

# SURVEY ON PROFILES AND CONDITIONS OF FREELANCE WORKERS IN CHIANG MAI CITY

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)  
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Publisher: IOM Thailand

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

Tel: (+66) 2-343-9300

Email: [DTMThailand@iom.int](mailto:DTMThailand@iom.int)

Website: <https://dtm.iom.int/thailand>

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Cover photo: Migrant workers are transported on the back of a truck in Chiang Mai province. © IOM 2023/Sonia BLUE

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## INTRODUCTION

Chiang Mai city is Thailand’s second largest after Bangkok and constitutes the northern region’s main economic and transit hub. In its Pa Tan district near the city center, migrant and Thai workers gather in a specific soi (alley) to wait for potential employers to drive by and offer them freelance work. Once an agreement is made, workers are transported to destinations throughout Thailand’s north to complete mainly agricultural or construction work before being dropped back off in Chiang Mai city. To gain a better understanding of the profiles of freelance workers and the conditions of their work, IOM Thailand initiated a survey exercise at this soi in Chiang Mai city, interviewing those waiting for employers regarding their employment choices, wages, work accommodations, and challenges. Data was collected in October 2023 among 179 respondents. Due to the sample size, the following findings should be considered indicative only.

### RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

THAI	45%
MYANMAR	40%
STATELESS	14%
OTHER NATIONALITY	1%
WOMEN	21%
MEN	77%
DID NOT IDENTIFY GENDER	2%
AVERAGE AGE	40.5



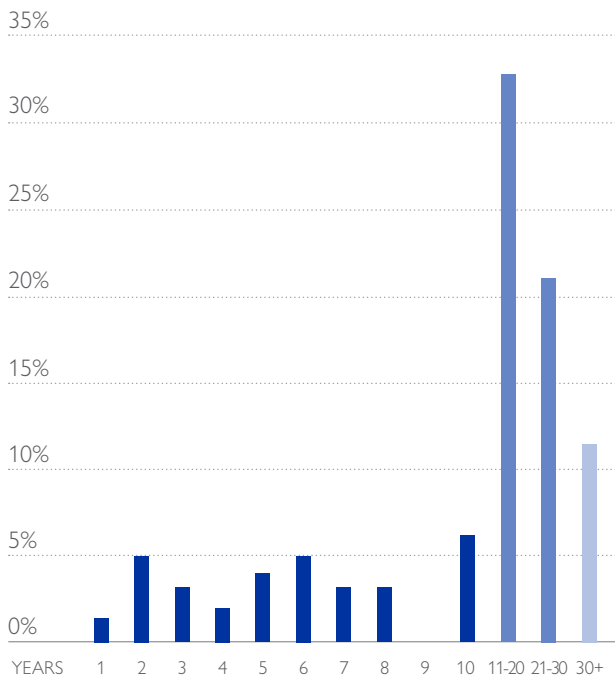
PHOTO: A construction camp near Chiang Mai city. © IOM 2023/Sonia BLUE

## WORKER PROFILES

Among those who consented to be surveyed, three-quarters were men (77%) and the remaining were women (21%) or chose not to identify their gender (2%). This gender breakdown remained relatively stable among the various nationalities of the respondents, which included Thai (45%), Myanmar (40%), other nationality (1%), and those without a documented nationality (14%), henceforth referred to as stateless. While not captured in the survey, field observation revealed that most respondents who held Thai nationality belonged to an ethnic minority, such as Thai-Karen or other hilltribe groups.

A third (32%) of non-Thai respondents had migrated to Thailand within the last ten years. One out of ten Myanmar respondents and eight per cent of stateless respondents had arrived within the last three years, meaning they arrived since the 2021 military takeover of Myanmar. Respondent migration to Thailand peaked in 2003 (16%), coinciding with political and economic difficulties in Myanmar, including new sanctions imposed by the US government.

### LENGTH OF STAY IN THAILAND AMONG NON-THAI WORKERS

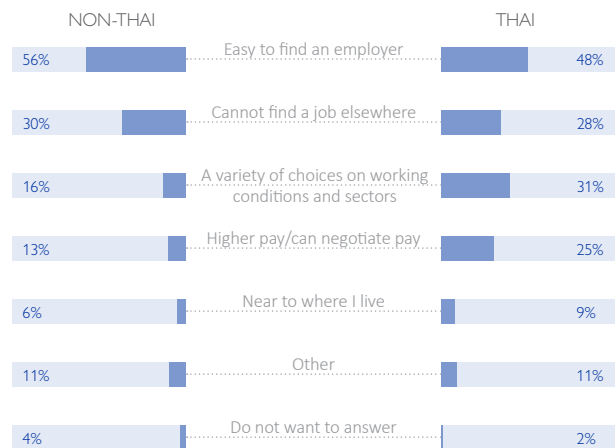


Over half of all migrant workers and stateless individuals (56%) moved to Chiang Mai within a year of migrating to Thailand. A fifth of Thai respondents (18%) reported being originally from Chiang Mai. While the average age among those waiting in the soi at the time of the data collection was 40 years old, the average age that both Thai and non-Thai respondents reported moving to Chiang Mai was around 26 years old.

Among all respondents, the primary reason for moving to Chiang Mai was employment (93%). Visiting friends and family (7%) constituted the second-most cited reason among both Thai and non-Thai respondents.

The majority (81%) of respondents without Thai citizenship were considered to be staying in Thailand regularly based on their documentation. Myanmar respondents most often possessed passports while stateless individuals most often held Thai documentation reflecting their status as lacking a documented nationality. Additionally, two-thirds (74%) of migrant workers and stateless individuals held a work permit, though such permits are tied to a specific employer and thus do not cover freelance work.

### REASONS FOR SEEKING FREELANCE WORK IN THIS LOCATION



Overall, a fifth (18%) of respondents arrived to the soi having already arranged a job with an employer and were waiting for them to pick them up. The remainder were asked why they chose to seek work at this particular soi, to which many responded that it was easy to find an employer at this spot (53%), they could not find a job elsewhere (29%), and the jobs here offered a variety of choices on working conditions and sectors (23%). A further 18 per cent cited that jobs from this soi paid better than jobs elsewhere and that they were able to negotiate their wages. The general flexibility of freelance work appeared to be a major motivator for many respondents, and enumerators observed workers often rejecting employers when they found the terms of their employment, regarding pay or the type of work, unsatisfactory.

The majority (87%) of respondents learned about this location for seeking freelance work through word of mouth from their friends or family.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

Most respondents (85%, n = 153) had experience working jobs that they found at this soi already. Thai and stateless respondents were slightly less likely than Myanmar respondents to have found jobs before (81% and 84% compared to 90%, respectively).

Based on past experiences, the respondents indicated that for multi-day jobs, **employers rarely provide accommodation for workers (22%)**. If they did, there was a roughly 50 per cent chance that it was not provided for free. Additionally, accommodation provided by an employer was more likely to be shared accommodation compared to accommodation found by oneself (56% versus 19%). A third of respondents (29%) reported having to share accommodation during their last job. At the same time, 12 per cent reported not having any accommodation at all during their last job, meaning they had to sleep in public or in their vehicles.

Overall, half of respondents' most recent jobs found at this soi were single day jobs (52%), though this was slightly more prevalent among Thai respondents (61%) compared to non-Thai (45%). On the other hand, non-Thai individuals were more likely to have recently completed multi-day jobs lasting two weeks or less (41%) compared to Thai respondents (22%). The longest amount of time respondents spent on a job was a month.

Respondents' average daily wage was around 500 THB (about 14 USD according to the UN official rate of exchange as of 13 October 2023) with 95 per cent of respondents earning over minimum wage (340 THB or around 9 USD in Chiang Mai province). Average daily wage varied slightly with nationality and gender, however, with migrant workers and stateless individuals earning marginally less than Thais on average (489 THB/around 13 USD versus 510 THB/around 14 USD) and women earning less than men on average (446 THB/around 12 USD versus 513 THB/around 14 USD). According to IOM Thailand's Mobility Tracking exercise, key informants throughout Chiang Mai province estimate migrant workers' average daily wages to be around 300 THB (around 9 USD), suggesting that freelance work may indeed be more profitable than other employment opportunities generally available to migrants.

Regarding payment methods, 93 per cent of respondents reported receiving a daily wage and five per cent reported

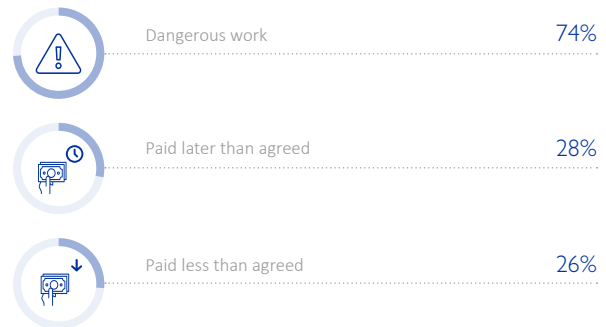
receiving a bulk fee for their most recent job. Two-thirds of respondents (65%) reported having some sort of agreement with their most recent employer regarding the terms of their employment, but almost all agreements (98%) were verbal only. These proportions were consistent between both Thai and non-Thai individuals.

When asked whether they experienced any challenges while working a job they had found at the soi, over a third (41%) responded that they did not experience any. However, **over a quarter (29%) cited having to do dangerous work**. Such dangerous work was more heavily represented among non-Thai respondents (42%) compared to Thai respondents (11%). The issue of **being paid less than agreed was cited by around 16 per cent of both Thai and non-Thai respondents**, but non-Thai individuals were more likely to also cite having experienced being paid later than agreed (16%) compared to Thais (6%). Total lack of payment after a job was reported by 14 per cent of Thais and 6 per cent of non-Thai individuals.

## CHALLENGES RELATED TO JOBS FOUND AT THIS LOCATION

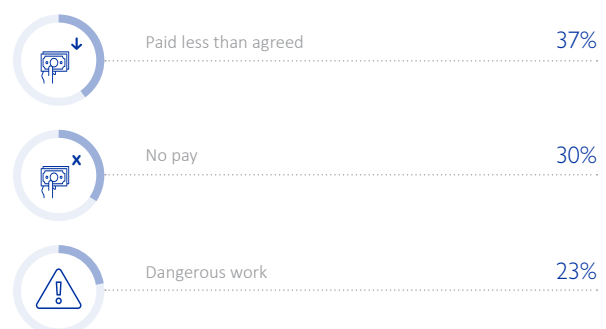
### 57% Percentage of non-Thai respondents who experienced challenges

TOP 3 CHALLENGES (among those who reported experiencing challenges)



### 46% Percentage of Thai respondents who experienced challenges

TOP 3 CHALLENGES (among those who reported experiencing challenges)



## WORKING EXPECTATIONS

Respondents who had not previously found a job from this soi (n = 25) were asked about their expectations regarding the working conditions. The majority (60%) expected to work day jobs. Half of those seeking multi-day jobs expected to be provided accommodation by their employer for free, contrasting with the reality experienced by other workers. Their average expected daily wage, on the other hand, was slightly lower than what was cited by other workers at around 470 THB (around 13 USD). Women and non-Thai respondents expected slightly lower pay than men and Thai nationals. Three-quarters (76%) predicted they would be paid a daily fee, whilst eight per cent expected a bulk fee. Less than half (44%) expected having an agreement with their employer regarding the terms of their employment, but of those that did, over a third (36%) expected to have an agreement in writing.

## RISKS

Roughly a third of respondents reported seeing or experiencing violence either during a job or while waiting in the soi itself. This proportion did not vary between men and women, but there were variations between non-Thai respondents and Thai respondents, with the former experiencing or witnessing more violence both in the soi and at work.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE SEEN OR EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE

	IN THE SOI	AT WORK
THAI	33%	24%
MYANMAR	38%	32%
STATELESS	52%	44%



PHOTO Orange orchards worked by Myanmar migrants in Chiang Mai province. © IOM 2023/Sonia BLUE



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