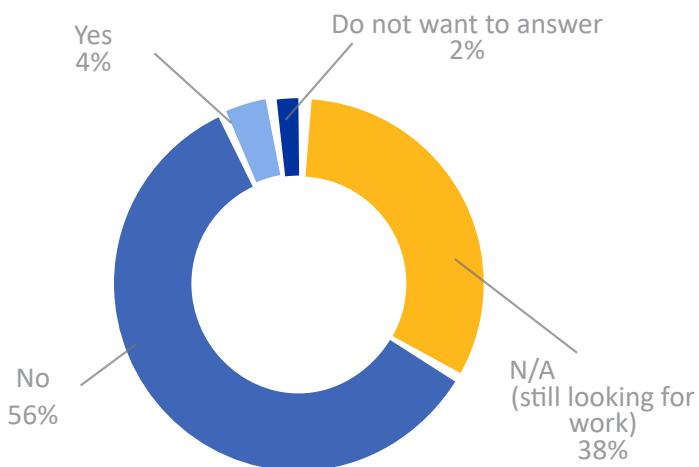


82%
Family/friends



14%
Lao authorities

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED WORKPLACE CHALLENGES?

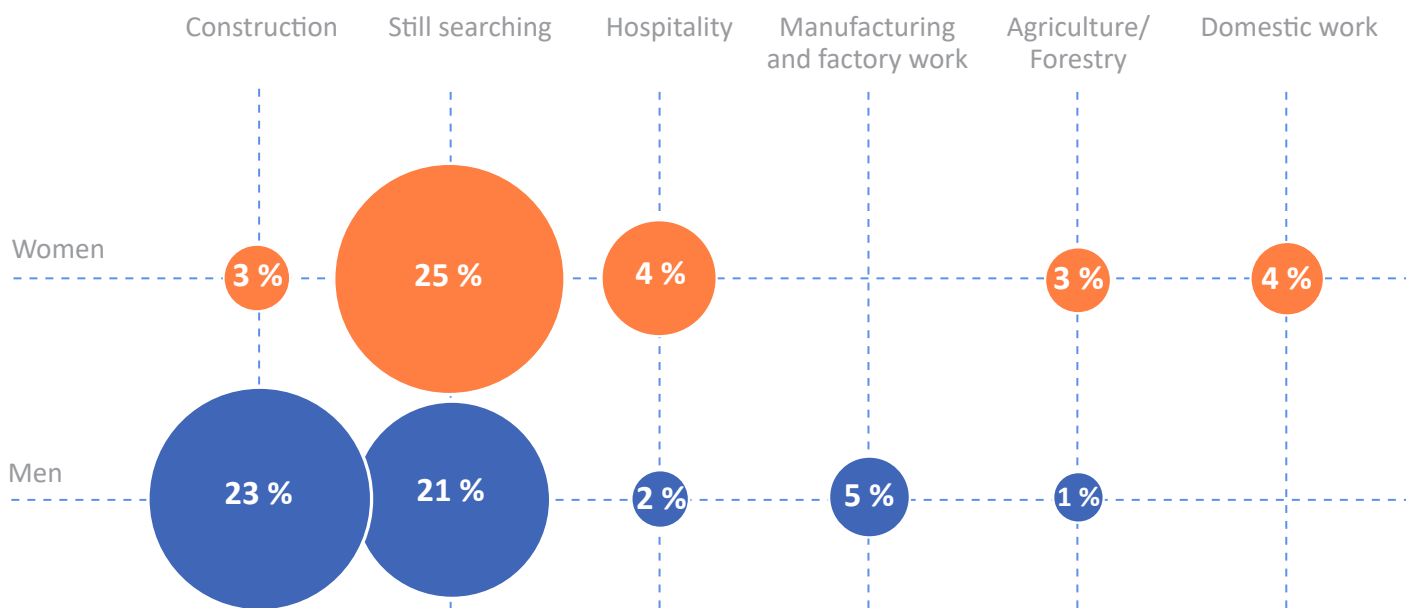


More than 50 per cent of migrants did not experience any workplace challenges, while 4 per cent reported that they had encountered workplace challenges and 2 per cent did not want to answer. Almost two in every five respondents were still looking for work.

When asked if they knew where to find support should the journey be challenging, 65 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had never thought about it, followed by 22 per cent of the respondents reported that they did not know where to find support and 13 per cent said they knew.

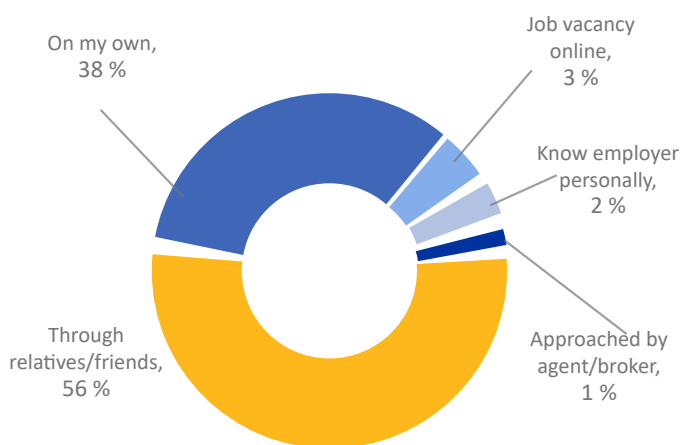
Among those who knew where to find support (13%), more than 80 per cent cited family/friends as a source of support, followed by Lao authorities including embassies, labor attachés, and other authorities (14%). Other sources of support indicated were NGOs/UN Agencies (5%), help hot line (5%) and social media like Facebook (5%).

OCCUPATION AFTER MIGRATION (top 5 sectors, multiple answers possible)



Close to 50 per cent of respondents haven't found a job at the time of the survey. One in four (26%) respondents managed to find a job in the construction sector after migrating to another province. More jobs were observed in the construction of highway and railway specifically starting from the month of October 2020. Men were spread across sectors like construction (23%), hospitality (2%), manufacturing (5%), and agriculture/forestry (1%). Women migrants were mostly found in agriculture/forestry (3%), domestic work (4%), hospitality (4%) and construction (3%).

HOW DID YOU FIND A JOB?



Among those who found a job, close to 60 per cent reported that they knew someone (relatives or friends) who knew the employer (56%) or they knew the employer personally (2%). A small percentage were connected through agents/brokers (1%) or searched online for the job (3%). It was shared that the "agents" or "brokers" mentioned in this context were mostly taxi drivers.

FINANCIAL STATUS

In this survey, respondents reported that their average income as internal migrants were either USD 9 per day or USD 186 per month.

For those who were able to get a job, their income was not depressed as expected as this amount was above the monthly minimum wage in Lao People's Democratic Republic, which is LAK 900, 000 (around USD 110).

USD 9

Average Daily Income

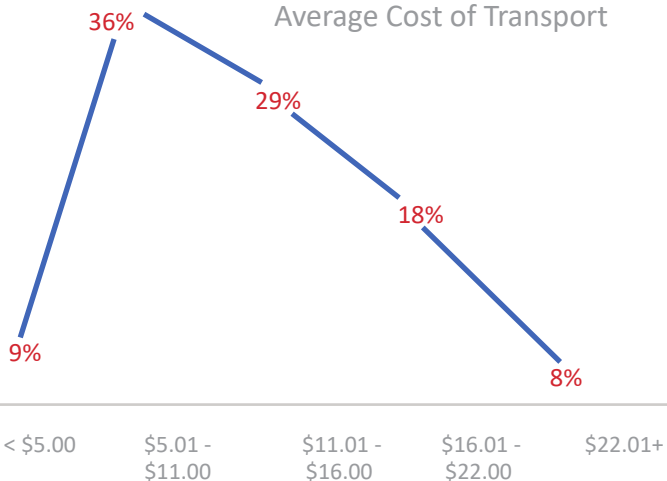
USD 186

Average Monthly Income

COST OF TRANSPORT (IN USD)

USD 13

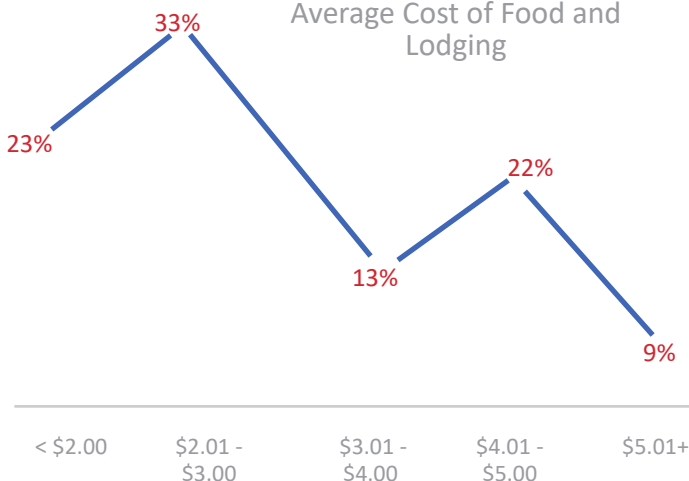
Average Cost of Transport



COST OF FOOD AND LODGING (IN USD)

USD 4

Average Cost of Food and Lodging



SOURCES OF FINANCE (multiple answers possible)



79%

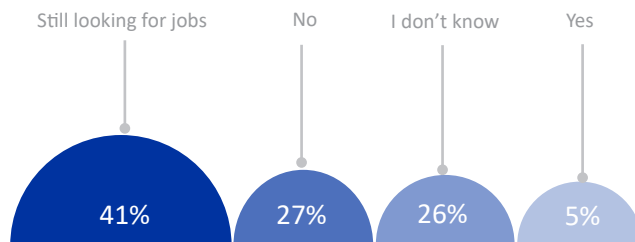
Personal savings



24%

Borrowed from friends and family

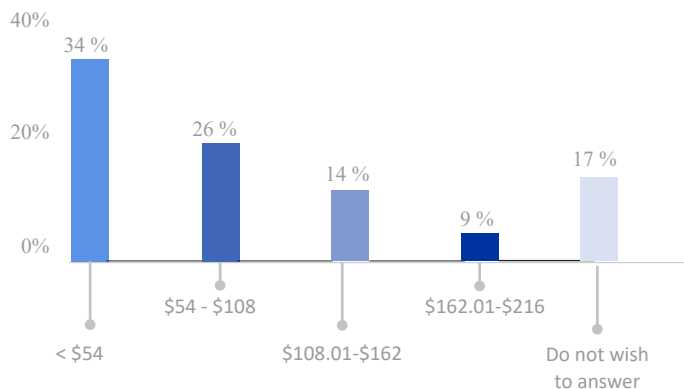
ARE YOU COMPENSATED FOR WORKING EXTRA HOURS?



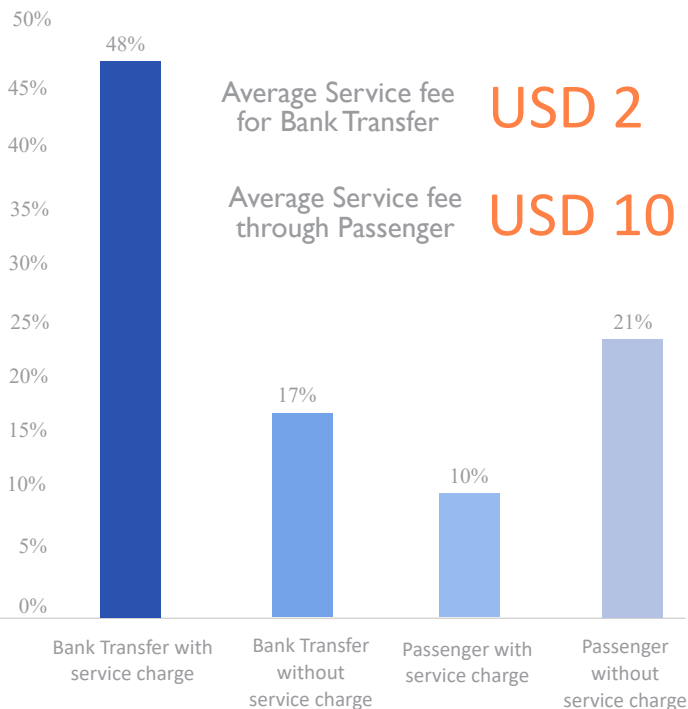
REMITTANCES (USD)

120%
19% of respondents sent remittances home

USD 100
Average Amount of Remittance Per Month



MODE OF REMITTANCE



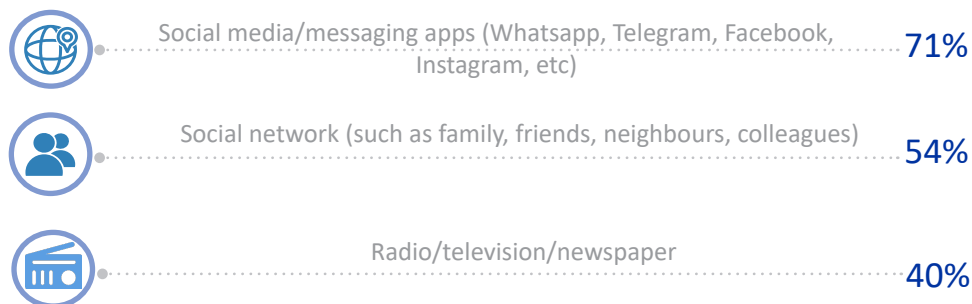
Average Service fee for Bank Transfer **USD 2**

Average Service fee through Passenger **USD 10**

KNOWLEDGE ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE OF COVID-19

SOURCES OF INFORMATION RELATING TO COVID-19

(top 3 answers, mutple answers possible)



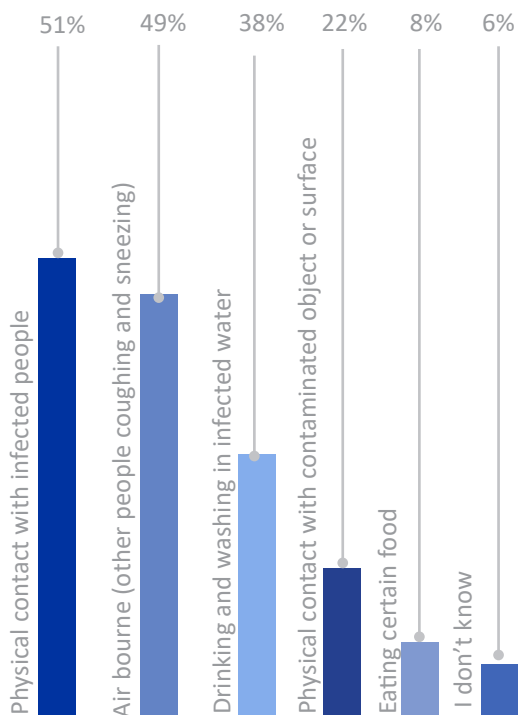
Sixty-eight per cent of respondents reported that they have heard of COVID-19.

Both social media and traditional media (radio/television/newspaper) were among the top 3 main sources of information for majority of the respondents. As such, it is important to ensure that the media are well informed and are accurate in its reporting of the pandemic as they are powerful communication tools; and essential for countering misinformation.

Word-of-mouth communications through family/friends (54%) were also cited by respondents.

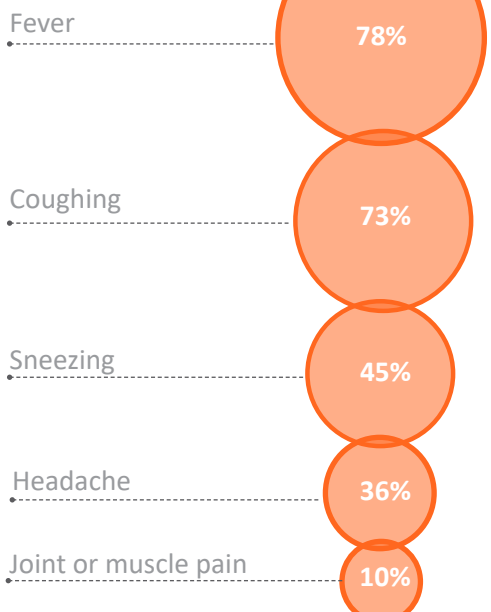
PERCEPTION OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

(top 6 answers, multiple answers possible)



MOST COMMONLY KNOWN SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

(top 5 answers, multiple answers possible)

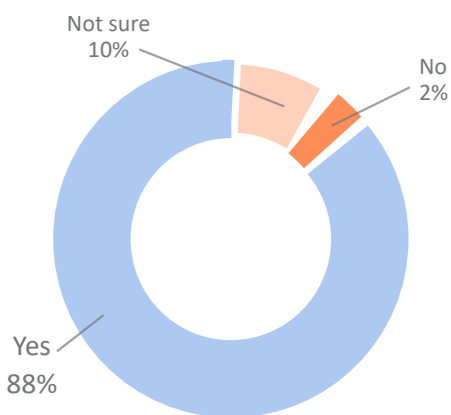


The survey also intended to capture the perception of respondents on COVID-19 transmission, with 73 per cent of respondents perceived that the virus is transmitted through proximity to people (51%) and contaminated object and surface (22%), and 49 per cent perceived the virus to be airborne (when other people cough or sneeze).

It appears that some respondents perceived that drinking/ washing in infected water (28%) and eating certain foods (8%) were also modes of transmission. Less than one in ten respondents admitted that they do not know what is the transmission mode of COVID-19 despite knowing about the virus.

The most commonly known signs and symptoms of COVID-19 among the respondents were fever (78%), coughing (73%), sneezing (45%), headache (36%) and joint/muscle pain (10%).

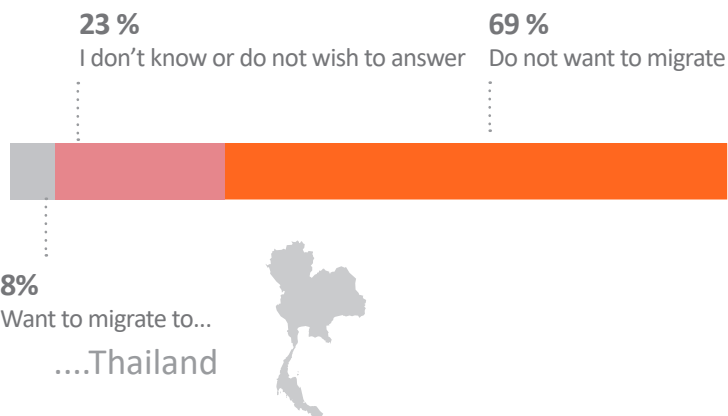
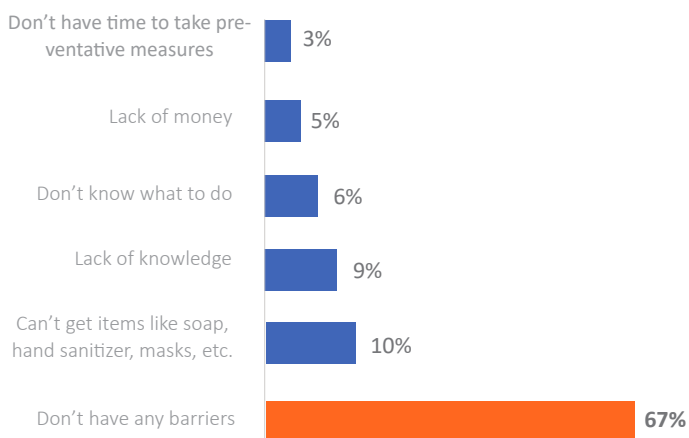
TAKING MEASURES AGAINST COVID-19



When asked if they would take preventive measures against COVID-19, 88 per cent of respondents said yes while 2 per cent said no, the rest were not sure (10%).

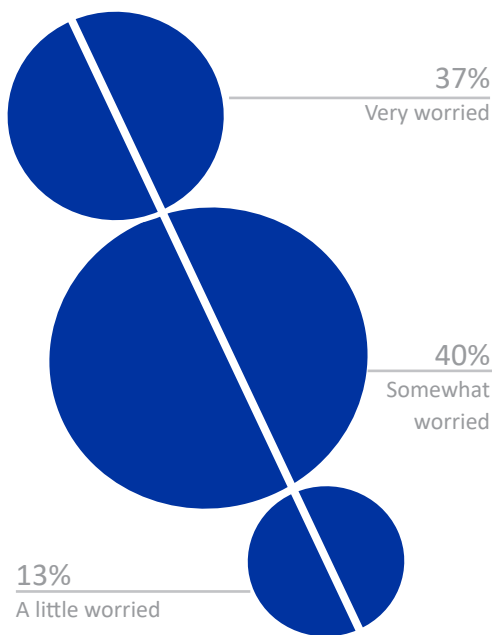
Respondents were also asked about their barriers to taking preventive measures. While a majority of them indicated that they did not have any barriers (67%), the top three barriers included inability to get items like soap, hand sanitizer, mask, etc (10%), lack of knowledge (9%) and do not know what to do (6%).

BARRIERS TO ACTION

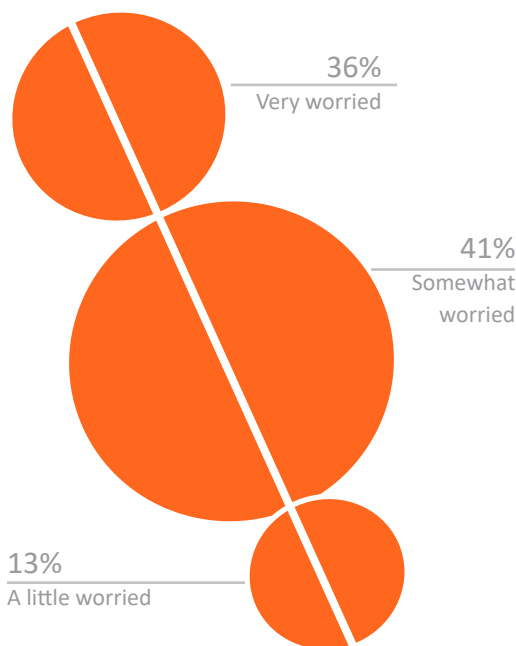


Close to 70 per cent of the respondents indicated that they were not interested in migrating internationally even when borders will reopen, while 8 per cent of respondents reported that they were interested in migrating for work, with Thailand as their choice of destination.

37% of respondents were very worried about the pandemic



36% of respondents' family and friends were very worried about the pandemic



The effects of COVID-19 on the internal migrants and their family/friends were less intense than those who had returned from abroad, where less than half of internal migrants and their family/friends (37%) were very worried about the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the world not only in the health aspect, but also in the socio-economic sense. The damage to economies has been enormous and the day-to-day lives of billions of people have been affected severely. While the number of people infected in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is much lower than in many other parts of the world, the pandemic has still significantly disrupted lives in the region.

For short-term or temporary migrants working abroad, who are often low-skilled and have little social protection, the impact of sudden job losses on their migration status as well as on their income can be drastic. Job loss as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak means loss of income for consumption, to remit home, and to repay their loans taken out to finance their journey. Typically, many such workers live in shared accommodation or operate in work environments that are not conducive to physical distancing, leaving them in a more vulnerable situation to contract COVID-19. Moreover, loss of employment could also mean loss of legal status and risks of harassment by local authorities.

Among migrants working abroad legally are those who migrated without proper documents. This group is in vulnerable situations as they are often employed in jobs with no social protection benefits. Their unofficial status in their host country makes them ineligible for any government welfare. It is reported that there are up to 3.9 million migrant workers in Thailand, consisting of those with legal documents and those without. However, reliable data on migrants working “unofficially” in the country is still lacking.

For migrants returning from abroad, which is one of the two categories this report focused on, COVID-19 forced many of them to return home after sustaining losses in terms of unpaid wages, depleted savings and without any social support. In addition to the health challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the large and chaotic population movement of migrants seeking to return home, the sudden influx of returnees may also lead or exacerbate social tensions with host communities.

Against this background, the pandemic is also expected to put a greater strain on regional cooperation initiatives. Scholars have thus called for sustained regional policy coordination on all socioeconomic matters to mitigate and isolate the pandemic shock. Drawing from past experiences, there is a need for timely and greater coordination in the ASEAN region to mitigate the pending economic shock in terms of unemployment, corporate bankruptcy, and financial market fragility.¹⁵ In the absence of regional cooperation, the cost of the pandemic and economic shocks will increase significantly.

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DTM

IOM DISPLACEMENT
TRACKING MATRIX