



FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS: INSIGHTS INTO THE PROFILES AND VULNERABILITIES OF MYANMAR MIGRANTS TO THAILAND (ROUND THREE)

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



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Introduction

Labour migration plays a key role in the South-East Asian context. In Thailand, this is owing to the country's steady economic growth over the past decades and the subsequent need for labour. Thailand has continued to attract low-skilled workers from neighbouring countries. The 2019 UN Migration Reports states "the number of non-Thai residents within the country has increased from an estimated 3.7 million in 2014 to 4.9 million in 2018, which includes approximately 3.9 million migrant workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam" (p. XI).¹ The actual number of migrants living in Thailand is believed to be higher still, as undocumented migrants are not accounted for in official statistics. Nationals from Myanmar make up the largest migrant worker population in Thailand, with recent estimates putting the figure at 2.3 million individuals.²

To gain a better understanding of the migration patterns and the nature of flows from Myanmar to Thailand - with a particular focus on any possible vulnerabilities - IOM Thailand's Migrant Assistance and Counter-Trafficking Unit initiated a survey exercise in June 2018 in both Mae Sot and Phop Phra in the province of Tak, using one of the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) tools - the so-called Flow Monitoring component. Flow Monitoring is a tool designed to track movement flows, and the overall situation at key points of origin, transit and destination. Hence, it is an optimal tool for providing a more detailed understanding of the migration situation at the Thai-Myanmar border. With special consideration to the experience of migrant workers, IOM Thailand aimed to find out more about migrants' profiles, drivers of migration, level of preparedness for migration, as well as associated vulnerabilities and return intentions.

IOM Thailand collected three rounds of data over a duration of six months: from mid-June to mid-August, from mid-August to mid-October and from mid-October to mid-December 2018.

From mid-June until mid-August 2018, a total of 4,284 Myanmar nationals were surveyed in the province of Tak, of whom 3,765 were identified as migrant workers. The 3,765 migrant workers fell into two different migrant groups. The first group was comprised of incoming migrants, arriving in Thailand prior to starting employment and the second group of outgoing migrants, returning after their employment ended. Two different survey tools were designed to capture the most accurate information possible for both target groups. The findings served to identify migration patterns as well as common challenges and vulnerabilities.

In September 2018, IOM Thailand published "Flow Monitoring Surveys: Insights into the Profiles and Vulnerabilities of Myanmar Migrants to Thailand", which analyzed the first round of survey data collected in Mae Sot and Phop Phra between mid-June and mid-August 2018. The initial report included an extensive theoretical section, reviewing existing literature for the five thematic areas of interest: Myanmar migrant profiles, drivers of migration, pre-migration preparations and arrangements, migrant vulnerabilities and return intentions.

A second report was then published in January 2019, covering a data collection timeframe from mid-August to mid-October 2018. During this period a total of 3,233 Myanmar nationals were surveyed in the province of Tak, of whom 3,013 were identified as migrant workers. The second report drew comparisons between the two data sets, comparing results and identifying similarities and differences between the population groups.

1 United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand (2019). Thailand Migration Report 2019. Bangkok. Retrieved from: http://thailand.iom.int/sites/default/files/document/publications/Thailand%20Report%202019_22012019_LowRes.pdf

2 IOM (2013). Assessing potential changes in the migration patterns of Myanmar migrants and their impacts on Thailand Retrieved from: <https://thailand.iom.int/assessing-potential-changes-migration-patterns-myanmar-migrants-and-their-impacts-thailand>

From mid-October to mid-December 2018 the team collected 4,188 additional surveys in the districts of Mae Sot and Phop Phra, of which 4,049 were completed by Myanmar migrant workers. Looking at the data in its totality, DTM Thailand collected 11,705 surveys in six months, of which 10,827 were completed by Myanmar migrant workers.

Executive Summary

Building on the first two reports, this report analyzes the third round of data collection and provides a more detailed analysis of the data, examining the similarities and differences in the results across the three rounds of data collection. In so doing, the report aims to advance a more comprehensive understanding of Myanmar migrants in Thailand, with the larger dataset increasing the representativeness of findings. The report first provides a thematic analysis of the findings and then draws correlations between factors like gender, education, documentation status, employment sector and duration of stay in Thailand.

As the final of three reports, the analysis will not focus extensively on the last round of data results as such and will instead provide an overarching analysis of the combined datasets and report on the combined data outcomes.

Migrant Profiles

Myanmar migrants coming to Thailand for employment were predominately married males between 16 and 30 years of age having completed either primary or secondary school education. For both incoming and returning migrants the most common length of stay in Thailand was over a year. The primary provinces of destination in Thailand were Bangkok, Tak, Samut Sakhon and Chon Buri. Kayin and Mon State, together with the Bago East region, remained the main migrant-sending states within Myanmar throughout all three data collection rounds.

Drivers of Migration

Roughly one quarter of the sample was unemployed before leaving Myanmar, with the majority of migrants employed on a daily wage or self-employment basis before their migration to Thailand. Employment was the main reason cited for coming to Thailand. Data shows that migration seems to be cyclical as a large share of the migrants surveyed had been to Thailand to seek employment before. Myanmar migrants stated preferring Thailand over other countries because of its geographical proximity and easily accessible labour market. The importance of family and friends in Thailand as sources of information and as factors in choosing Thailand as a destination country lends credence to the migration network theory which suggests that migrants usually depend on pre-established networks in their country of destination.

Pre-migration Preparations and Arrangements

Migrants prefer to arrange employment prior to their journey, mainly through the help of family or friends in Thailand or through an agency. Manufacturing and construction are particularly popular sectors of employment. Returning migrants reported paying, on average, more than twice what incoming migrants paid for their migration journeys. To finance the cost of migration, incoming migrants relied predominantly on their savings and income, whereas returning migrants more frequently reported having borrowed money from a variety of different actors. Most respondents who borrowed money reported borrowing from money lenders and/or family or friends in Myanmar. Returning migrants were also more likely to have received support in their migration arrangements. The responses on support and migration arrangements indicate the importance of family and friends in Thailand as well as in Myanmar, who are identified as key actors and active facilitators in the respondents' migration processes.

Migrants' Vulnerabilities

On average, migrants ranked their ability to speak, understand and read Thai as relatively low. With respect to documentation status, those employed in the agriculture and domestic work sectors were more likely not to have any form of documentation. Respondents that worked in Tak province frequently reported wages below the provincial minimum, as did respondents returning from Bangkok. Migrants returning from Chon Buri and Samut Sakhon provinces reported, on average, higher wages than the provincial daily minimum. Migrants without documents also more often reported to be paid below the median minimum daily wage. Fewer incoming migrants reported experiencing problems during their journeys than returning migrants. Incoming migrants also rarely expected to face problems at the workplace in Thailand.

Return

A third of returning migrants reported having faced some kind of problem at the workplace and almost two thirds of the return sample expected to face challenges upon their return, mostly associated with their mental or physical health, as well as with finding a job. Only one out of three returning migrants considered migrating again, predominantly to Thailand. For roughly half of the migrants, their general financial situation improved through migration. For those that reported their financial situation as having deteriorated, the main reasons were attributed to not making enough money in Thailand or to accumulating debt.



Picture 1 - Man Crossing from Myanmar to Thailand at an Informal Crossing Point in Phop Phra

Methodology

The data analyzed in this report is collected using the same methodology as that of the first two reports published in September 2018 and January 2019, “Flow Monitoring Surveys: Insights into the Profiles and Vulnerabilities of Myanmar Migrants to Thailand” (Round One and Round Two). While the first two reports considered data collected between mid-June and mid-October 2018, this report analyzes data collected during the third round (mid-October to mid-December 2018) and also provides a comprehensive analysis of data collected throughout the entire period, from mid-June to mid-December 2018. As in previous reports, the data collection was conducted using two different survey tools designed to capture the most accurate information possible about incoming and returning Myanmar migrant workers (see Table 1).

Table 1 - DTM Survey Tools

Tool	Target Population	Definition
FMS Tool 1	Myanmar migrants that are crossing the border from Myanmar into Thailand	Myanmar nationals that are entering Thailand with the intention to work, irrespective of whether they come to Thailand for daily work or intend to stay longer. Work is defined as taking up employment from an employer, i.e. self-employment is not considered working in this survey.
FMS Tool 2	Myanmar migrants that are returning from Thailand to Myanmar	Myanmar nationals that are going back/returning to Myanmar after having worked for at least one day in Thailand. Work is defined as taking up employment from an employer, i.e. self-employment is not considered working in this survey.

As in the first two reports, the analysis is based on surveys collected both in Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts, in the province of Tak. The Round Three sample consists of 4,188 Myanmar nationals migrating to Thailand of whom 4,049 individuals indicated coming to Thailand for employment. A total of 3,092 surveys were collected with survey Tool 1 - incoming Myanmar migrants to Thailand, and 1,096 surveys were collected with survey Tool 2 - returning Myanmar migrants to Myanmar. The combined dataset from the three rounds of data collection consists of 11,705 Myanmar migrants.

The Flow Monitoring Surveys conducted at select border crossing points are designed to collect and compile structured data to advance an overall understanding of current trends in migration flows of Myanmar migrant workers between Thailand and Myanmar. The analysis of the survey data will follow the structure of the pre-designed thematic areas outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 - Thematic Areas

1	2	3	4	5
Migrant profiles (demographics + socio-economic)	Drivers of migration	Pre-migration arrangements/ preparations	Vulnerabilities en route and upon arrival in Thailand	Reasons for return and challenges upon return

Data Limitations

With regard to data collected using Tool 2 (returning Myanmar migrants), 67 per cent of the surveys collected in Round Three (700 out of 1,096) and 65 per cent of the surveys collected across the entire data collected period (1,912 out of 2,924) were conducted in the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in Mae Sot. The survey data therefore over-represents the deportee population of Myanmar migrants and results may over-report migrant vulnerabilities. The report will highlight this potential bias whenever relevant to the interpretation of data findings.

For numeric variables such as remittances, wages and the cost of migration, large outliers were removed from the analysis to avoid skewing results. In some cases, this might lead to slight inaccuracies in the results, especially when taking the mean of these numeric variables. To keep this bias to a minimum, we present different range brackets for remittances, wages and journey costs.

The data collected should also not be regarded as representative of all Myanmar migrants coming to Thailand or returning to Myanmar as the data collection activity only provides information on those Myanmar nationals that enter or exit through select crossing points in Tak province. With regard to migrants using other entry and exit locations in Thailand, this data cannot provide any information.

Data Analysis

Round Three Data

Between 13 October 2018 and 12 December 2018, IOM Thailand collected a total of 4,188 surveys using two questionnaire tools designed using the DTM Flow Monitoring component and adapted to fit the context of Tak province, Thailand. To capture the migrant population traveling from Myanmar to Thailand, the Tool 1 survey asked migrants if they intended to stay in Thailand or if they had plans to travel further. The results show that 50 survey respondents out of the 3,092 surveyed under Tool 1 reported that they did not wish to stay in Thailand (1.6%). Of these 50 respondents, the majority intended to travel on further to Malaysia (39 individuals) and the remainder to Indonesia (11 individuals). After discovering that these respondents did not wish to stay in Thailand, the 50 surveys were removed from the sample; the total sample size for analysis in the end was then $n = 4,138$.

Of the 4,138 surveys a total of 3,904 interviews were collected in the district of Mae Sot, and 234 surveys were collected in the district of Phop Phra. Looking at the two survey tools, 3,042 surveys were collected with Tool 1 (incoming Myanmar nationals) and 1,096 surveys with Tool 2 (returning Myanmar nationals).

Combined Round Data

In the six months period, between 13 June 2018 and 12 December 2018, a total of 11,705 Myanmar national were surveyed using the DTM Flow Monitoring Surveys. Filtering out those that did not intend to stay in Thailand (for incoming migrants), the analysis will use the sample of $n = 11,466$ Myanmar migrant workers. Of the 11,466 individuals, the larger share of 8,542 Myanmar nationals were incoming migrants (to Thailand) and 2,924 individuals were identified as returning migrants (to Myanmar).

The analysis section below follows the structure of the different thematic areas; whenever possible the study also establishes relationships and cross tabulations between the different thematic areas. Emphasis is also placed on comparison between the two survey tools, as well as between the three rounds of data collection. Nevertheless, while the first two reports were more focused on the individual round results, this report and analysis looks holistically at the full data set, which combines the data of the three rounds of data collection.

Thematic Area 1 - Migrant Profiles

Myanmar migrants coming to Thailand for employment were predominately married males between 16 and 30 years of age with either primary or secondary school education. The most common length of stay in Thailand was over a year, and the main province of destination was Bangkok, followed by Tak, Samut Sakhon and Chon Buri. Kayin and Mon State, together with the Bago East region, remained the main migrant-sending states within Myanmar throughout all three data collection rounds. Bamar, Karen and Mon were the three prevailing ethnicities.

Socio-Demographic Profiles

Looking at the full dataset (n=11,466) of Myanmar nationals, the data shows that 99 per cent of the sample identified themselves as Myanmar nationals. The remaining one per cent identified as Myanmar Muslims. The gender distribution was similar in all three data collection rounds. The full dataset shows a gender distribution of males being slightly over-represented at 57 per cent, while females constituted 43 per cent of respondents with a similar distribution between incoming and returning migrants.

The full data set also aligns with the data from previous rounds with regards to age, showing that the largest share of respondents is between the age of 16 and 30 years old (58%), followed by the age group of 31-45 years (38%). Looking at the two sample populations, returning Myanmar nationals appear on average to be younger (28 years) than incoming Myanmar nationals (31 years).

Figure 1 - Overall Age Breakdown (n=11,466)

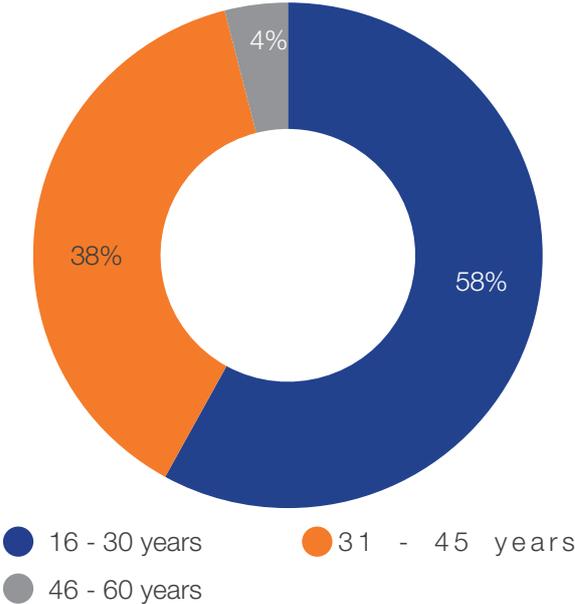
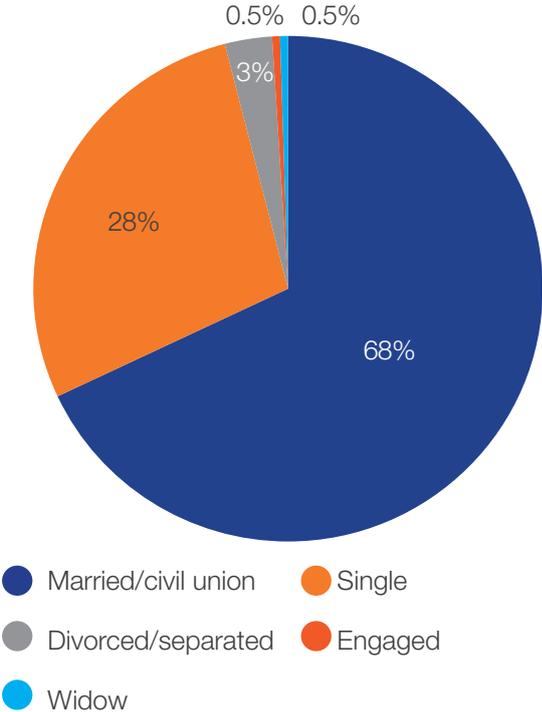


Figure 2 - Overall Marital Status (n=11,466)



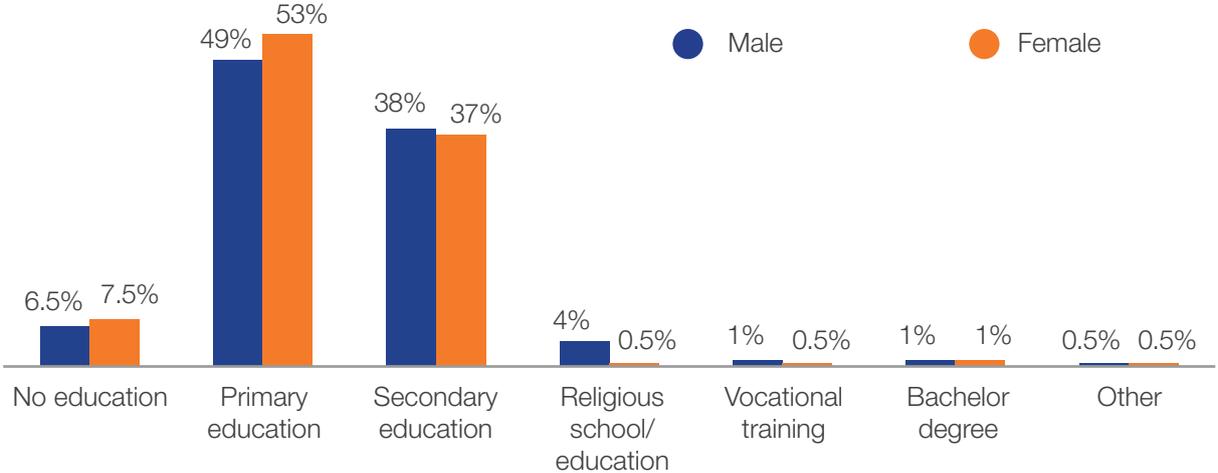
The third round of data collection also confirms the trend identified during the first two rounds, namely that Myanmar migrants tend to be married (71%) rather than single (36%). The share of married individuals for the whole sample lies at 68 per cent. As shown during the first and second round of data collection, most respondents reported to have children. This share was slightly higher in Round Three results than in previous rounds at 60 per cent.

Combining the data from all rounds, results show that on average, 58 per cent of all respondents reported to have children. More females reported to have children

(60%) than males (56%). Looking at the location of children, all three rounds showed that more than 80 per cent reported to have at least one child in Myanmar, while 20 to 25 per cent reported to have at least one child in Thailand. Looking at the full sample, less than 10 per cent had children living in different locations. Overall, more females reported to be accompanied by their children to Thailand than males (25 vs. 18 per cent).

On average, across all three rounds, returning migrants appear to have a slightly higher education level with a larger share having completed secondary education (47% in comparison to 35% for incoming migrants). This difference was most noticeable during the round three data analysis, in which 50 per cent of the return sample reported to have completed secondary education. Comparatively, only 31 per cent of the incoming sample had completed secondary level education. Looking at the whole sample, on average roughly seven per cent reported not to have completed any form of education (6.5 per cent for incoming migrants and 7.5 per cent for returning migrants). The combined data sample shows slight differences in the education level depending on the respondent's sex. Figure 3 shows that males have slightly higher levels of education than females.

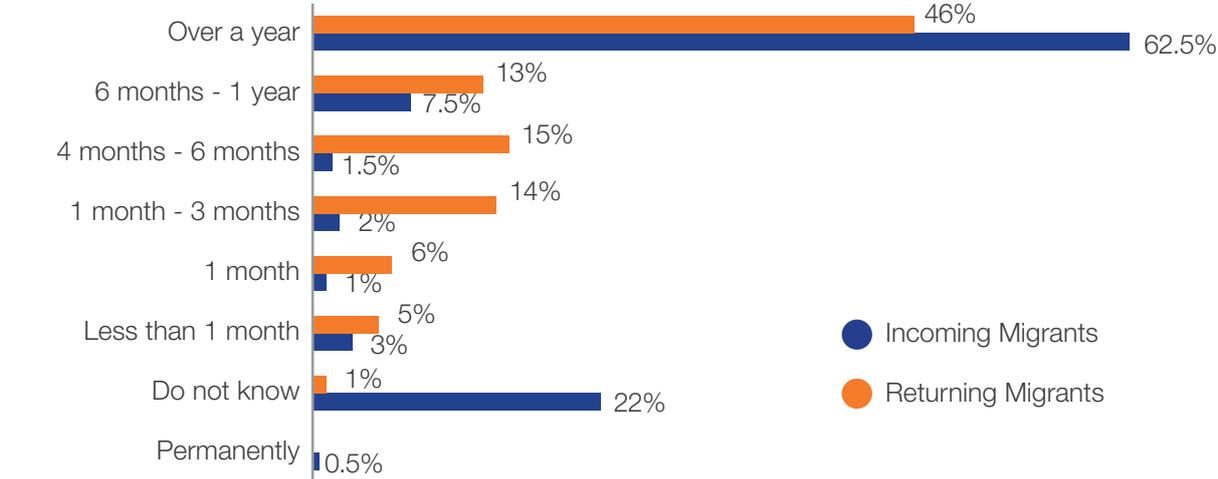
Figure 3 - Overall Education Level by Gender (n=11,466)



Length of Stay in Thailand

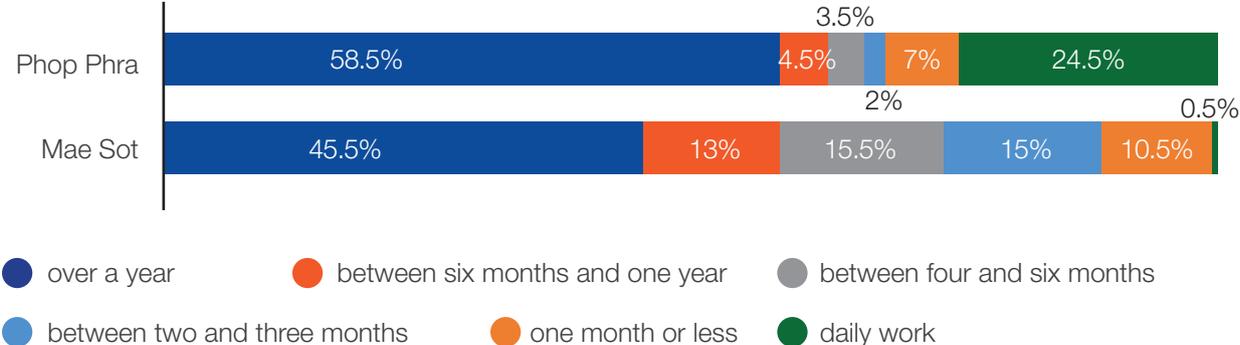
Incoming migrants were asked about their intended duration of stay in Thailand while returning migrants were asked to specify how long they actually stayed in Thailand. Looking at the full dataset of all three rounds the data shows that for both samples (see Figure 4) the most commonly stated length of stay in Thailand was over a year (63% for incoming migrants (expected time) and 46% for returning migrants (actual time spend)).

Figure 4 - Expected Length of Stay in Thailand (Incoming Migrants) vs Actual Time Spent in Thailand (Returning Migrants) n=11,466



Looking at the survey locations (see Figure 5) it becomes clear that although the largest share of respondents in Phop Phra and Mae Sot stayed in Thailand for more than a year, shorter term migration seems to be more popular within Phop Phra district. This DTM data supports anecdotal knowledge that many Myanmar nationals entering through Phop Phra intend to stay in the area only for daily work or short term seasonal employment³.

Figure 5 - Duration of Stay in Thailand by Location of Entry (Returning Migrants n=2,924)



Places of Origin and Destination

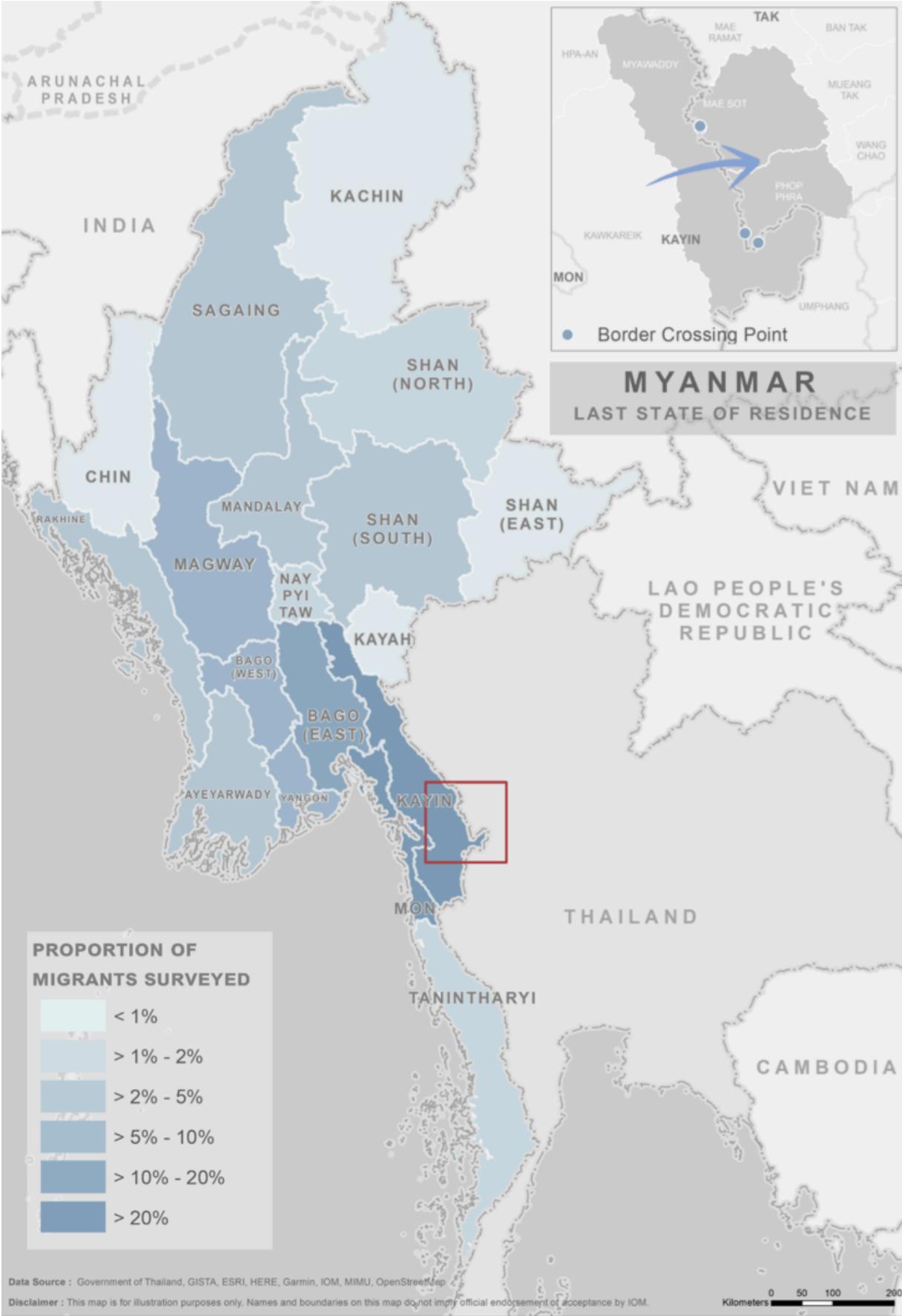
Of the total sample, almost all migrants reported that Myanmar was their last country of residence (99.3%) before coming to Thailand. The remaining one per cent had lived in countries such as China, Bangladesh and Malaysia. In terms of places of origin, the data in all three rounds remains largely similar. Kayin and Mon State, followed by the Bago East region are the most common states of origin for Myanmar migrants surveyed in Thailand. The overall sample shows some variations between incoming and returning migrants (see Table 3).

Table 3 - Overall Main States of Origin by Population Group (n=11,384)

Tool 1 – Inflows (n=8,482)			Tool 2 – Outflows (n=2,902)		
State	#	%	State	#	%
1. Kayin State	2,274	27%	1. Mon State	609	21%
2. Mon State	2,073	24.5%	2. Kayin State	502	17.5%
3. Bago Region (East)	1,125	13%	3. Shan State (South)	280	10%
4. Yangon Region	510	6%	4. Bago Region (East)	247	8.5%
5. Magway Region	451	5%	5. Magway Region	224	8%
Remaining	2,049	24.5%	Remaining	1,041	35%

³ The correlation is significant on a 0.01 level

Map 1 - Last State of Residence in Myanmar (n=11,134)



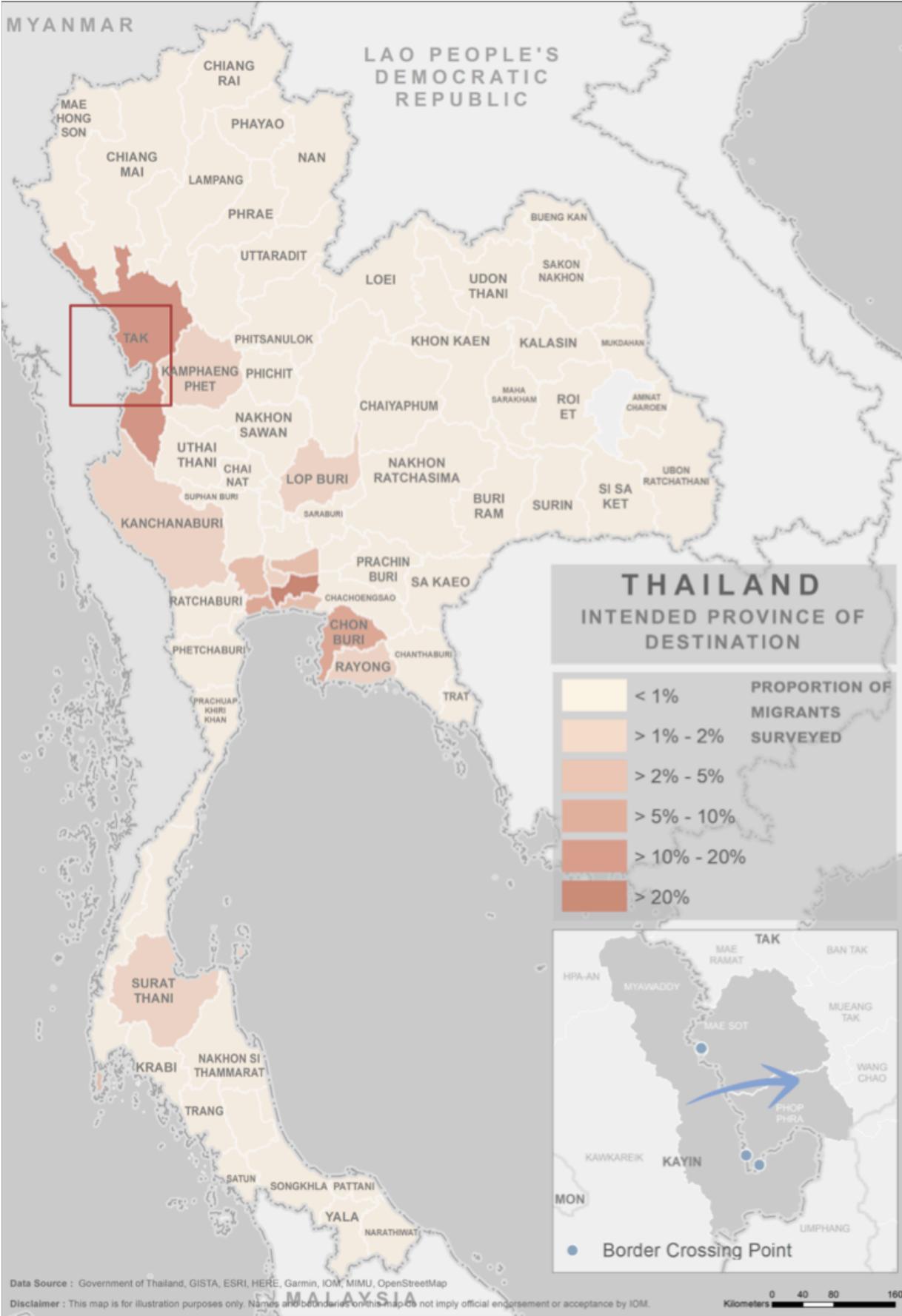
In terms of ethnicity, the primary ethnicities identified were Bamar (50.5%), Karen (20%), Mon (14.5%) and Pa-O (4.5%). The distribution is similar between incoming and returning migrants. Bamar, as one of the most common ethnicities in Myanmar, was the largest represented ethnic group throughout all rounds.

To establish a comprehensive profile of Myanmar nationals migrating to Thailand it is also important to identify the intended provinces of destination within Thailand. The destinations can provide valuable information on migration patterns, as well as living and working conditions, ultimately allowing for more targeted programmatic interventions. While incoming migrants were asked about their intended province of destination in Thailand (single-answer), returning migrants were asked which provinces they had lived in during their last migration experience (multiple-answer).

Results of all three rounds were largely similar. The combined dataset of all three rounds shows that Bangkok is the most popular province of destination in Thailand (35.5% for incoming migrants and 37.5% for returning migrants). For incoming migrants Bangkok is followed by Tak (11%), Chon Buri (8%), Samut Sakhon (7%) and Phuket (5%). For the return sample, the second most popular province is Samut Sakhon (9.5%), followed by Chon Buri (7%), Tak (6%), Phuket (4%) and Pathum Thani (3%).

Looking more closely at the overall results by location of entry, this report's data supports the findings of the previous two reports that Mae Sot is a strategic transit point for Myanmar nationals migrating across Thailand. Incoming migrants identified in Phop Phra on the other hand, predominately reported wanting to stay in the province of Tak (92%). This data also aligns with the expectation that those migrating for daily work predominately intended to stay in Tak province (90%).

Map 2 - Intended Province of Destination in Thailand (Incoming Migrants) n=8,537





Picture 2 - Two Myanmar Migrants and a DTM Enumerator at the Bus Stop in Mae Sot

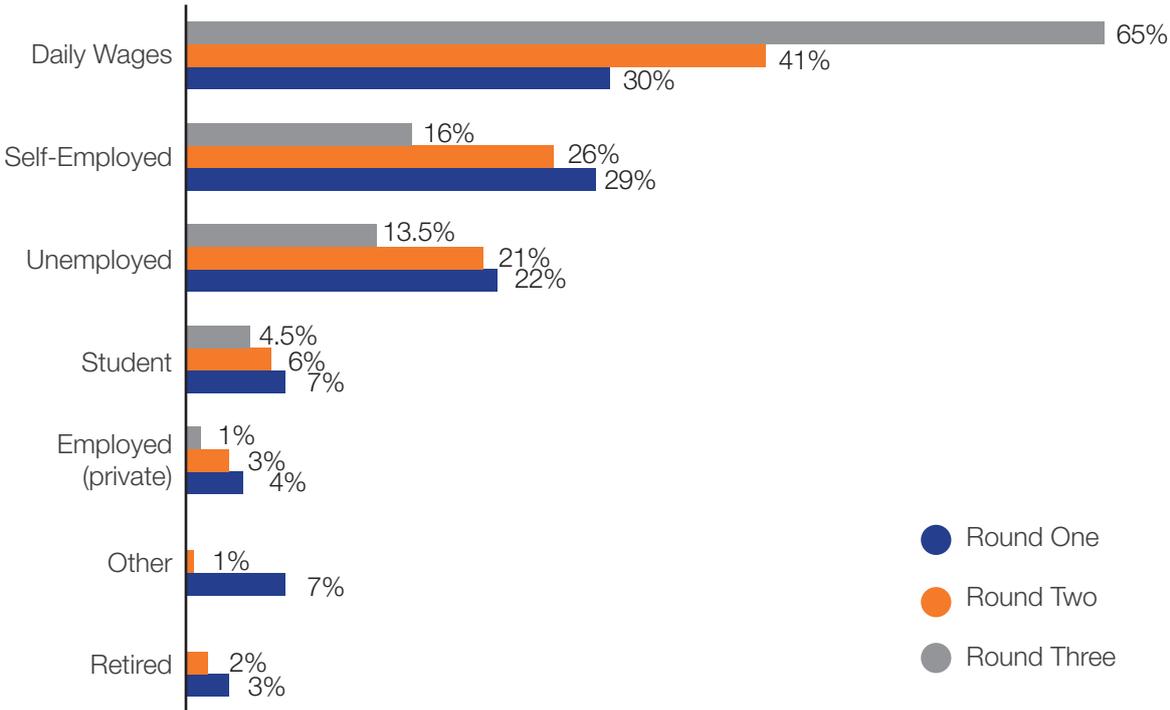
Thematic Area 2 - Drivers of Migration

Roughly one quarter of the sample was unemployed before leaving Myanmar. The data suggests that females are slightly more likely to have been unemployed before their migration. Prior to migration, the majority were employed on a daily wage or self-employment basis. Employment was the main reason cited for coming to Thailand, and the data shows that migration seems to be cyclical as a large share of the migrants surveyed had been to Thailand to seek employment before. This pattern is especially visible among incoming migrants, however, the share of returning migrants that had previously migrated for employment to Thailand decreased with each round of data collection. Myanmar migrants stated preferring Thailand over other countries because of its geographical proximity and easily accessible labour market. The importance of family and friends in Thailand as sources of information and as factors in choosing Thailand as a destination country lends credence to the migration network theory which suggests that migrants usually depend on pre-established networks in their country of destination.

Socio-Economic Profiles

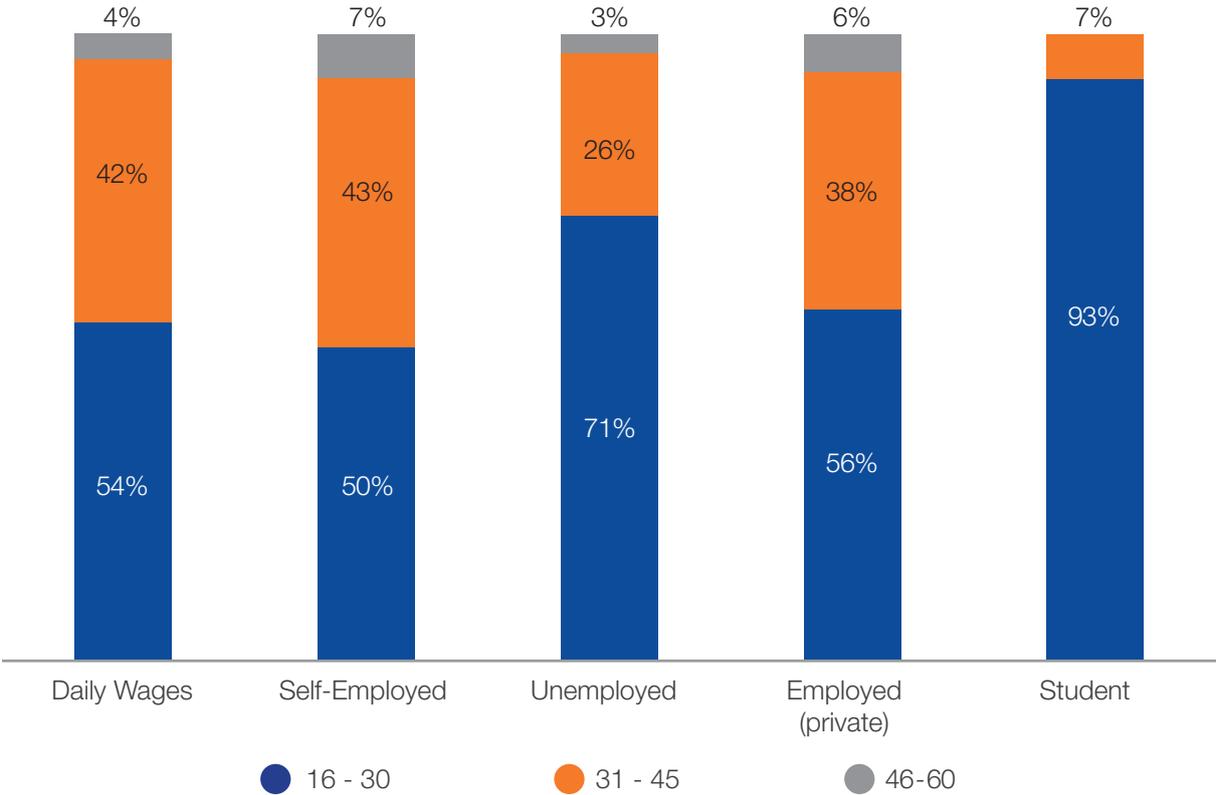
Understanding the drivers of migration requires a look at the migration process in its totality. This means that factors causing a person to leave cannot be evaluated alone but need to be viewed in relation with factors that might attract an individual to choose a specific country. Before turning to drivers of migration, the socio-economic characteristics of migrants are analyzed to understand their conditions prior to departure. For both population groups, the most common forms of employment include daily wage labour (48% for incoming migrants and 39% for returning migrants) or self-employment (21% for incoming migrants and 31% for returning migrants). The unemployment rate for both samples is roughly 19 per cent. The unemployment rate was slightly over 20 per cent for Round One and Round Two (similar for both population groups), and 13 per cent for Round Three. Looking at the employment status before migration in more detail, the data shows that the unemployment rate is higher amongst the younger demographic⁴ (see Figure 7).

Figure 6 - Employment Status before Migration by Data Round (n=11,466)



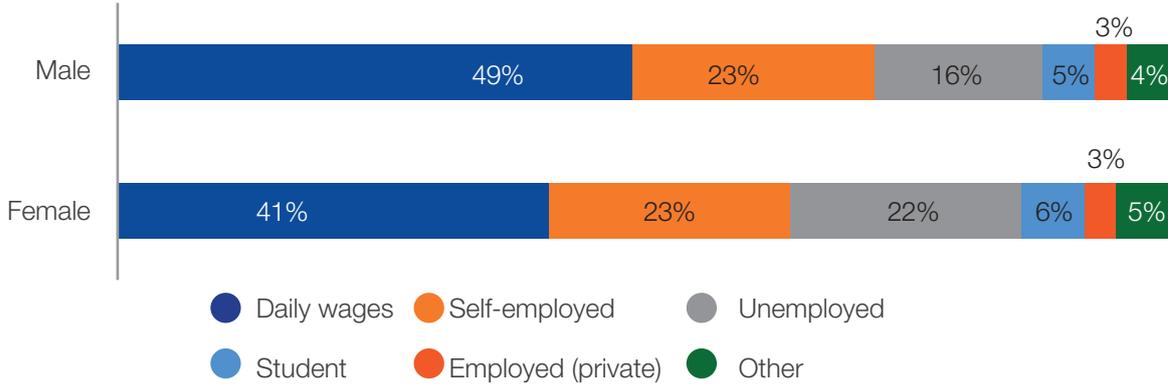
4 There is a negative correlation between age and employment status significant on a 0.01 level

Figure 7 - Overall Employment Status by Age Distribution (n=11,466)



With respect to the sex distribution, males seem to be more likely to be employed through daily wage labour across all three rounds of analysis. The unemployment rate is slightly unevenly distributed between male and female respondents. Of total respondents, 16 per cent of the male population and 22 per cent of the female population reported being unemployed before their migration journey⁵ (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 - Overall Employment Status by Gender (n=11,466)



⁵ There is a negative correlation between gender and employment status significant on a 0.01 level

Reasons for Leaving Myanmar

The respondents were asked to cite their main reasons for leaving Myanmar. Knowing the reasons for leaving combined with factors influencing the decision-making process can provide crucial information on migration patterns. Some respondents reported multiple reasons for leaving Myanmar and migrating to Thailand. Nevertheless, for all three rounds the main and often sole reason cited for leaving Myanmar was finding employment in Thailand (between 80 and 90 per cent each round). The overall data analysis of all three rounds shows that on average, 82 per cent of incoming migrants and 88 per cent of returning migrants left Myanmar to find employment in Thailand. Of the remaining 18 and 12 per cent of the sample, while their primary reason for leaving Myanmar was not clearly identified as finding employment, 76 per cent of both population groups still intended to work during their stay or had worked during their time in Thailand⁶. Other reasons stated for leaving Myanmar include reasons related to employment for a spouse (9%), food and/or water insecurity (7%), visiting family and friends (5%), or tourism (2%). No correlation can be established between sex and coming to Thailand because a spouse found work, as the share was almost equally distributed between male and female respondents.

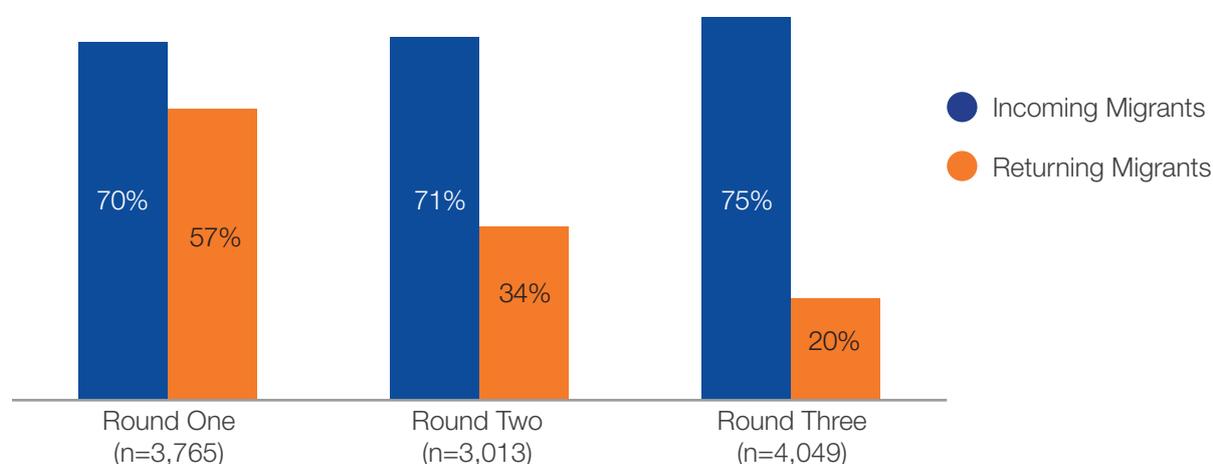
Since the majority of the survey focused on employment expectations and experiences in Thailand, those respondents that did not intend to work in Thailand or reported not having worked during their stay in Thailand were excluded from the sample moving forward. The new sample size from this point on is n=10,827 individuals.

Decision-Making Process

Understanding the decision-making process of migrants is crucial in order to identify patterns in the migration trends from Myanmar to Thailand. Is the decision taken by individuals, families or even whole communities? This question is important as different factors play into the decision-making process of an individual to migrate, especially since labour migration can be a common household strategy to mitigate risks related to financial insecurity and generate additional household income.

To understand the migration patterns of the sample population, respondents were asked if this was their first time working in Thailand. As in the two previous rounds, incoming migrants during Round Three were more likely to have worked in Thailand before, in comparison to returning migrants. The overall share of Myanmar migrants that had worked in Thailand previously was 72 per cent for incoming migrants and 31 per cent for returning migrants.

Figure 9 - Prior Labour Migration by Data Round and Population Group

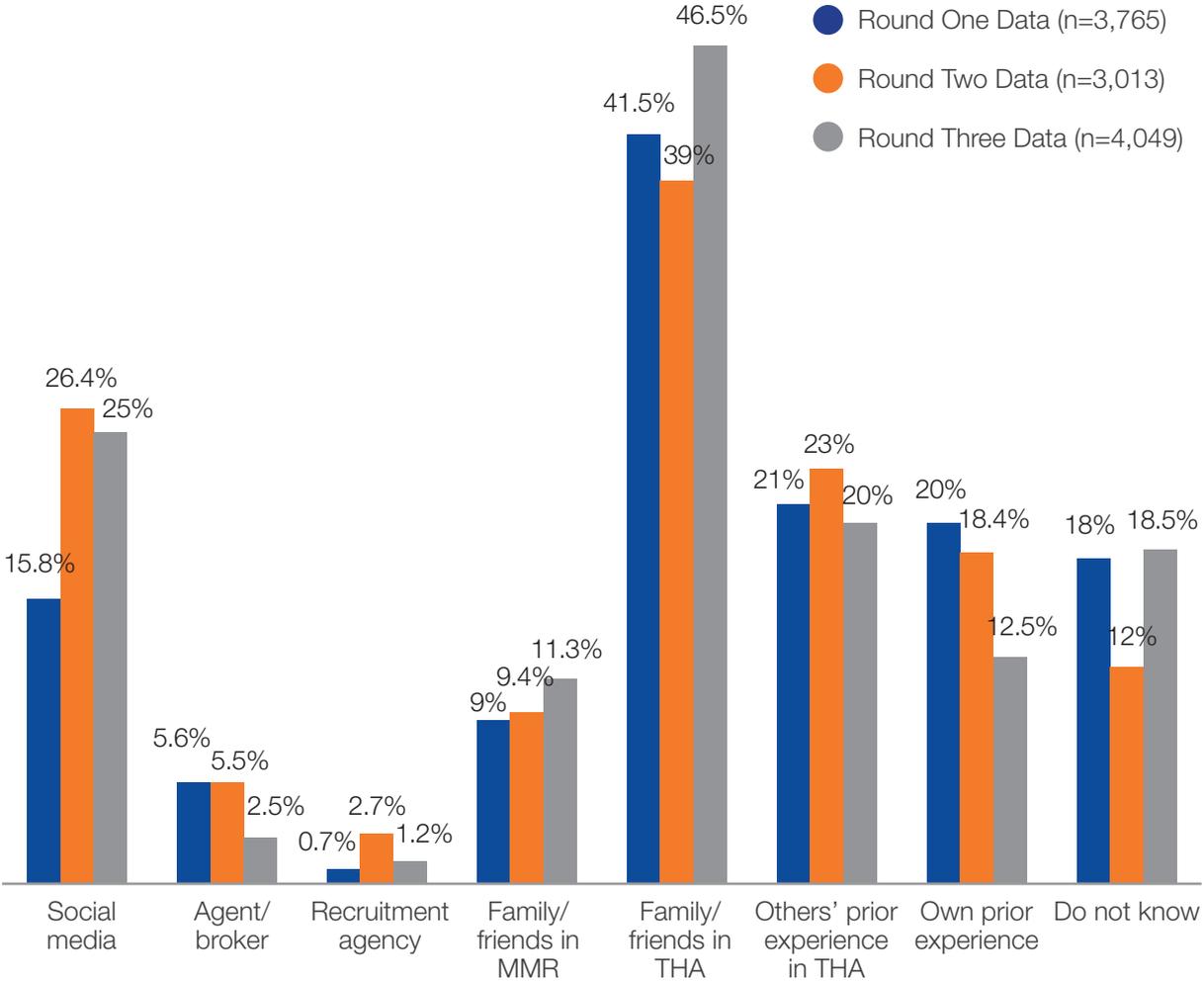


⁶ In order to be sure about employment intentions/status in Thailand, respondents were asked if they did not indicate employment to be a reason for leaving Myanmar whether they still intended to work/ worked during their stay

When asked why they preferred to migrate to Thailand over another country in the region, the majority cited several reasons for choosing Thailand. Among these, the most commonly given were “Thailand being the easiest to access” (69%), “access to jobs being easier” (47%), “incomes being higher” (35%), “working conditions being better” (21%), as well as having friends (21%) and/or family in Thailand (18%).

The reasons for choosing Thailand as the intended destination country were similar across all rounds. When asked about the main source of information about life in Thailand, we also see some similarities across data rounds. The importance of social media is particularly stressed in the last two data rounds, while family/friends in Thailand remain the largest source of information for all three rounds (see Figure 10⁷). Looking at the sex distribution, no clear pattern is visible, however female respondents relied slightly more often on family/friends in Thailand and a small percentage of male respondents relied slightly more commonly on unlicensed brokers⁸

Figure 10 - Sources of Information about Life in Thailand by Data Collection Round



Family and friends in Thailand are commonly reported as both reasons for preferring Thailand as a destination country as well as sources of information about life in Thailand. This is interesting to look at from the network theory perspective, underlining that migrants often make use of pre-existing networks in the country of destination. The importance of family and friends in both countries, at home and in Thailand, will become of further interest when looking at the support mechanisms relied on for the migration journey.

7 Respondents were allowed to name several sources of information about life in Thailand, hence numbers can exceed 100%

8 Results are not statistically significant

Thematic Area 3 - Pre-migration Preparations and Arrangements

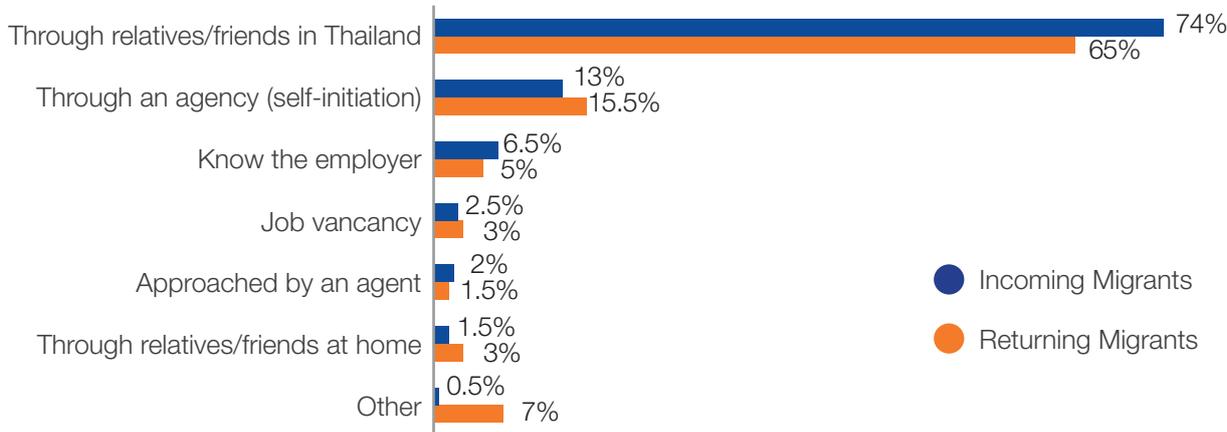
Migrants prefer to arrange employment before coming to Thailand, mainly through the help of family or friends in Thailand. Manufacturing and construction are particularly popular sectors of employment. Returning migrants reported paying, on average, more than twice what incoming migrants paid for their migration journeys. This can be attributed to the fact that returning migrants travelled further into Thailand. To finance the cost of migration, incoming migrants relied predominantly on their savings and income, whereas returning migrants more frequently reported having borrowed money from a variety of different actors. The largest share, however, borrowed from lenders and/or family or friends in Myanmar. Returning migrants were also more likely to have received support in their migration arrangements. Support was mostly received from family or friends in Thailand, recruitment agencies and brokers. Throughout all questions on support and arrangements, it becomes clear that family and friends in Thailand as well as in Myanmar are key actors and active facilitators in the respondents' migration processes.

Employment Arrangements

As identified in the Round One and Round Two data analysis, migrants prefer to make their employment arrangements before coming to Thailand. Although this trend was clearly established during the first two rounds of data collection, it became even more apparent in the third round, with 98 per cent of incoming migrants affirming that they already had a job lined up prior to migration and 90 per cent of the return sample indicating that they did. Looking at the full data set, 90 per cent of all incoming migrants and 78 per cent of all returning migrants reported having a job arranged before their departure. Looking at the correlation between having a job lined up and having worked in Thailand before, the data shows that the share of those who had a job lined up was slightly larger among those who had already worked in Thailand⁹.

Throughout all rounds, the most common actors involved in helping to find employment were family and friends in Thailand, however this share was highest during the Round Three data collection (74% for incoming migrants and 65% for returning migrants). Returning migrants had in the previous two rounds relied more heavily on finding a job through an agency. Looking at sex distribution, only small differences become visible. As with sources of information on migration, female migrants relied slightly more often on family/friends in Thailand for employment arrangements (74% vs 70%), while males reported to have found their job through an agency (15% vs 11%) slightly more often. Once again, the importance of social networks in Thailand become clear, as migrants relied most heavily on family and friends in Thailand for their employment arrangements.

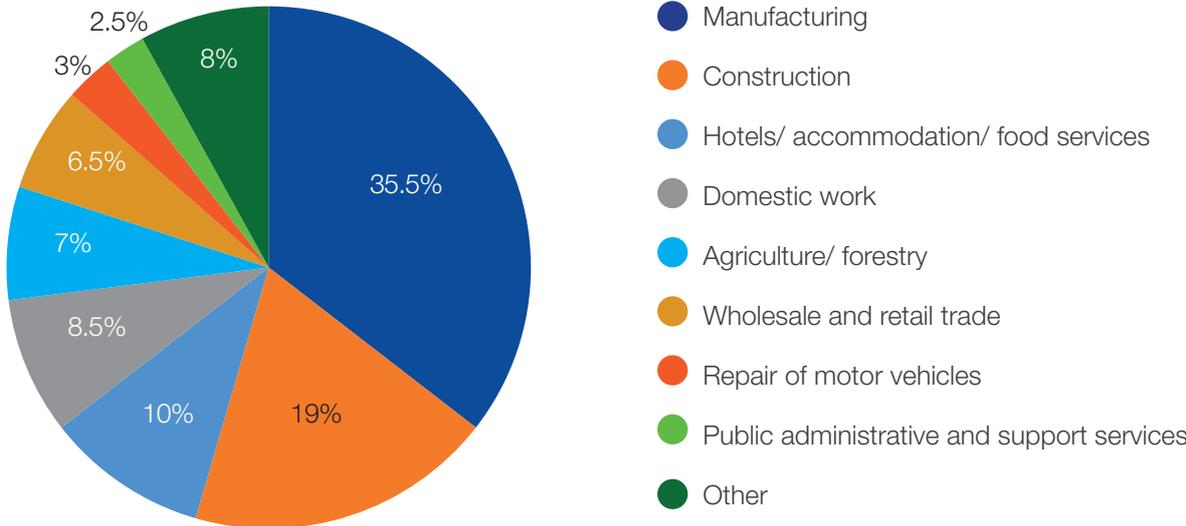
Figure 11 - How Employment Was Obtained by Population Group (n=10,156)



⁹ No statistical significance could be found for this correlation

Looking at the primary sectors of employment, the two leading sectors, namely manufacturing (35%) and construction (19%), (see Figure 12), remain the same in each round of data collection. Comparing the overall employment sectors with the intended provinces of destination in Thailand, the data shows that Bangkok seemed to be the most popular destination for employment related to domestic work (58%), wholesale and retail trade (43%) and manufacturing and construction (both 37%). Tak seems to be especially popular for work in the agricultural sector (69%) and Samut Sakhon for employment related to the fishing industry (40%).

Figure 12 - Main Employment Sectors in Thailand (n=10,156)

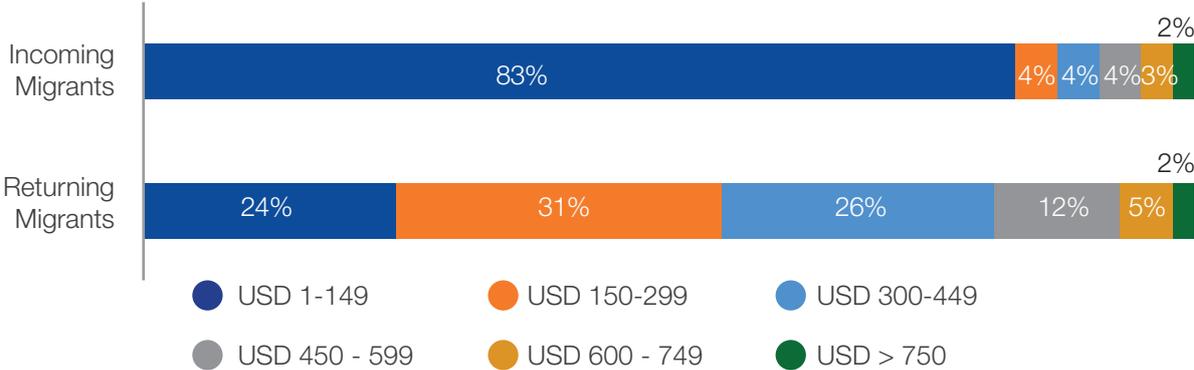


Migration Costs

Migrants were also asked about the cost of their journey and sources to finance the journey. The first two rounds suggested that on average returning migrants spent almost three times the amount that incoming migrants paid, namely USD 282 versus USD 96 for Round One and USD 306 versus USD 130 in Round Two. The gap is not as pronounced when looking at Round Three results with USD 158 for incoming migrants in comparison to USD 295 for returning migrants.

Looking at the overall dataset, incoming migrants spent on average USD 130 on their migration journey and returning migrants spent an average of USD 280. The different cost brackets per population group are shown below. The data shows that incoming migrants usually pay amounts in the first cost bracket (USD 1-149) while 81 per cent of the returning migrants pay between USD 1-449 (see Figure 13).

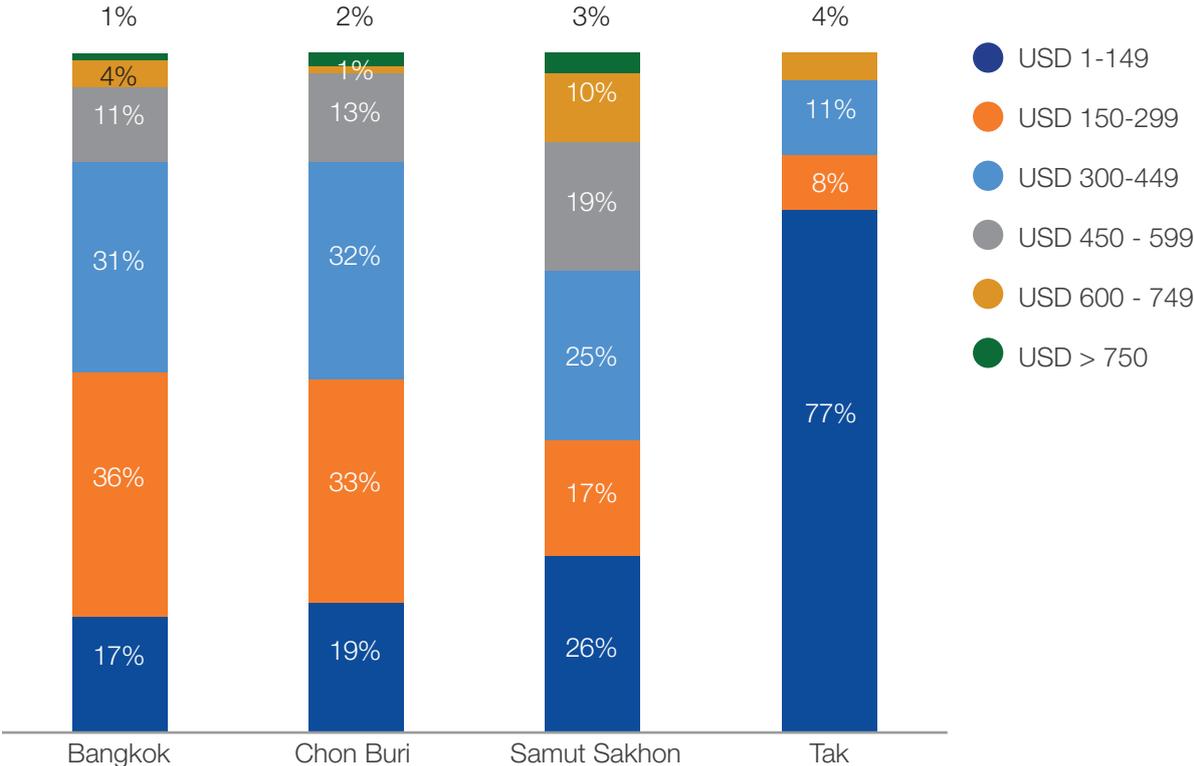
Figure 13 - Migration Costs by Population Group (n=10,827)



As explained in the literature review of the first report and supported by the data collected, the large majority of returning migrants did not stay in Tak province but returned from provinces further south. The same can be said about incoming migrants: only a small share intended to stay in Tak province. Therefore, they are still to spend the full amount needed to reach their intended destination in Thailand.

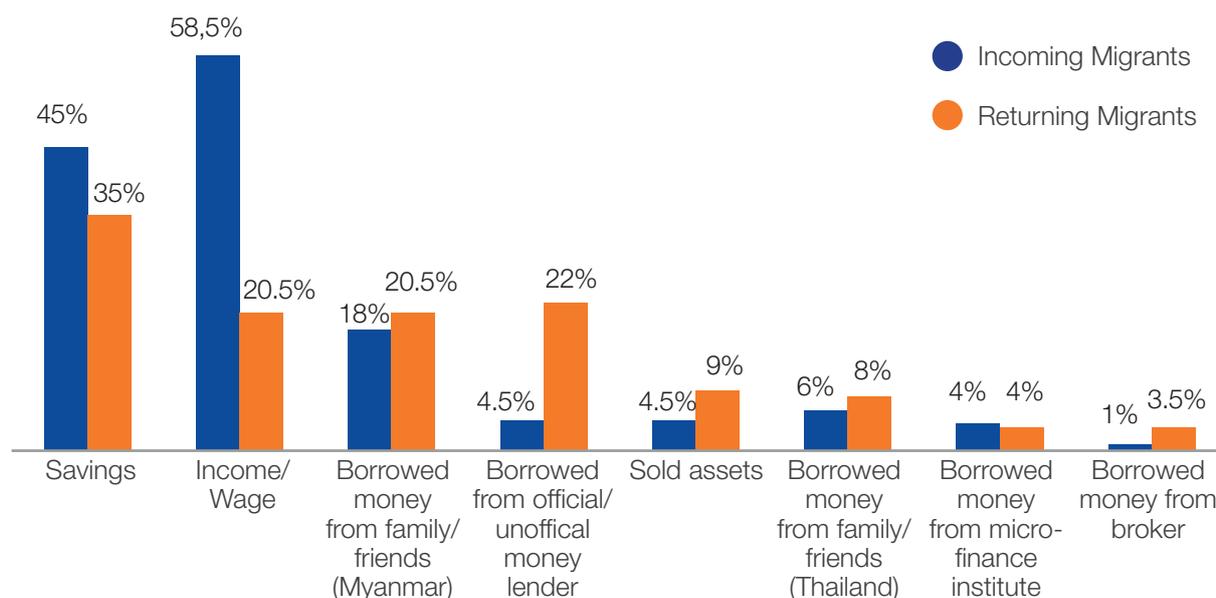
Looking at the overall return data from all three rounds we see that for provinces like Bangkok, Chon Buri or Samut Sakhon, migrants tend to spend amounts in the higher cost brackets, while those returning from Tak predominately paid amounts at the lower end of the scale (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 - Overall Migration Cost by Province of Destination (Returning Migrants) n=2,658



The costs of migration can give indications about migrants’ vulnerabilities in the long run - taking out loans and accumulating debt through the migration process can especially increase the risk of becoming vulnerable. Therefore, migrants were asked how they were able to finance their journeys. Roughly half of the migrants reported multiple sources to finance their journey. Comparing the three rounds of data, the results show that incoming and returning migrants named different sources to finance their journey. In Round One and Two, incoming migrants predominantly relied on savings and income or wages, and to a lesser extent, borrowed money from family and friends. Returning migrants more commonly borrowed money, especially from family and friends at home in Myanmar as well as from money lenders. Round Three results show that borrowing money from family and friends in Myanmar became more important for incoming migrants (26%) and returning migrants named money lenders as their source of funds in 38 per cent of the cases. Looking at the sex distribution for financial means no obvious differences are apparent. Female migrants are, as already identified, slightly more dependent on family/friends in Thailand when it comes to borrowing money (8% vs 5%). As for family and friends in Myanmar, both male and female respondents appear to be equally likely to turn to them for support (roughly 19%). Male respondents, on the other hand, reported to have borrowed from money lenders slightly more often (10% vs 8%) or to having sold assets (6% vs 4%). All of these differences are very minor and none of them are statistically significant. In terms of vulnerabilities, the data also shows that migrants interviewed at the IDC seemed to be more likely to have borrowed money. Of all migrants interviewed at the IDC roughly 62 per cent reported that they had borrowed from one or several sources.

Figure 15 - Main Sources to Finance the Migration Journey by Population Group (n=10,827)

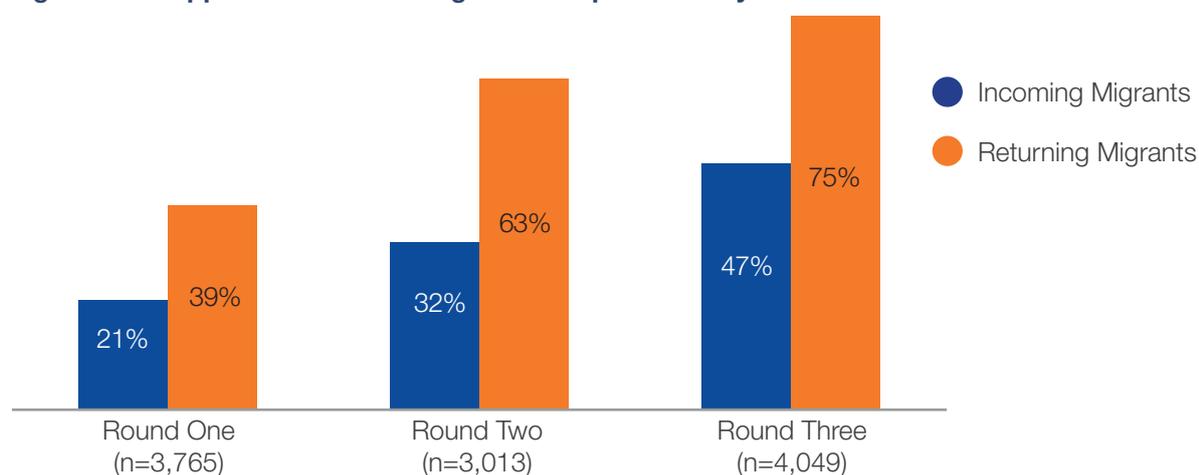


In line with the network theory discussed under Thematic Area 2, the importance of financial support from family and friends at home for the migration journey could possibly hint at migration being used as a family strategy to maximize household income. Follow-up questions about support mechanisms can help to shed more light on the importance of family and friends both in Myanmar and in Thailand.

Support Mechanisms

Beyond financial support, respondents were also asked if someone helped them to prepare for their journey, and if so, who helped them and how. This question can give valuable insight into migration dynamics especially if brokers were involved in the process, if migrants largely made their own arrangements or if family and friends were used as support networks. All three rounds of data collection show that the return sample received more support in their migration preparations, with the share having received support increasing with every round (see Figure 16). Looking at the sex distribution across both tools, there does not seem to be any relationship between sex and receiving support for migration. The share of females and males that received support is relatively evenly distributed. In terms of documentation status, migrants that did not hold any kind of valid documentation (27%), migrants on an MoU contract (27%), or those issued with a CI (21%) most often reported to have received help in their preparations.

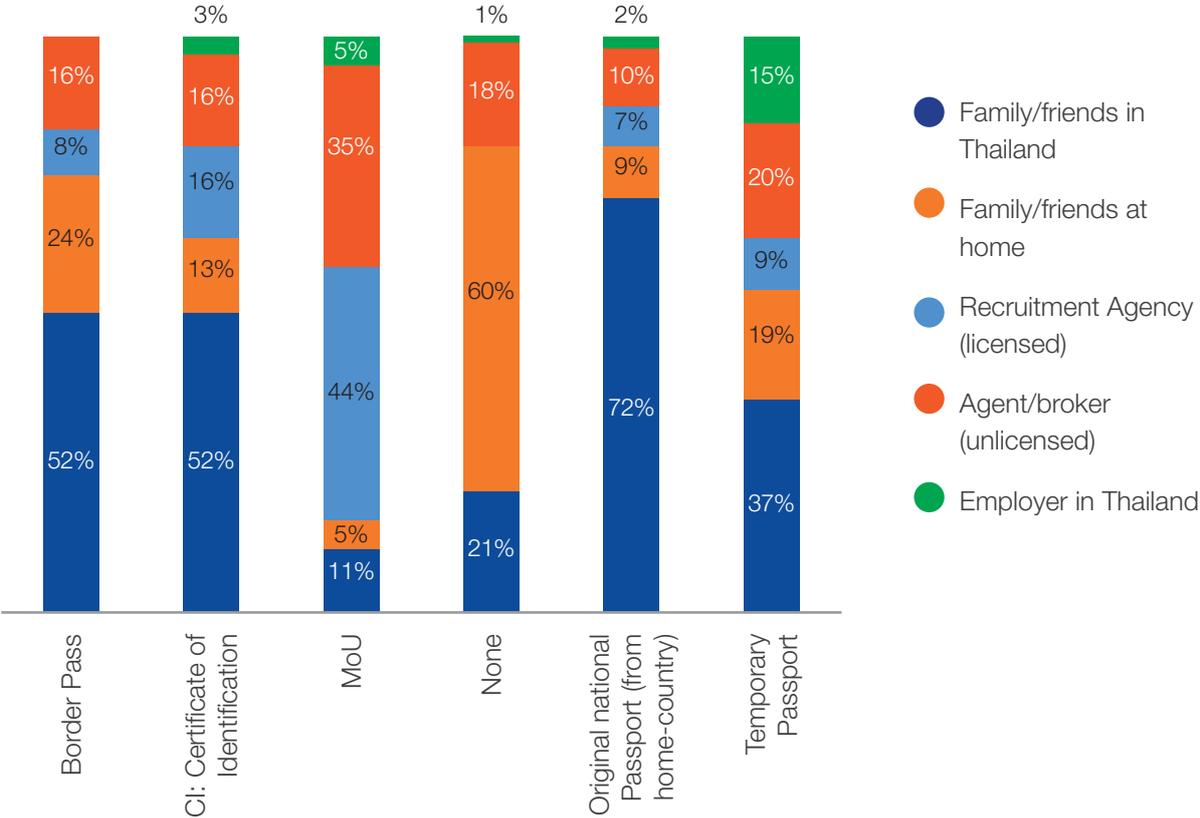
Figure 16 - Support Received in Migration Preparations by Data Round



Looking at the actors involved in supporting preparations, overall incoming migrants relied heavily on family and friends in Thailand (50%), followed by licensed recruitment agencies (20%) and unlicensed brokers (17%). Returning migrants, on the other hand, relied largely on family and friends at home in Myanmar (43%), unlicensed brokers (23%) or family and friends in Thailand (19%). In relation to secondary support mechanisms, 80 per cent of the incoming sample reported to receive help from only one actor, while 45 per cent of the return sample reported receiving additional support from unlicensed brokers. The support from family and friends in Thailand is an additional indication about the extensive networks migrants have in Thailand and the role they play in the migration process. The support of family and friends at home suggests that migrants may not take the decision to migrate in isolation but rather depend on close networks.

Although both population groups mainly received support in arranging transportation, employment, accommodation and documentation, the distributions between the two samples varied. Most respondents named more than one area where they received support. Incoming migrants reported having received support in making employment arrangements (67%), as well as with transportation (54%), accommodation (33%) and their documentation status (21%). Returning migrants commonly received transportation support (60%), in addition to support with finding accommodation (37%), employment (31%), and to a lesser extent with their documentation status (13%). The arrangements for transportation were predominately made by either unlicensed brokers or recruitment agencies, who often also provided support with documentation and finding employment. Employment was also commonly arranged by an employer in Thailand and documents also often arranged by family or friends at home or in Thailand. Accommodation was most commonly arranged by family/friends at home or in Thailand. Migrants with no documentation or those holding an MoU contract were more likely to have received support in their migration preparations. In terms of the documentation status of migrants and actors involved, licensed recruitment agencies and unlicensed brokers seemed to be common support mechanisms when the respondents held an MoU contract or a Certificate of Identification (CI). Those with CIs also often received support from family and friends in Thailand. Respondents with no documentation relied more heavily on the support of family and friends in Myanmar, and that of family/friends in Thailand and unlicensed brokers (see Figure 17).

Figure 17 - Overall Migration Preparation Support by Documentation Status (n=4,291)





Picture 3 - Myanmar Migrant Woman Waiting at the IDC in Mae Sot

Thematic Area 4 - Migrants' Vulnerabilities

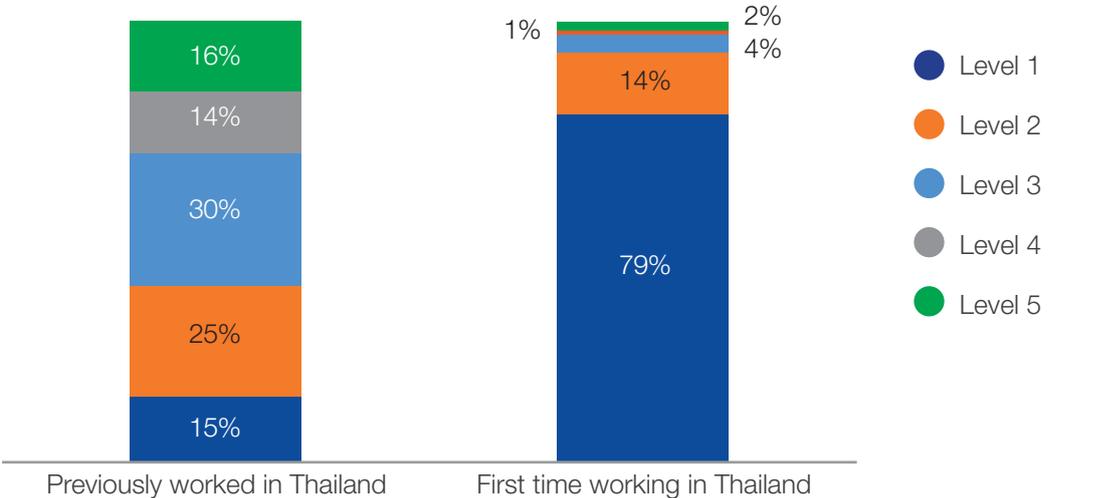
On average, migrants ranked their ability to speak, understand and read Thai as relatively low. With respect to documentation status, those employed in the agriculture and domestic work sectors were more likely not to have any form of documentation. Respondents that worked in Tak province frequently reported wages below the provincial minimum, as did respondents returning from Bangkok. However, migrants returning from Chon Buri and Samut Sakhon provinces reported, on average, higher wages than the provincial daily minimum. Migrants without documents more frequently reported being paid below the median minimum daily wage. Fewer incoming migrants reported experiencing problems during their journeys than returning migrants, and incoming migrants also rarely expected to face problems at the workplace in Thailand. Having children in Myanmar did not appear to be a determining factor in remittance-sending behaviour. However, migrants with proper documentation were more likely to send remittances than those with no documentation.

Language Skills

Migrants can become vulnerable at different points in their migration experience for a variety of reasons and circumstances. This study uses several proxies and indicators to learn more about Myanmar migrant workers' vulnerabilities. One indicator considered is the ability to communicate in Thai. Respondents were asked to rank their ability to speak, understand and read Thai from a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest level of ability). As in Round One and Round Two, returning migrants ranked their average Thai speaking and comprehension skills lower than incoming migrants did. Looking at the complete data set, on average 55 per cent of incoming migrants ranked their speaking and comprehension on the lowest two levels (1 and 2) while over 85 per cent of returning migrants ranked themselves on level one or two of the scale. This could be, on the one hand, attributed to the fact that the majority of incoming migrants had already migrated to Thailand before (as highlighted in Round One and Round Two reports), however on the other hand it might also be linked to incoming migrants potentially overestimating their language skills. More data would be needed to make a stronger statement about the reason for this difference between the sample populations.

Many incoming migrants had previously worked in Thailand, and the data shows that of those incoming migrants with previous experience in Thailand a larger share ranked their speaking and comprehension abilities at the medium or higher levels, with only 15 per cent ranking their speaking ability and 11 per cent ranking their comprehension ability at the lowest level (see Figure 18).

Figure 18 - Thai Speaking Ability by Migration Experience (Incoming Migrants) n=8,023



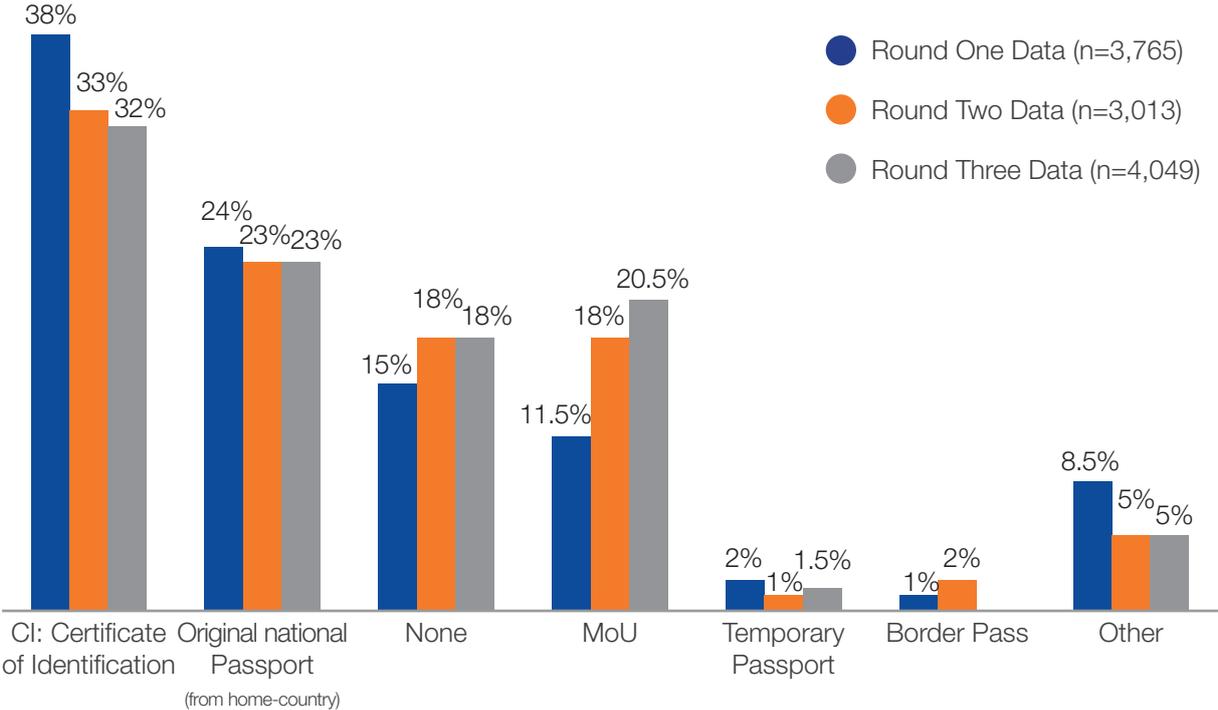
As already underlined during the Round Two analysis, the data also shows that those originating from the border states of Kayin and Mon more frequently ranked their speaking and comprehension skills at the medium to high end.

As for the ability to read Thai, all three rounds show that most of those surveyed reported being unable to read any Thai and ranked themselves at the lowest end of the scale (94% of all incoming migrants; 97% of all returning migrants).

Documentation Status

Another indicator used in the survey to assess the vulnerability of Myanmar workers was their documentation status. Overall, for incoming migrants the most common form of documentation was a Certificate of Identification (CI) (41%) or a national passport (28%), whereas most of the returning migrants reported having no documentation (56%). Comparing the three data rounds for incoming migrants, it becomes clear that with every round the number of respondents entering on an MoU contract increased (12% during Round One, 20% during Round Two and 22% during Round Three for incoming migrants). These changes could potentially be attributed to the implementation of the Royal Ordinance on Foreign Worker Management (B.E. 2560) as of 1 July 2018.

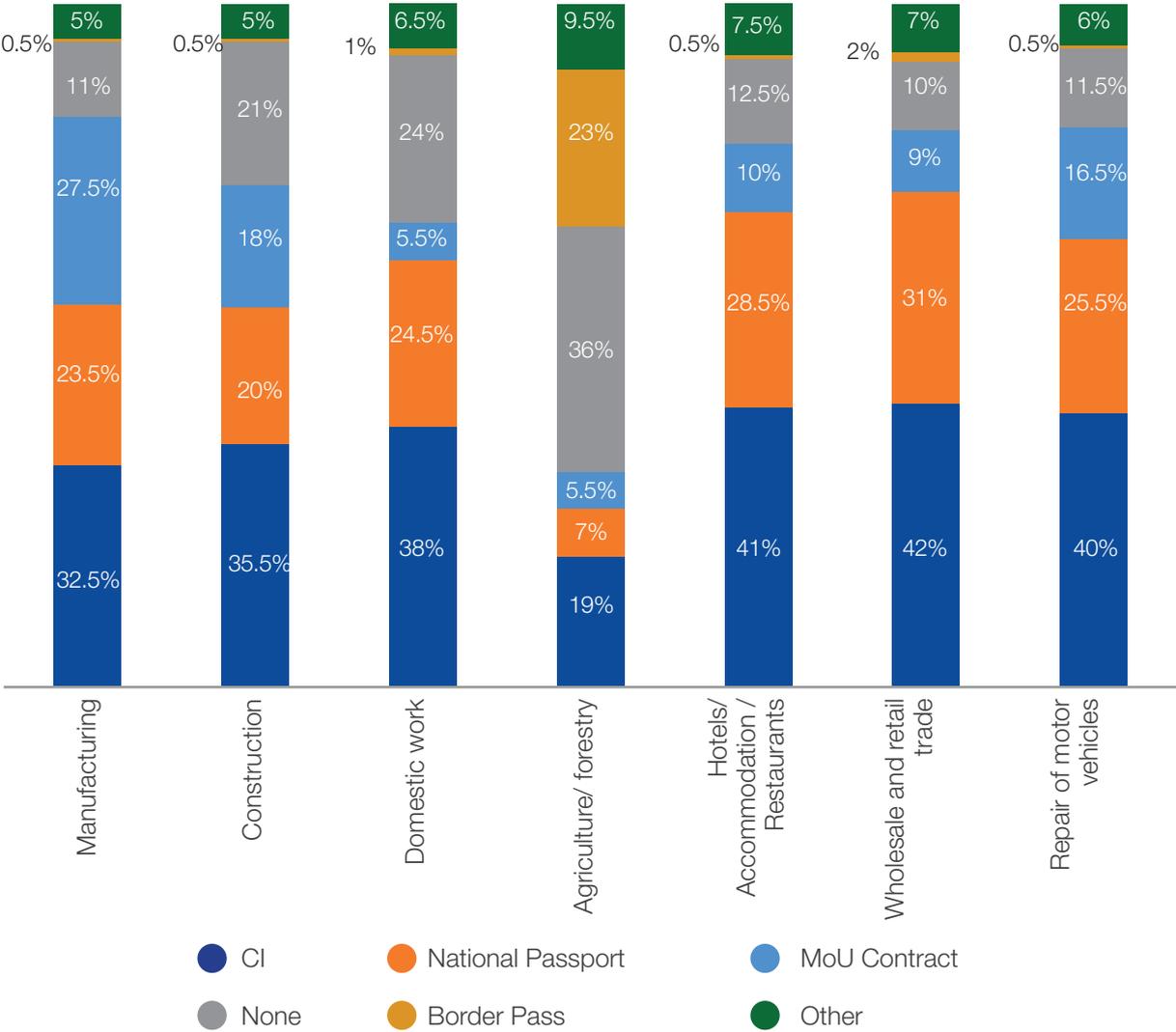
Figure 19 - Overall Documentation Status by Data Collection Round



Results for the return sample should be interpreted with caution, however, as in all three rounds over 70 per cent of the return sample were surveyed at the Immigration Detention Center (IDC) before their return/ deportation to Myanmar.

Looking at the different forms of documentation in relation to different employment sectors (see Figure 20), the data shows that agriculture seems to be the sector where migrants most often do not have proper documentation (36%), followed by domestic work (24.5%). MoU contracts seem to be regularly held in the manufacturing sector (27.5%). While the Certificate of Identification is prominent across all employment sectors, the wholesale and retail sector (42%) and hotel/accommodation/restaurant industries (41%) have the highest shares of migrants holding a CI. Border Passes only seem to be commonly held by migrants working in the agricultural sector (23%).

Figure 20 -Overall Documentation Status by Employment Sector (n=10,157)



Larger shares of incoming migrants holding a border pass (30%) or not having any documentation (40%) entered Thailand through Phop Phra, while incoming migrants entering through Mae Sot were more likely to hold a CI (44%), a national passport (30%), or to enter under an MoU contract (19%).

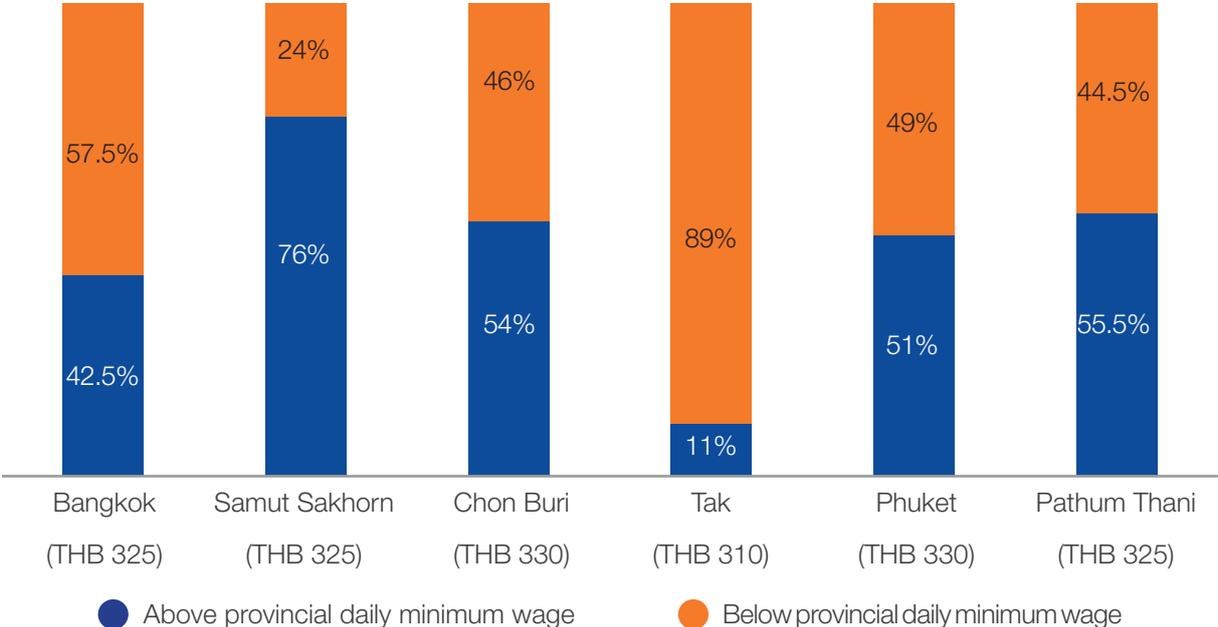
Contract Conditions and Wages

Migrant workers that reported holding an MoU contract or a pink card were asked some follow-up questions about their employment contracts. These questions were limited to this sub-sample as the other documents are not necessarily linked to holding a work permit or employment contract.

The sub-sample of 1,887 migrants was asked if they had seen their employment contracts. The combined data shows that only roughly 9 per cent of the sub-sample had not seen their employment contracts. Those that answered affirmatively were asked if they had also signed their own employment contract. Only 2 per cent of this sample reported not having signed the contract themselves. The most common language respondents reported signing their contracts in was in both Myanmar and Thai (55%). Of those who signed their own contracts, a total of 88 per cent stated having read and signed their contract in Myanmar language. Returning migrants were also asked if their first employer in Thailand corresponded with the employer stated on their employment contract. Only 8 per cent of the sub-sample said that the names did not match, and 5 per cent did not remember.

Wages and contract conditions can also be used as indicators for potential vulnerabilities at the work place. Each respondent was asked if they knew their daily wage before starting employment. The majority in all three rounds reported knowing their daily wages beforehand (91% of incoming migrants; 85% of returning migrants). Looking at the combined data, on average, incoming migrants expected to be paid THB 360 a day while returning migrants reported that on average they earned THB 330 a day. The results were similar for all three data rounds. Taking the median minimum wage of THB 318 a day, 45 per cent of the overall return sample (n=2,358) reported having earned wages below this amount. The daily minimum wage, however, varies depending on the province in Thailand. Taking the main provinces of destination in Thailand individually and correlating them with their respective minimum wage provides a clearer and more detailed picture of the findings (see Figure 21). In line with trends identified in the Round Two report, it appears that migrants returning from Samut Sakhon were most likely to be paid above the provincial daily minimum wage (76%) and migrants returning from Tak province were least likely to be paid above minimum wage (11%).¹⁰

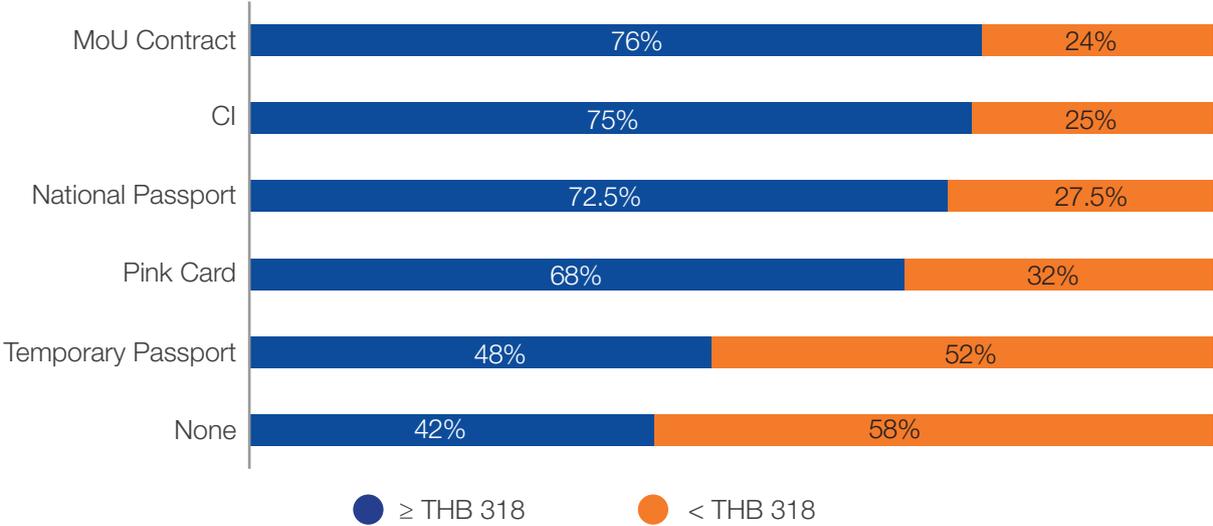
Figure 21 - Daily Wages by Province in Thailand (Returning Migrants) n=2,358



The relationship between receiving the minimum wage and documentation can also provide some crucial insight into the working and living conditions of migrant workers and where they might be most vulnerable. As migrants worked across different provinces in Thailand, the analysis will use the median daily wage of THB 318 as a reference. Migrants holding an MoU contract or CI seem to be most likely to be paid above the average minimum daily wage. As expected migrants with no documents are most likely to be paid below the average minimum daily wage.

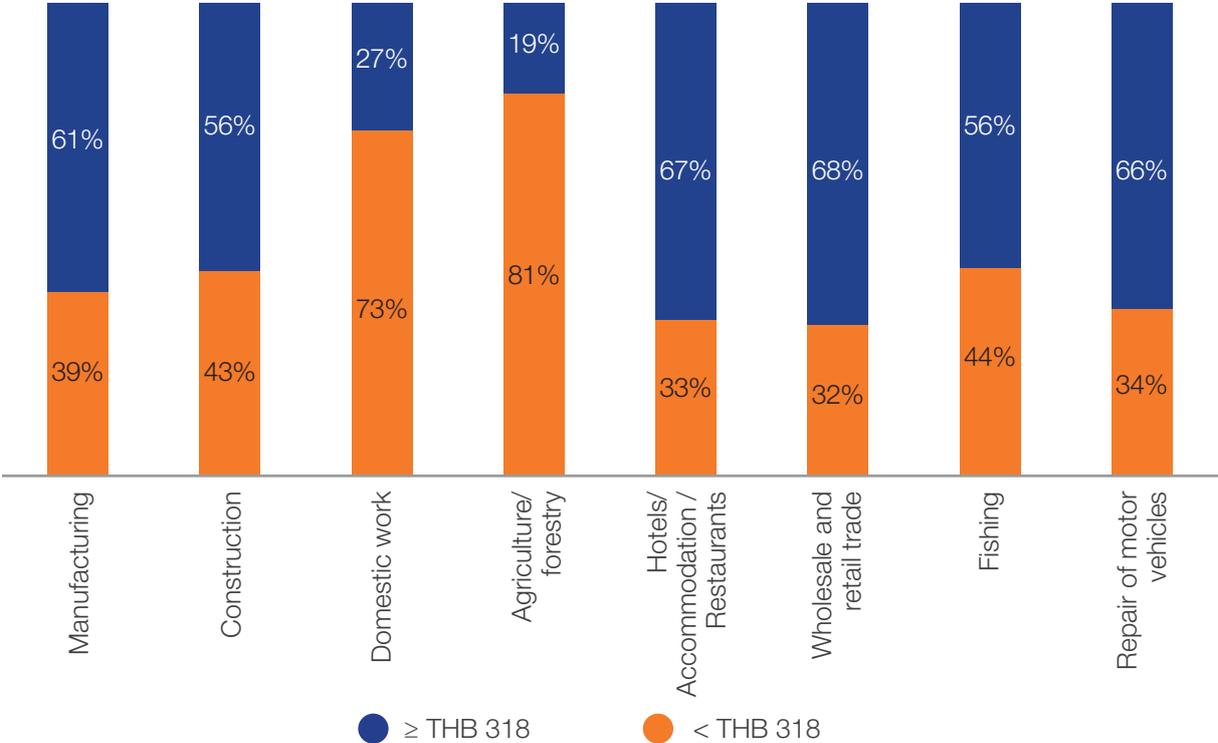
10 It needs to be acknowledged that this analysis might not be entirely accurate since returning migrants often named several provinces in Thailand where they worked, therefore sometimes it is not possible to assign the daily wage to the exact province in Thailand. Moreover, some of the results should also not be over-interpreted due to small sample sizes (e.g. Phuket or Pathum Thani)

Figure 22 - Daily Wages by Documentation Status (Returning Migrants) n=2,358



As in Round One and Round Two, the data from Round Three shows that migrants working in sectors like agriculture/forestry and domestic work often reported wages below the median minimum wage. For employment in the service industries such as hotel/accommodation/restaurants, wholesale/retail and repair of motor vehicles, roughly two thirds of the returning sample reported being paid above the median minimum wage. In sectors like construction and manufacturing, over half of the return sample were paid above THB 318 a day as seen in Figure 23.¹¹

Figure 23 - Median Minimum Wage by Employment Sector (Returning Migrants) n=2,358



11 Some of the results should not be over-interpreted due to small sample sizes (e.g. wholesale and retail, fishing or repair of motor vehicles)

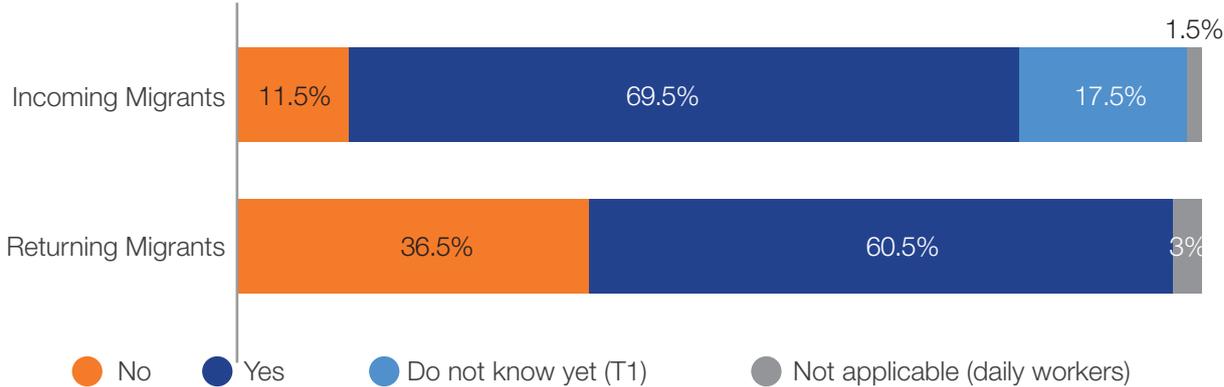
As in Round One and Round Two, 90 per cent of returning migrants confirmed that their expected and actual wages matched. Eight per cent stated that their actual wages were lower than expected. A similar question was asked about daily working hours. The majority of respondents expected (92%) and actually worked (91.5%) on average between 8 and 12 hours a day. Five per cent reported working more than 12 hours a day.

Remittances

With regards to remittances, almost 70 per cent of all incoming migrants were planning on sending money home during their stay in Thailand and 17.5 per cent had not decided yet. The number is slightly smaller among returning migrants with only 60.5 per cent reporting that they had sent money back to Myanmar while working in Thailand.

The average amount that migrants intended to remit or reported to have remitted remained largely similar throughout the different data rounds. Incoming migrants indicated, on average, that in the upcoming six months they planned to remit around USD 135, while the 60.5 per cent of the return sample that had sent back remittances indicated an average amount of USD 220 per month. Of the 60 per cent that reported to have send money home, roughly 62 per cent earned wages above the median minimum wage of THB 318 per day (roughly USD 10).

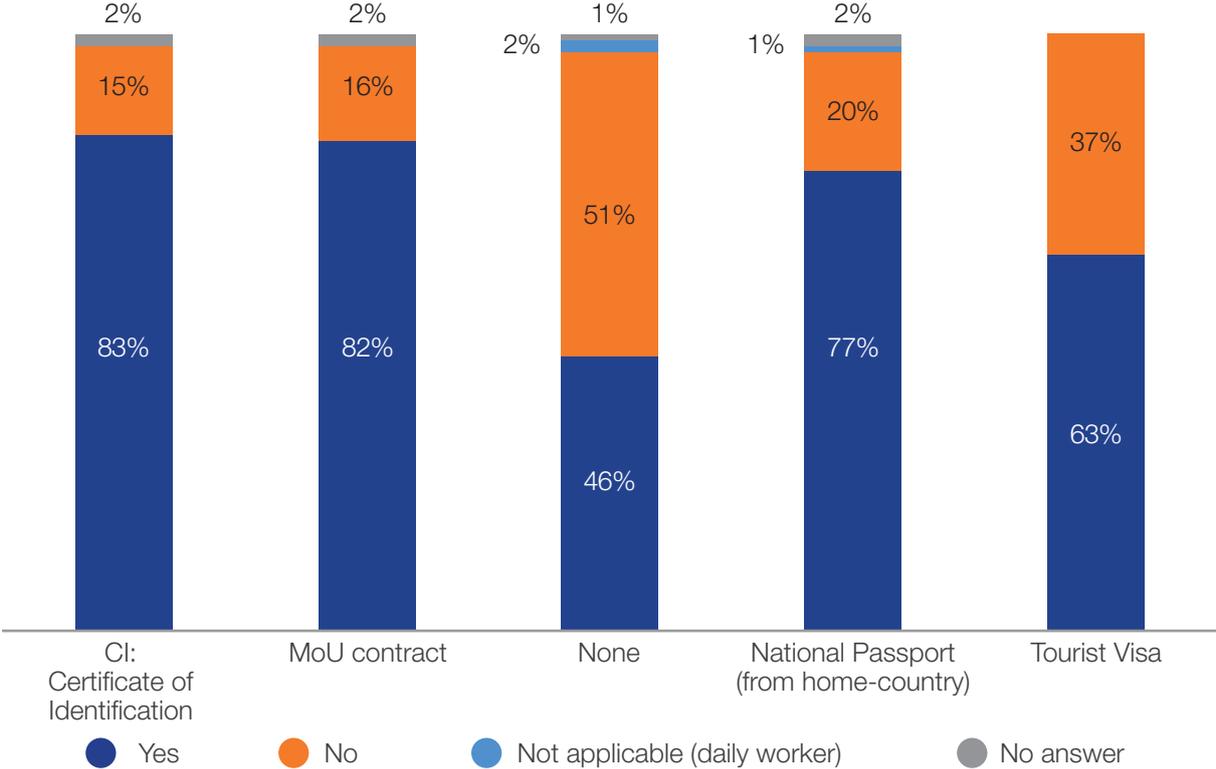
Figure 24 - Remittance Sending by Population Group (n=10,827)



Just as in Round Two, an analysis of the complete dataset does not indicate any positive relationship (or statistical significance) between having borrowed money for the migration journey and sending money back to Myanmar. Of all returning migrants who reported having borrowed money from at least one source to finance their journey, 55 per cent reported to have sent remittances. Of those that did not borrow money for the journey, 66 per cent reported that they had remitted money to Myanmar. The data also shows that there is no statistical significance between sending money home and the sex of the respondent.

While borrowing money does not seem to correlate with the likelihood of sending remittances, migrants with a regular migration status appear to be more likely to send back remittances than those with no documentation (see Figure 25).

Figure 25 - Remittance Sending by Documentation Status (Returning Migrants) n=2,804

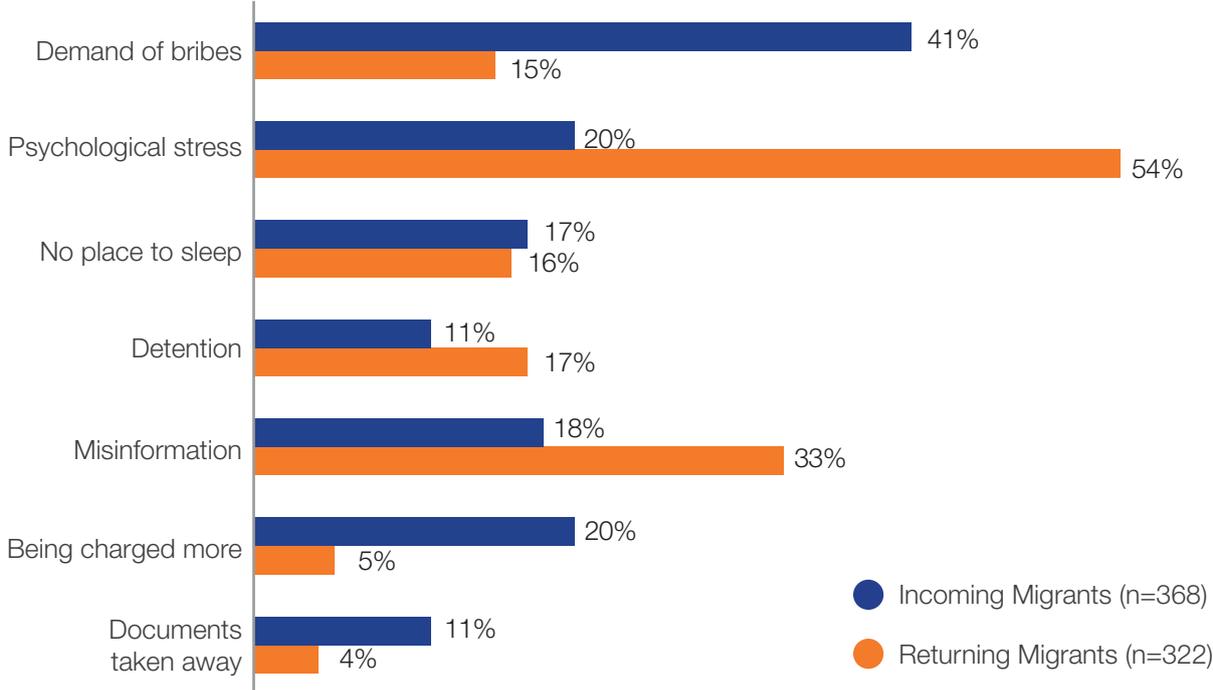


As identified in the first section on demographic profiles, over 80 per cent of the overall sample (over 85% in case of returning migrants) reported having at least one child still living in Myanmar. Having children in Myanmar might seem to increase the likelihood of sending remittances back home. However, data shows that having children in Myanmar does not seem to be a determining factor in remittance-sending behaviour. Returning migrants that had children in Myanmar reported in 61 per cent of the cases to send remittances, while 59 per cent of returning migrants that did not have children in Myanmar reported to have remitted money to Myanmar.

Problems en Route and at the Workplace in Thailand

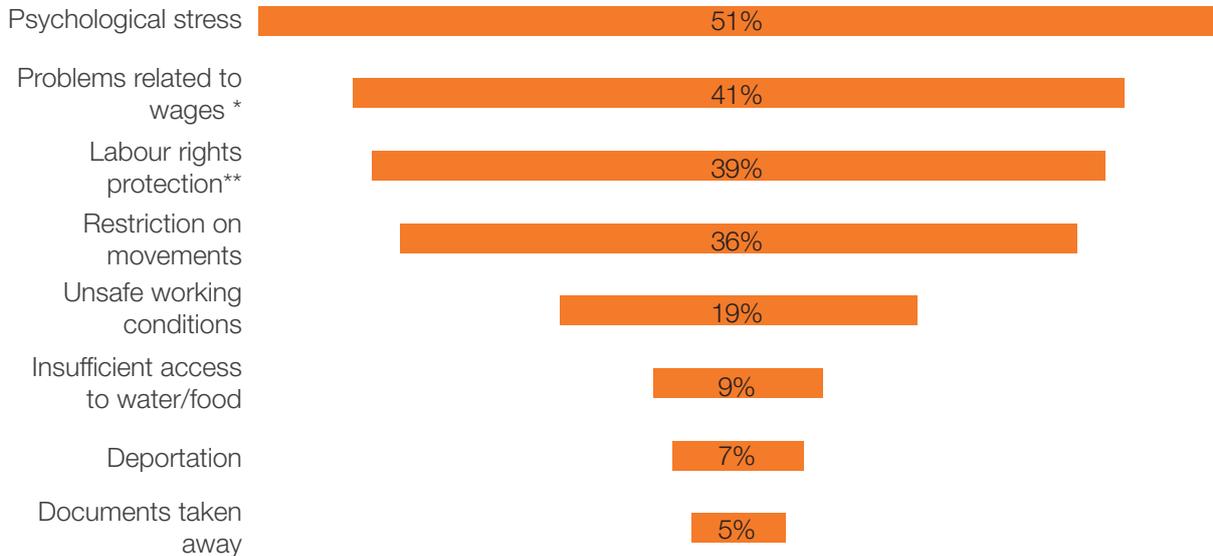
To better understand migrant workers' vulnerabilities, the respondents were asked directly if they had faced any problems during their journey to Thailand (or journey so far, for incoming migrants), and about problems at the workplace. Incoming migrants were asked about their expectations of problems at the workplace. As already highlighted in previous rounds, on average, returning migrants report more problems than incoming migrants. This seems expected as most incoming migrants have at the time of interview yet to reach their destination. The combined dataset shows that 5 per cent of incoming migrants and 12 per cent of returning migrants reported problems. Incoming migrants tended to report problems related to payments, such as having to pay bribes (41%) or being charged more money than previously agreed on. Returning migrants, on the other hand, commonly reported psychological stress (54%) and misinformation (33%) as main problems while en route to their destination in Thailand.

Figure 26 - Problems en Route by Population Group



As identified in the Round One and Round Two reports, incoming and returning migrants encountered and expected different problems at the workplace. Consistent with findings from previous rounds, the combined data shows that only four per cent of incoming migrants expected to face problems at their workplace. However, 32 per cent of the return sample reported having faced problems. This discrepancy might seem surprising as throughout all rounds over 90 per cent of incoming migrants reported prior work experience in Thailand and could therefore be expected to be more attuned to potential problems. Conversely, however, perhaps only those with positive migration experiences the first time would seek to go back, resulting in lower expectation of facing problems, especially as they might believe themselves to be familiar with the Thai context. Results from all three rounds show that most problems were related to psychological stress as well as problems related to wages and labour rights (see Figure 27).

Figure 27 - Problems at Workplace (Returning Migrants) n=893



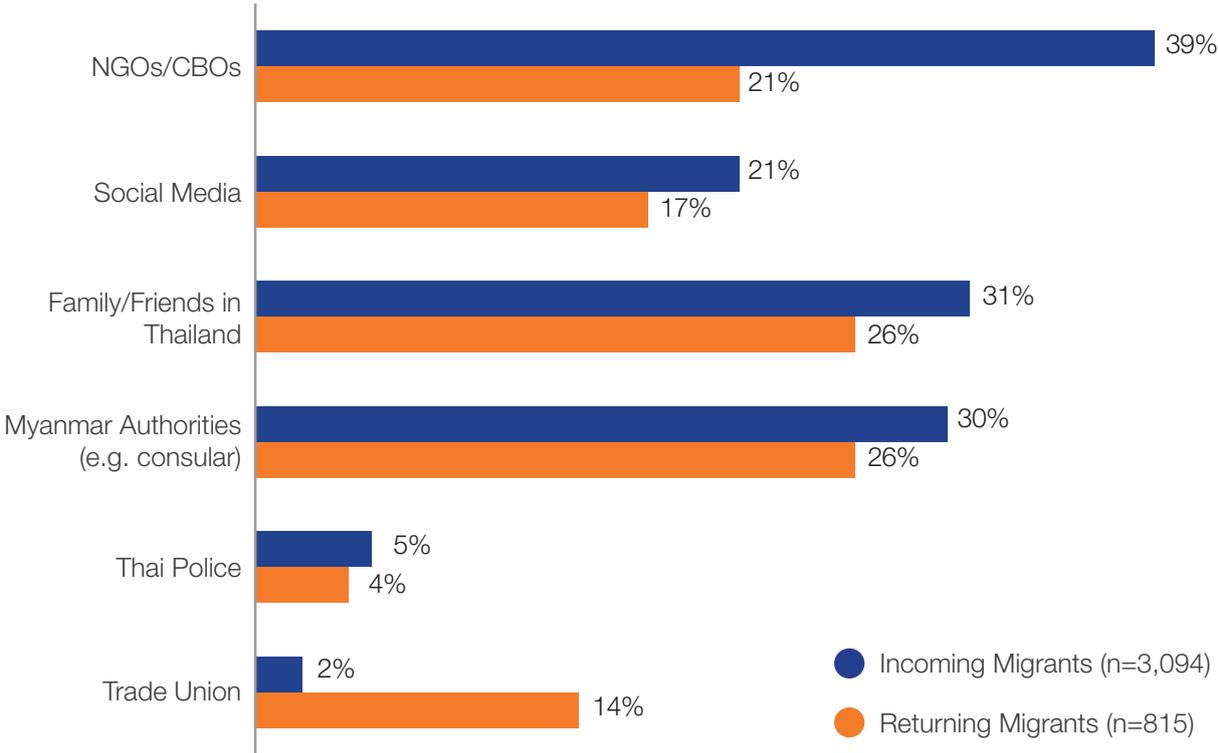
* Problems related to wages include: paid below minimum wage, illegal wage deductions, wages being withheld and irregular pay
 ** Labour rights protection includes: long working hours, no breaks and no holidays

Overall, the data shows that there is no statistical significance in the relationship between having documents and facing problems. However, when considering the relationship between facing problems and being deported, it becomes clear that respondents interviewed at the IDC are more likely to have reported problems while working in Thailand¹². Of all the return respondents that reported problems, 84 per cent were interviewed at the IDC. Furthermore, the ability to speak Thai also indicates some relationship with the likelihood of facing problems. Return migrants that ranked themselves at the lower ends of the scale in their ability to speak Thai more commonly reported problems during their employment in Thailand¹³.

To overcome these challenges, proper support systems need to be in place. Migrants were asked if they knew of any support mechanisms in case of problems in Thailand. Round Three results show that the number of respondents aware of available support mechanisms was much lower than in the two previous rounds. Only 34 per cent of incoming and 21 per cent of returning respondents reported knowing how to get support in case of problems. Looking at the entire dataset, 39 per cent of incoming migrants and 29 per cent of returning migrants reported being aware of available support mechanisms. Looking at the sex distribution, a correlation can be established between awareness of support mechanisms and being male or female. Males seem to be more commonly aware of support mechanisms than females (33% vs 39%).¹⁴

For both males and females, the data reveals the importance of family and friends in Thailand as support networks. Furthermore, Myanmar authorities are common sources of support for both incoming and returning migrants. However, incoming migrants seem to be more reliant on local NGOs/CBOs and returning migrants were more aware of trade unions as a source of support (see Figure 28).

Figure 28 - Main Known Support Mechanism in Thailand by Population Group



Returning migrants were asked if the support mechanism identified was also able to help them overcome their problem(s). Roughly 59 per cent of returning migrants reported to have received the support needed while three per cent reported receiving no support and 19 per cent reported receiving partial help. A further 11 per cent stated that they were not in need of support and 8 per cent did not want to answer the question. There was no correlation identified between sex and receiving support.

12 The correlation is significant on a 0.01 level

13 No statistical significance can be found for this statement

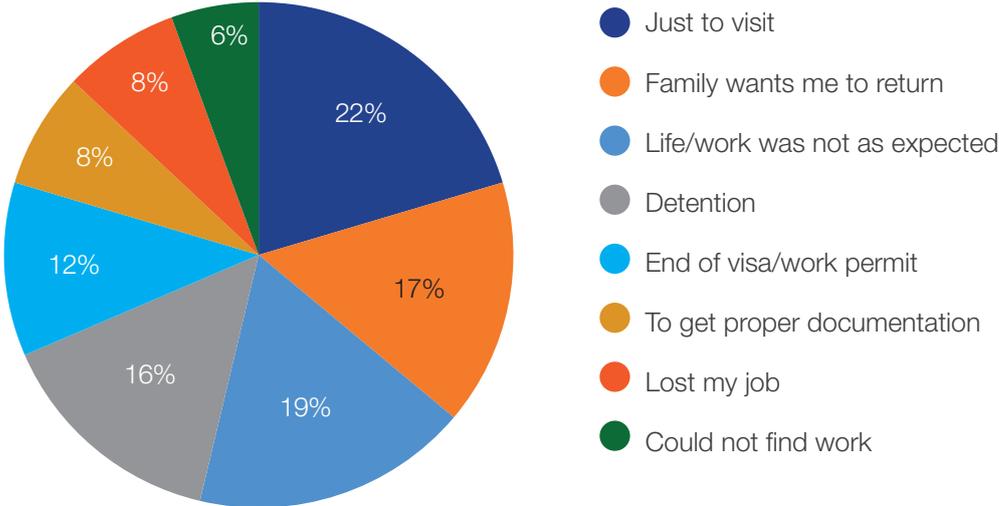
14 The correlation is significant on a 0.01 level

Thematic Area 5 - Return

A third of returning migrants reported having faced a problem at the workplace and almost two thirds of the return sample expected to face challenges upon their return. These challenges were mostly associated with their mental or physical health or with finding a job. Approximately one third of the return sample considered migrating to Thailand again. For roughly half of the respondents, their general financial situation improved through migration. For those that reported their financial situation as having deteriorated, the main reasons were attributed to not making enough money in Thailand or to accumulating debt. There seems to be a positive correlation between borrowing money to fund the migration journey and being financially worse off.

Questions for thematic area five were only included in the survey tool for returning migrants as it centers on the topic of return. In terms of reasons for returns to Myanmar, no single common reason was reported but rather a variety of different reasons were cited (see Figure 29). However, the distribution for the different return reasons remained largely similar throughout the three rounds of data collection.

Figure 29 - Reasons for Return (Returning Migrants) n=2,804



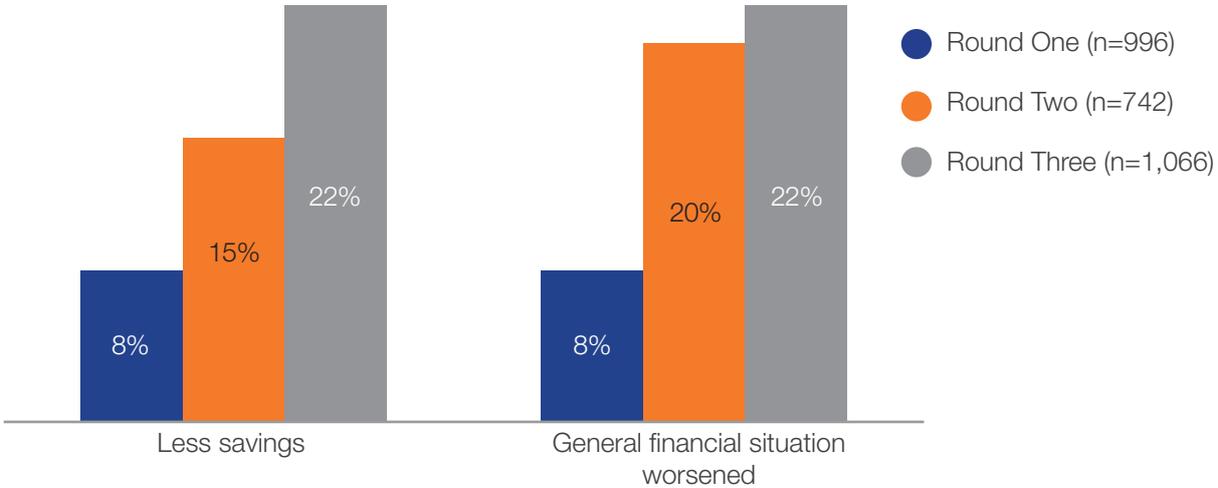
In addition, respondents (those that are expected to return for a longer period and not just to visit family and friends or to retrieve proper documentation) were asked if they expected to face challenges upon their return to Myanmar. Of the full sample, roughly 34 per cent did not expect to face any challenges upon return. Looking at the different data collection rounds individually, with each round fewer respondents reported not expecting challenges upon return (65% in Round One, 37% in Round Two and only 2% in Round Three). Throughout all rounds, mental health was mentioned as the greatest expected challenge with 80 per cent of respondents citing mental health concerns during the Round Three analysis (40% in the overall dataset). Other common challenges raised included finding a job (14.5%), physical health (8%), finding housing (7%) or the repayment of debts (4%).

The share of migrants that considered migrating again decreased with each data collection round (41% during Round One, 32% during Round Two and 19% during Round Three). For the combined data sample, 30.5 per cent reported wanting to migrate again, while 19 per cent did not know yet and 49.5 per cent reported not wanting to migrate again. Of the 30.5 per cent that would consider migrating again, a clear majority of 97.5 per cent would return to Thailand. The remaining 2.5 per cent named countries including Malaysia (9 respondents), Indonesia (2 respondents) and China (1 respondent). Reasons for migrating again included

higher wages (61%), better job opportunities (43%), presence of family and friends still being in Thailand (31%) and better living conditions in Thailand (22%).¹⁵ Looking at the age distribution it becomes clear that younger respondents between the ages of 16-30 years (70%) and 31-45 years (29%) were more likely to express interest in migrating again.

As previous research has shown¹⁶, migrants can incur debt through their migration experience, often by failing to anticipate certain costs or by expecting to earn more money than they do. The survey therefore included a few simple questions on the respondents' financial situations upon return. Although in general the combined dataset shows that overall the general financial and savings situations of returning migrants improved, the proportion of respondents with fewer savings and a worse financial situation increased with each round (see Figure 30).

Figure 30 - Status of Savings and General Financial Situation by Data Collection Round



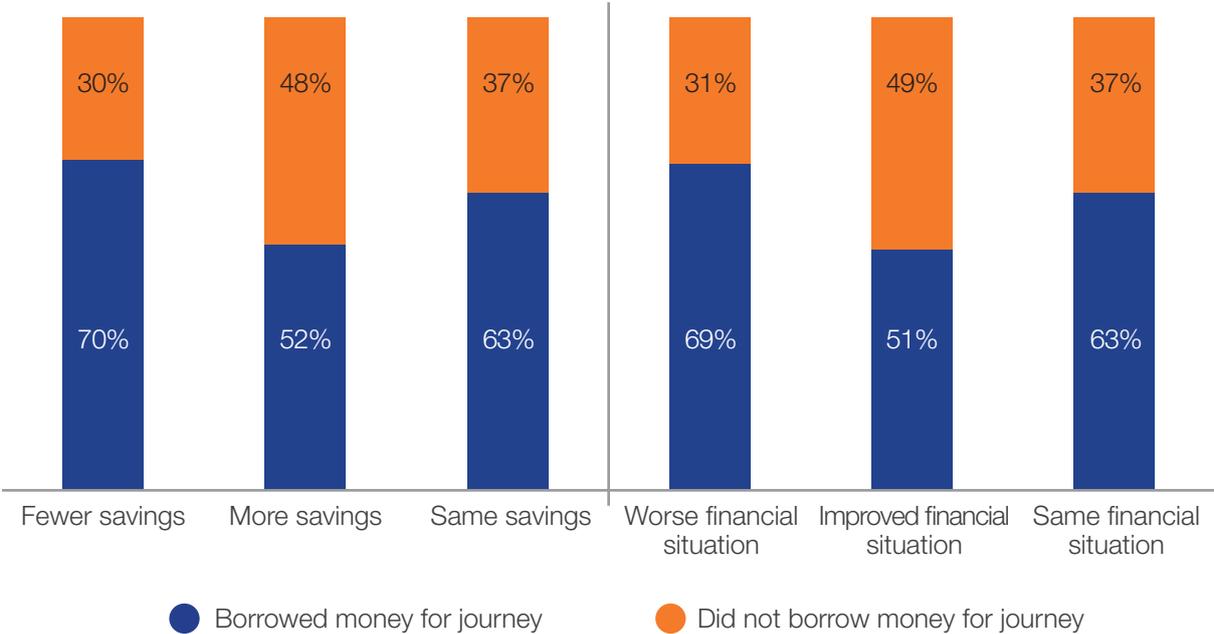
Looking at the combined dataset, the majority (60%) reported that their general savings situation had improved through migration while 15 per cent reported that their savings had decreased, and 19 per cent reported no change; the remaining 6 per cent did not want to answer the question. Regarding their general financial situation, 59 per cent of the return sample reported that their situation had improved, however, 17 per cent reported that it had gotten worse and 20 per cent indicated that it had remained the same; the remaining 4 per cent did not feel comfortable answering the question. When asked why their financial situation had deteriorated, 63 per cent reported that they were not able to earn enough money with their job in Thailand, 55 per cent cited debts and 31 per cent said they were not able to find a good enough job.

Borrowing money can often have a negative impact on migrants' overall financial situations as they might not have anticipated certain costs or have expected to earn more money than they actually did. Looking at the sub-sample with fewer savings after migration and those whose overall financial situation deteriorated, the data suggests a positive correlation between borrowing money and worse financial outcomes.

15 Respondents could choose multiple reasons, which is why these percentages add up to more than 100%.

16 Bylander (2018). Debt and the Migration Experience - Insights from Southeast Asia. International Organization for Migration. Retrieved from: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/debt_and_the_migration_experience_insights_from_southeast_asia_2.pdf

Figure 31 - Status of Savings and Financial Situation by Having Borrowed Money for the Migration Journey (n=2,804)



As Figure 31 shows, on average, migrants who indicated having fewer savings, as well as being financially worse off after migration, also seemed more likely to have borrowed money for their journey to Thailand. Of those that reported having the same level of savings and that their financial situation had remained the same, the sample suggests that they were also more likely to have borrowed money for their migration journey.¹⁷ Looking at the respondents interviewed at the IDC there is no relationship between being financially worse off or having less savings and being deported.

¹⁷ There appears to be no statistical significance between borrowing money and having more savings after migration. There is a negative correlation on a 0.01 level between borrowing money and being financially better off through migration.



Picture 4 - DTM Enumerator Interviewing Myanmar Migrant at the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The results of this third round of data collection and the combined results from all three rounds are useful in providing further empirical data to confirm and, at times, challenge anecdotal knowledge and preconceptions about cross border movements and labour migration between Thailand and Myanmar. Undertaking multiple rounds of data collection makes it possible to compare data gathered at different points in time, and to confirm or challenge previously identified findings.

The data collection activity in Tak province took place in Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts within a timeframe of six months (mid-June until mid-December 2018). A total of 11,466 Myanmar migrants coming from and going to Thailand were surveyed, of whom 8,542 were incoming migrants and 2,924 were returning migrants. A total of 10,780 surveys were collected in the district of Mae Sot and 686 surveys in the district of Phop Phra. Of the total sample of 11,466 migrants, 10,827 individuals were identified as migrant workers.

Migrants' Profiles

Myanmar migrants coming to Thailand for employment were predominately married males between the ages 16 and 30 having completed either primary or secondary school education. For both incoming and returning migrants, the most common length of stay in Thailand (actual and expected) was over a year, and the main provinces of destination were Bangkok, Tak, Samut Sakhon and Chon Buri. Kayin and Mon State, together with the Bago East region, remained the primary migrant-sending states within Myanmar throughout all three data collection rounds. Bamar, Karen and Mon were the three most commonly observed ethnicities.

Drivers of Migration

Roughly one quarter of the sample was unemployed before leaving Myanmar. The data suggests that females are slightly more likely to have been unemployed prior to migration. Moreover, younger respondents (age range between 16 and 30 years) seem more likely to be unemployed. The majority of migrants were being employed on a daily wage or self-employment basis before their migration to Thailand. Employment was the main reason cited for coming to Thailand, and the data shows that migration seems to be cyclical as a large share of migrants surveyed had been to Thailand to seek employment before. This pattern is especially visible among incoming migrants, however the share of returning migrants that had previously migrated for employment to Thailand decreased with each round of data collection. Myanmar migrants stated preferring to come to Thailand over other countries because of its geographical proximity and easily accessible labour market. The importance of family and friends in Thailand as sources of information and as factors in choosing Thailand as a destination country lends credence to the migration network theory which suggests that migrants usually depend on pre-established networks in their country of destination.

Pre-migration Preparations and Arrangements

Migrants clearly prefer to arrange employment before coming to Thailand (roughly 90% of respondents had done so), mainly through the help of family or friends in Thailand or through an agency. Manufacturing and

construction are particularly popular sectors of employment. Returning migrants reported paying, on average, more than twice what incoming migrants paid for their migration journeys. This could be due to the fact that returning migrants had travelled further into Thailand than incoming migrants at the point of interview. To finance the cost of migration, incoming migrants relied predominantly on their savings and income, whereas returning migrants more frequently reported having borrowed money from a variety of different actors. The largest share borrowed from money lenders and/or family and friends in Myanmar. Returning migrants are also more likely to have received support in their migration arrangements. Support is mostly received from family and friends in Thailand, as well as recruitment agencies and brokers, mainly in the form of support with transportation, employment, documents and accommodation. The questions on support in migration preparations and arrangements indicate the importance of family and friends in Thailand and Myanmar as key actors and active facilitators in the respondents' migration processes, both financially and otherwise.

Migrants' Vulnerabilities

On average, migrants ranked their ability to speak, understand and particularly read Thai as relatively low. With respect to documentation status, those employed in the agricultural and domestic work sectors were more likely not to have any form of documentation. Respondents that worked in Tak province frequently reported wages below the provincial minimum wage, as did respondents returning from Bangkok. Conversely, migrants returning from Chon Buri and Samut Sakhon provinces reported, on average, higher wages than the provincial daily minimum. Migrants without documentation also more often reported being paid below the median minimum wage. Fewer incoming migrants reported experiencing problems during their journeys than returning migrants, and incoming migrants also rarely expected to face problems at the workplace in Thailand. Having children in Myanmar does not appear to be a determining factor in remittance-sending behavior. However, migrants with proper documentation appear to be more likely to send remittances than those with no documentation.

Return

A third of returning migrants reported having faced a problem at the workplace and almost two thirds of the return sample expected to face challenges upon their return, particularly with regard to their mental or physical health or with finding a job. Only one third of the return sample considered migrating again, predominantly to Thailand. For roughly half of the migrants, their general financial situation improved through migration. For those that reported their financial situation as having deteriorated, the main reasons were attributed to not earning enough money in Thailand or to accumulating debt. There seems to be a positive correlation between borrowing money to fund the migration journey and being financially worse off.

Recommendations

- The data collected from 11,705 respondents between mid-June and mid-December 2018 provides useful insights into the profiles and vulnerabilities of Myanmar migrants to Thailand. However, this data is far from being representative of all Myanmar migrants to Thailand, particularly noting that data collection was only undertaken in the province of Tak. In order to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of key migration trends and the potential vulnerabilities affecting Myanmar labour migrants coming to Thailand, **further data collection is recommended**, in particular with a focus on capturing flows between Kawthaung-Ranong and Tachileik-Mae Sai.
- Noting the high volume of remittances sent by Myanmar migrants, the prevalence of children left in Myanmar by migrating parents, and the negative way in which debt seems to shape the migratory experiences of Myanmar migrants, **further research on the topics of debt, children left behind, and remittance-sending practices** may help to better understand these trends, to better support the developmental potential of migration, and to better understand - and hopefully mitigate - some of the possible vulnerabilities associated with migration to Thailand.
- The majority of returning respondents (59-60%) reported having benefited financially from their migration. However, labour migrants without documentation were more likely to be paid below minimum wage, and migrants surveyed at the Immigration Detention Centre were also more likely to have faced problems at the workplace. Moreover, migrants who took on debt to fund their migration were more likely to return with fewer savings and in a worse financial situation, and were less likely to be able to remit funds to Myanmar than those who didn't take on debt. In order to ensure that migrants are in a better position to achieve positive outcomes from their migration, **continued efforts in providing accurate pre-migration information should be made**, in particular encouraging regular migration and in promoting a better understanding of the risks associated with taking on debt. As only a third of migrants reported being aware of available support mechanisms in Thailand, pre-migration information should also focus on increasing awareness of support systems.
- Survey findings point to the critical role played by Myanmar migrants in Thailand as sources of information for aspirant migrants, as actors in supporting employment arrangements for family and friends seeking to join them, and as support networks for fellow migrants facing challenges in Thailand. As warranted as pre-migration outreach may be in the country of origin, in order to effectively ensure that aspirant migrants are receiving accurate information about legal migration options, labour rights and regulations, and available support mechanisms, it is imperative that **comprehensive and regular outreach take place with the existing migrant community in Thailand as well**.
- The data shows that when Myanmar migrants face challenges in Thailand, they predominantly seek support from trusted actors, such as fellow migrants, Myanmar consular authorities, and local NGOs and CBOs. By large, they are unlikely to seek support directly from Thai authorities or INGOs. In order to ensure that migrants in need of assistance are receiving accurate information and are being correctly referred for support, it is important for relevant stakeholders to **engage with and work closely alongside Myanmar authorities and local NGOs and CBOs**.
- The data also underlines the growing usage of social media by Myanmar migrants, with a little over 20% of respondents identifying social media as one of their main sources of information on life in Thailand, and as a possible source of support in cases of challenges. While the role that social media plays is still very much secondary to that played by family and friends in Thailand, its growing importance warrants stakeholders **taking a closer look at the social media usage of Myanmar migrants and the sources of information accessed on social media** - particularly to ensure that information being accessed is correct and up to date. Stakeholders may also want to give consideration to how they can better engage Myanmar migrants through relevant social media channels.

- Data collected from June to December 2018 shows a progressive increase in Myanmar migrants entering Thailand on government to government MoU contracts, likely as a result of the implementation of the Royal Ordinance on Foreign Worker Management (B.E. 2560) on 1 July 2018. While this trend is certainly encouraging, survey responses continue to highlight the important role played by unlicensed brokers in facilitating migration - particularly in the case of migrants entering Thailand on MoU contracts. This points to a need to **continue simplifying legal migration options, so that workers no longer need to solicit support from unlicensed agents, as well as to a need to continue making efforts to regulate the interventions of brokers**, who may in some cases act unscrupulously and have limited accountability as unlicensed operatives.
- While the majority of migrants reported returning with increased savings and an improved financial situation, two thirds of returnees nonetheless anticipated challenges on their return to Myanmar, predominantly linked to mental health concerns and to difficulties in finding a job. The potential of the migration experience to adversely affect mental health needs to be acknowledged, with over 16% of migrants citing psychological stress as a problem at the workplace, and over a third of returning migrants anticipating challenges associated with their mental health once back in Myanmar. These statistics point to the need to **improve mental health resources for the Myanmar migrant population**, both prior to migration and upon return. Government authorities and other support actors should also **explore ways in which to better assist returning migrants with employment advice, job counselling and psychosocial support**, possibly through dedicated Migrant Resources Centres, or other relevant avenues.
- According to the survey data collected, almost a third of Myanmar migrants reported facing some type of problem at the workplace, with challenges ranging from wage-related problems and issues associated with labour rights protection, to unsafe working conditions and facing restrictions on their movement. Almost half of returning migrants also reported earnings below the median minimum wage, with non-payment of the provincial minimum particularly pronounced in Tak and Bangkok. Given these realities, **efforts to continue regular workplace inspections** are called for, with a particular focus on the most commonly-reported challenges and on provinces where non-payment of minimum wage seems prevalent. Recognizing the difficulties inherent in appropriately **regulating the domestic work and agricultural sectors**, stronger efforts are nonetheless called for to protect the rights of migrants engaging in these activities, as survey data shows that they are more unlikely to be paid minimum wage in Thailand.



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