FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS: INSIGHTS INTO THE PROFILES AND VULNERABILITIES OF MYANMAR MIGRANTS TO THAILAND

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)
SEPTEMBER 2018

DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX (DTM)

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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Executive Summary

Due to Thailand's economic growth in recent decades, the country has become heavily dependent on low-skilled foreign workers, and it has long been a trend for citizens from neighboring countries such as Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar to move to Thailand for work. As a result, 63 per cent of Myanmar's overall migrant population lives in neighboring Thailand, and Myanmar migrants constitute the largest proportion (about 80%) of migrants in Thailand. Although migration from Myanmar to Thailand has a long-standing history, migrants still face a number of challenges. Due to the nature of the jobs sought (mainly low-skilled), the lack of proper legal statuses, as well as a lack of social networks and support systems in country, migrants are often exposed to greater risks and vulnerabilities than local populations. Both governments have put in place legal initiatives to regularize migration, but the process has been long, cumbersome and often disputed.

In order 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 May 2018 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; it is an optimal tool to provide 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.

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 help to identify migration patterns as well as common challenges and vulnerabilities and can be used to better direct policy and programming for the protection and assistance of migrant workers.

Since many of the respondents had worked in Thailand before, the main findings of the report show that the information and expectations that incoming migrants have is overall not too different from the experiences and impressions that outgoing migrants have when returning from Thailand. Looking at key findings for each thematic area, the data shows that the majority of respondents were married men between the ages of 16 and 30 years, originating mainly from Kayin State, Mon State and the Bago region. While the average duration of stay is the same for both samples, namely over one year, the education level for returning migrants was slightly higher. Migrants coming through Mae Sot tend to scatter all over Thailand after their arrival, travelling especially to Bangkok, Phuket and Chon Buri. On the other hand, Myanmar nationals entering Thailand in Phop Phra tend to stay in Tak province.

Prior to migration most migrants reported relying on self-employment or daily wage employment conditions, and almost one quarter did not have any form of employment. The largest share of both samples chose to go to Thailand for employment reasons. The majority of both migrant groups had previously worked in Thailand, however incoming migrants were more likely to have done so. Thailand was predominately chosen as a destination country because of the ease of access, as well as the accessibility of jobs.

For both sample populations, the largest share had already secured a job before arriving in Thailand. Nevertheless, incoming migrants were more likely to already have a job lined up, which could be explained by data showing that a larger share of incoming migrants reported to have obtained their job by knowing the employer. This aligns with the fact that a greater proportion of incoming migrants also had previous work experience in Thailand. Overall, the three main employment sectors for respondents were manufacturing, construction and the service industry (in hotels, restaurants and food preparation). Returning migrants reported having spent on average three times more for their journeys than incoming migrants. Possible reasons could be that incoming migrants have yet to reach their destination and may be required to pay more further along. The most commonly reported sources for financing migration were savings and general income/wages. However, returning migrants seemed to rely more heavily on borrowing money from a variety of different actors. With regard to support for migration preparations and arrangements, incoming migrants relied mainly on family or friends in Thailand, whereas returning migrants commonly made use of unlicensed brokers or agents. One determining factor for this appears to be the migrant's legal status in Thailand. A large share of return respondents also did not possess any form of documentation, making the use of unlicensed brokers more likely.

Surprisingly, Thai language skills in speaking and comprehension were twice as high in the sample of incoming migrants than in the sample of returning migrants. This could potentially be explained by the high share of incoming migrants that had previously lived in Thailand. Both sample groups report poor levels of Thai language reading ability. Migrants travelling through Phop Phra who intend to stay in Tak province were more likely to not have any form of documentation. Of those migrants entering Thailand under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) almost one quarter had never seen their employment contract. Of those who had seen it, the majority also reported having signed the contract themselves. On average, the expected daily wage for incoming migrants and the actual wages received by returning migrants fell above the median minimum wage of THB 318. Women, however, were less likely to earn more than the median minimum wage. Problems reported during the journey were relatively low for both samples, with those that did face problems mainly reported misinformation as well as psychological stress. With regard to problems in the workplace, it seems that incoming migrants could underestimate the potential for problems, as a larger share of returning migrants reported facing problems than incoming migrants reporting expecting them. Common problems are related to wages and payments, as well as long hours and psychological stress.

The data did not reveal any key determining factor for returning home but rather a variety of factors – the end of a work permit/visa; deportation; not having proper documentation; and visiting family/friends were the most common reasons given. The majority of returning respondents did not expect to face any challenges upon return. The share of those that intended to migrate again and those that did not wish to do so is relatively evenly distributed. Two determinants to migrating again seem to be age as well as the length of stay in Thailand. Migrants aged between 21 and 30 years reported being more likely to migrate again, as well as those respondents that had lived in Thailand for over a year. In general, migrants seemed to have accumulated more savings through migration, and had also improved their overall financial situation.

Picture 1- DTM enumerator explaining a photo consent form to a respondent

Introduction and Background

Labour migration plays a key role in the South-East Asian context, particularly in Thailand (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017). For a number of reasons, including its continuous economic growth over the past few decades and the consequent need for labour, Thailand has continuously attracted low-skilled workers from neighbouring countries (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017; IOM, 2013). In the 2017 UN Migration Report, the official number of international migrants in Thailand was estimated to be 3,589,000 (UNDESA, 2017). The actual number of migrants living in Thailand, however, is believed to be even larger as undocumented migrants are not accounted for in official statistics. Nationals from Myanmar make up the largest migrant worker population in Thailand. In the 2013 and 2015 IOM report "Assessing potential changes in the migration patterns of Myanmar migrants and their impacts on Thailand", the number of Myanmar workers in Thailand was estimated to be at least 2.3 million individuals.

A number of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) on labour migration have been signed between ASEAN countries and beyond, and various measures and amnesties have been introduced to support the regularization of migrants. Nevertheless, the associated costs and lengthy processes required to take part in regular migration channels continue to drive migrants to resort to means of irregular migration channels (Chantavanich, Middleton, & Ito, 2013). In the context of Thailand and Myanmar, the announcement in June 2017 to introduce a Royal Ordinance on Foreign Workers Management B.E. 2560 (2017), imposed stiff penalties on both employers and migrant workers who violate provisions on the legal employment of migrant workers; this ordinance has caused a shift in the migration movements of Myanmar nationals working in Thailand.

Migrants from Myanmar are usually able to enter into Thailand without much difficulty. In some areas along the Thai-Myanmar border, such as near the towns of Mae Sot and Mae Sai, the border is only marked by an often shallow river, hills or jungle. Furthermore, border passes for migrants are easily obtained at three official checkpoints between Thailand and Myanmar (Chiang Rai, Mae Sot and Ranong), making it convenient for Myanmar migrants to enter Thailand. While border passes allow migrants to stay on the Thai side of the border for a short, fixed duration of time, many are also believed to use the pass as a legal entry ticket into Thailand, which they then overstay on in order to work (Jirattikorn, 2015).

Although migration from Myanmar to Thailand is not a new phenomenon, there remains a dearth of reliable data that can be used for the development of evidence-based policy and programming. The lack of primary data is often ascribed to the temporary and sometimes irregular nature of much of the migration occurring within the country. In an attempt to fill some of the current information gaps, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) established a Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) flow monitoring data collection exercise under the regional "Greater Mekong and Malaysia: Migrant Assistance and Protection Program (MAPP)". The data collection tools and strategy implemented are based on the DTM global methodology, and the flow monitoring component was adapted to the migration context of the two countries. The data will not only help to better understand the flows of migrants coming from Myanmar to Thailand, but also to understand migrants' vulnerabilities during their journey, as well as upon arrival. The information collected contributes to the provision of a more comprehensive profile of the migrant population coming from Myanmar to Thailand, which can be used by IOM, governments and other humanitarian actors for improved advocacy and protection of this population, as well as for the delivery of more targeted assistance.

In order to create the most accurate baseline sample, the data collection exercise consists of three stages. Firstly, the observation stage enabled IOM Thailand to identify key unofficial border crossing points in and around Mae Sot, Tak province, which functioned as the basis for the second stage. The second stage involved establishing Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) at these key border crossings and beginning to implement the Flow Monitoring Registry. The data collected at these FMPs provided the baseline for the Flow Monitoring Survey (FMS) by counting the daily flows at various border crossing points. Next, the FMS was rolled out across key locations in Mae Sot and neighbouring districts identified in the previous stages. The FMS was designed around five thematic areas, collecting information on Myanmar migrants' profiles, drivers of migration, pre-migration preparations and arrangements, vulnerabilities en route and upon arrival, as well as reasons for return and associated challenges. The report will follow the same structure – after explaining the methodological set-up of the activity and the data collection, the report will provide a short literature review for each of the five thematic areas before analysing the primary data collected by thematic area.

Methodology

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a set of tools and methodologies, which enable systematic and regular primary data collection, analysis and dissemination of population movements, human mobility and forced migration (both internal and cross-border). DTM was first conceptualized in 2004, and it has since been adapted for implementation in over 70 countries, including many in Asia, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Mongolia. In 2017 alone, DTM tracked over 30 million individuals (internally displaced persons, returnees and migrants) across a broad range of contexts. DTM operations are collaborative exercises. IOM engages with national authorities and humanitarian partners to ensure wide coverage and access, as well as the usefulness and relevance of data and trust in the results. Although originally designed to serve the humanitarian community during crises, DTM has been increasingly implemented in non-crisis situations. Similar to the labour migration context at the Thailand-Myanmar border, DTM has in some cases been used not only as a tool to track the movements of a displaced population, but also to receive better and more detailed information on the said population. The activity that is being implemented at the Thai-Myanmar border in Tak Province is called Flow Monitoring. The Flow Monitoring module was designed to track movement flows and the overall situation at key points of origin, transit and destination.

Geographical Location

Due to its geographical location and to the presence of the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge, Mae Sot district in Tak province is known to be one of the largest and busiest border crossing points for people traveling from Myanmar to Thailand for employment, daily business or to purchase merchandise. It is for this reason that DTM Flow Monitoring activities were rolled out in and around Mae Sot district. Activities were also implemented in the neighbouring district of Phop Phra due to the prevalence of labour migration in the district, especially related to the agricultural sector. The Thai side (Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts) and the Myanmar side (Myawaddy district) are separated from each other by a natural border, the Moei River. The lengthy and often shallow river makes flows between the two countries nearly impossible to monitor and control. IOM Flow Monitoring activities are therefore not aiming to capture the whole migrant population crossing the border between the two countries but will take only a representative sample of this population.

Map 1 - Geographical Location of Mae Sot and Phop Phra + Main Border Crossing Points
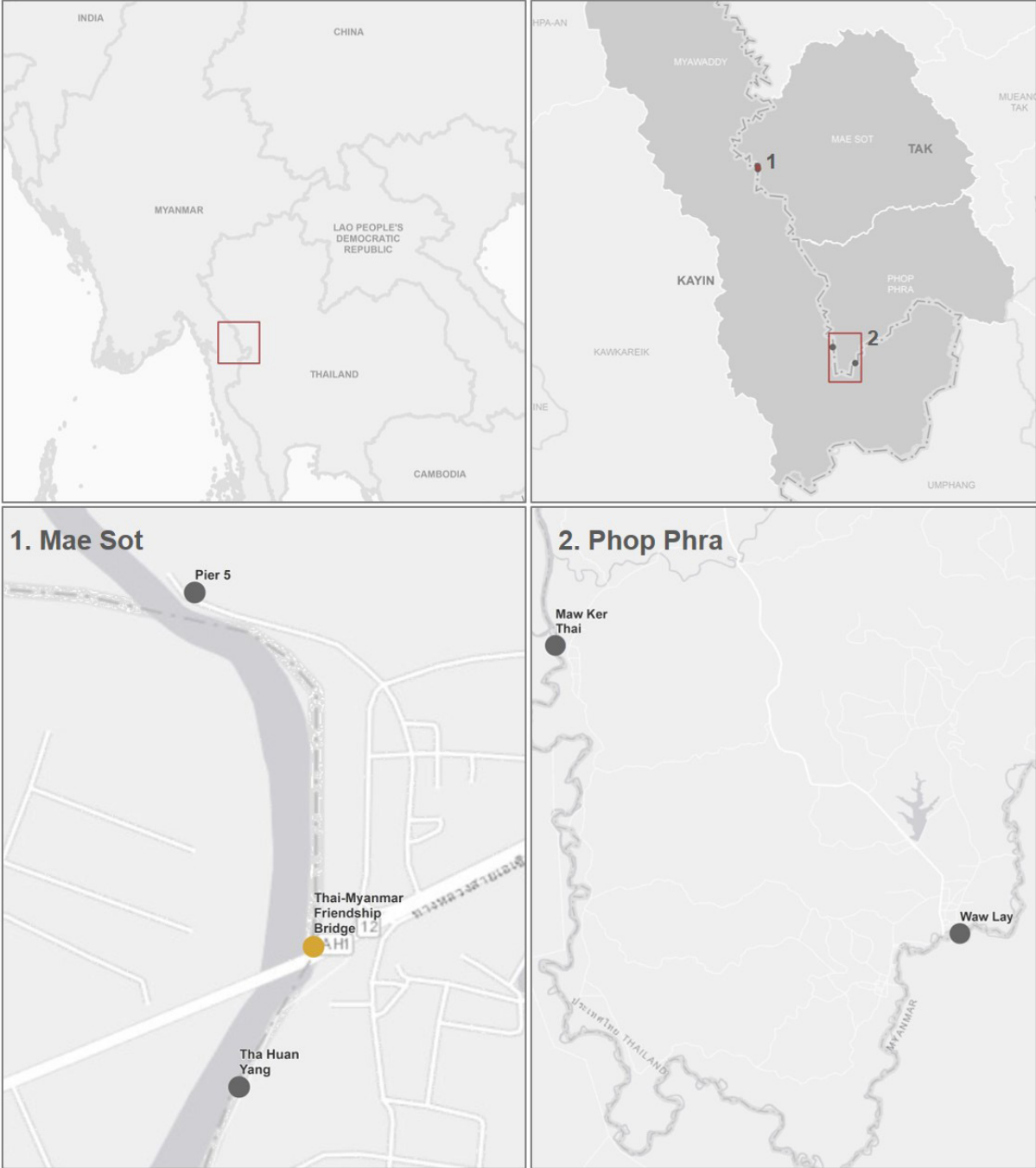
The maps of Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts do not show all unofficial border crossing points but only those relevant to the project

Project Implementation

DTM activities at the Thai-Myanmar border in Tak province evolved around three main phases. Table 1 elaborates on each phase, its objective and the operational set-up.

Table 1 - DTM Project Phases

Phase	Objectives	Set-up

1. Observations	• Identify the main crossing points for labour migration
	
	• Identify main hours migrant workers cross
	
	• Identify main transit points for migrant workers (for example, bus stops and waiting areas)
	
	• Identify potential changes in flows throughout the week (for example, more movements on particular days or weekends)
		• The observation phase was implemented for one week
		
		• Recruitment of 13 enumerators that were present at the border points during the main operating hours (6am – 7pm)
		
		• 7 locations:
		  - 4 crossing points in Mae Sot district
		  - 3 crossing points in Phop Phra district

2. Flow Monitoring Registry (Head count) methodology	• This tool is used in contexts where transit through FMPs is done either individually or in small groups and at a relatively slow pace. It consists of counting each person transiting through the FMP during a pre-determined period
	
	• Count flows of Myanmar nationals into Thailand and flows of Myanmar nationals back to Myanmar
	
	• Collect information on the volume, transportation mode, direction, gender and purpose of groups /individuals passing through the FMPs
	
	• Establish sample size for the FMS, based on the numbers registered
		• Initial 2 weeks of piloting to establish baseline data for the FMS activities
		
		• Continuous counting from 1 June 2018 onwards
		
		• Based on the observation stage, the main Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) were identified
		
		• 4 locations:
		  - 2 crossing points in Mae Sot district
		  - 2 crossing points in Phop Phra district

| 3. Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) | • Collect data using FMS on five thematic areas (profiles, drivers, pre-migration preparations, vulnerabilities and return intentions) | • Through the observation phase FMS points were identified

• 6 locations:

  - 4 in Mae Sot district

  - 2 in Phop Phra district

• Locations were chosen because of their strategic importance:

  - bus stops where migrant workers transit to go to other parts of Thailand

  - waiting/transit areas where migrant workers get picked up by employers

  - Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge (official border crossing point)

  - Immigration Detention Centre (IDC)

• Two survey tools were used:

  - Tool 1 is designed for inflows to Thailand

  - Tool 2 is designed for outflows/returns to Myanmar |

When collecting data on flows from Myanmar to Thailand, it is important to distinguish between regular and irregular flows. Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the DTM activity only apply to irregular border crossing points along the Moei River. For Phase 2, with regard to regular border crossing points, IOM Thailand receives access to official data from the immigration authorities in Tak province, which provides the information on all regular border crossings. For Phase 3, FMS data is collected at both regular as well as at irregular crossing points.

Flow Monitoring Survey Set-up

While the counting activities at the established FMPs help to gain a better overview of the daily flows between Thailand and Myanmar, the FMS is able to enhance the overall understanding of current migration flows and trends between Thailand and Myanmar, the underlying root causes of these movements, and the vulnerabilities experienced during the process. The Flow Monitoring Surveys at the selected border crossing points are designed to collect and compile structured data to answer the following questions:

Figure 1 - Research Questions

1) What are the socio-demographic profiles of Myanmar migrants going to and returning from Thailand?

2) What personal factors drive Myanmar nationals to migrate to Thailand?

3) Which factors attract Myanmar nationals to migrate to Thailand?

4) How is the journey from Myanmar and stay in Thailand organized/arranged?

5) What expectations/knowledge do Myanmar migrants have about life/work in Thailand?

6) How do Myanmar migrants finance their journeys?

7) What challenges and vulnerabilities do Myanmar nationals face during their journey to Thailand, as well as once they arrive in the country?

8) What are Myanmar nationals' levels of knowledge about their rights and obligations as migrants in Thailand?

9) What kind of support networks do Myanmar workers know about or have access to in Thailand?

10) What are the reasons for return and do Myanmar migrants expected to face challenges upon return? (Tool 2)

The ten questions correspond to five thematic areas, which were used as the foundation to design the survey. The literature review and data analysis in the second and third part of this report will follow the structure of these five thematic areas.

Figure 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 Collection and Analysis

In order to capture the flows of Myanmar nationals between Thailand and Myanmar, two different survey tools were designed. These survey tools are aimed at covering two different target groups.

Table 2 - 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.

The study consists of a quantitative, close-ended survey of Myanmar migrants crossing the border into Thailand for employment purposes or returning to Myanmar after finishing their labour migration. The DTM methodology was designed with the support of IOM's Global DTM Support team in Geneva, as well as with support from IOM's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok. The survey was developed jointly by IOM Thailand's Migrant Assistance and Counter-Trafficking Unit and DTM colleagues in IOM's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Additional inputs were provided by IOM's Migrant Protection and Assistance Division in Geneva.

All data is collected by enumerators, recruited by IOM Thailand. In order to establish a positive relationship and sense of trust with the local population, as well as to avoid difficulties due to language barriers between respondents and interviewers, IOM only recruited local border residents who know both the area and the target population well. All enumerators are either Myanmar nationals currently residing in Thailand or Thai nationals that are able to speak the Myanmar language.

All enumerators were trained for two days on the survey content and set-up procedure. The survey data was collected using the KoboCollect application installed on tablets. The KoboCollect application is connected to the DTM server in Geneva, and it automatically uploads completed surveys to the system. This makes it easier to monitor daily data entries and target compliances.

The first-round cutoff point was after eight weeks of initial surveying. Afterwards the data was translated (when necessary) and cleaned accordingly. The data was analyzed using both the SPSS statistics program and Microsoft Excel. The results are primarily based on cross-tabulations, in addition to some t-/chi-tests.

Sample Size

As outlined in the previous section, the study focuses on two target populations: Myanmar migrant workers crossing the border into Thailand for employment purposes, and Myanmar migrant workers returning to Myanmar after finishing an employment assignment. Border crossings at unofficial border points remain largely undocumented and are therefore hard to estimate. The Flow Monitoring Registry (Head count) methodology (Phase 2 of the activity) therefore provided a good tool to establish a baseline population.

In the first 10 days of initial counting, on average 3,751 people per day crossed the border between Thailand and Myanmar at the observed unofficial crossing points (FMPs). At the official border crossing point, the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge, on average 7,598 individuals crossed per day (based on the overall numbers in May 2018). In order to calculate the sample size more accurately the average daily crossings were projected to the average weekly crossings, as well as to the overall estimated crossings for the whole data collection phase of Round 1 (8 weeks). In order to estimate the sample size, the estimated average number of crossings during Round 1 was used as the baseline. The average was calculated by adding together the average crossings of all FMPs and the official Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge data. The range was then applied to a 5 and 3 per cent confidence interval, using a 99 per cent confidence level on the baseline population per Round 1 duration.

Table 3 - Sample Size Overview

Location	Baseline Data (average crossings per day) *Summation of FMP and official statistics*	Baseline Data (average crossings per week – *7)	Baseline Data (average crossings for round 1 duration - 8 weeks – *8)	Total estimated target for round 1	Actual number of respondents
Inflows	6,200	43,400	347,200	664 – 1,839	**3, 238**
Outflows	5,149	36,043	288,344	664 – 1,837	**1,054**
Total	**11,349**	**79,443**	**635,544**	**665 – 1,844**	**4,284**

Picture 2 - DTM enumerator at a FMP counting arriving migrants

Picture 3 - Migrants returning to Myanmar

Literature Review

Before analyzing the data collected during DTM activities in the districts of Mae Sot and Phop Phra in Tak province, Thailand, existing literature on the different thematic areas targeted by the study will be explored and summarized. In order to identify existing data gaps, it is important to first review the literature and research that has been undertaken to date on the topic of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. The literature review will follow the order of the thematic areas. Firstly, a brief overview will be provided on the history of migration of Myanmar nationals to Thailand, as well as associated policies, before summarizing existing research on the profile of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. The drivers of migration, as well as the preparation and arrangements migrants make before leaving Myanmar will be explored in sub sections two and three. The last two sub sections will help to understand research that has been conducted on the vulnerabilities migrant workers face in Thailand and throughout their employment experience, as well as their return intentions and challenges associated with return to Myanmar. Finally, the review will conclude with a short section on data gaps and how the DTM FMS-data hopes to address these gaps.

History of Migration from Myanmar to Thailand

Over the past decades, Thailand has been the recipient of large scale migration movements from its neighboring countries (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012) with Myanmar migrants constituting the largest proportion (about 80%) of all migrants in Thailand (Mon, 2010). It is estimated that about 10 per cent of Myanmar's population (approximately 5.3 million people) have migrated, for a variety of social and economic reasons, with more than 2 million of these currently living in Thailand alone (IOM, 2015a; Mon, 2010; Wine, 2008). One reason for the large cross border movements between Thailand and Myanmar is the proximity of the two countries. Myanmar and Thailand share a border of approximately 2,500 km, and individuals have been crossing it for centuries, long before a defined border even existed (Mon, 2010).

Taking a closer look at the more recent movements from Myanmar to Thailand, most literature starts in the late twentieth century. From the country perspective of Thailand, the large-scale movements in recent decades are a result of Thailand's healthy economic growth and its booming export-oriented businesses, which have created demand for low-skilled migrant labour. This has largely been met by workers from neighboring countries, such as Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic, thus enabling the labour-intensive sectors in Thailand to maintain their economic growth (IOM, 2013). Looking at it from the Myanmar country perspective both political and economic factors have motivated migration. Attracted by Thailand's booming economy, both regular and irregular migration has increased markedly since the 1980s and Myanmar migrants include skilled professionals and technicians, as well as unskilled labourers in the fishery, agriculture and hospitality industries (Ndegwa, 2016).

Only in the 2000s did Thailand launch a long-term policy aimed at formally recruiting migrants and legalizing the stay of migrant workers holding temporary work permits (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012). Until 2003 no comprehensive migration policy existed allowing low-skilled migrant workers to enter Thailand legally. Since then a series of MoUs have been signed and a regularization system was introduced in 2006 for migrants from Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. In 2009 a regularization system was also put in place for Myanmar nationals (Chantavanich, Middleton, & Ito, 2013; Asian Development Bank, 2009).[1]

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1   See Figure 1 for a timeline of the Royal Thai Government's policy towards foreign nationals.

There remains scope, however, to further improve the Royal Thai Government's policies to manage migrant workers, as many of the policies still entail long processes, as well as high fees, which low-skilled migrant workers are in many cases unable to afford. Many of the procedures to regularize migrants' statuses can also be complex and bureaucratic, requiring migrants to solicit support from brokers and incur additional costs. Furthermore, scholars have criticized the gap between policy formulation and implementation. For instance, Campbell (2018) writes in his book that although most migrants in Mae Sot were aware of the registration deadlines to receive a temporary passport, only a small minority actually applied for legal documents because the costs for private passport companies were prohibitive. While by law it was possible for employers to advance the costs for documents, in practice in the area of Mae Sot this almost never happened.

Figure 3 - Main Thai Policies Impacting Migration from Myanmar

1978/9 The Foreign Employment Act of 1978 and the Immigration Act of 1979 laid out the rights for foreign professionals to work in Thailand. Permits available for workers in specific sectors were mainly granted to migrants recognized as professionally trained and skilled.

1996 Aiming to tackle the increasing number of irregular migrant workers while accommodating the needs of employers for cheap labour, the Royal Thai Government established the so-called "registration" process for migrant workers in 1996 on an annual basis (giving 1-year validities). While registrations were initially carried out at the provincial level, it was only in 2004 that the first national registration took place, and over one million migrants came forward and reported to the authorities.

2003 A step forward in Thailand's migration policy was taken in 2003 when MoUs were signed between Thailand and its three neighboring countries (Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar) to cooperate on the issue of employment of foreign workers. The MoUs, for the first time, established a legal channel for low-skilled migrants from these countries to enter Thailand for work purposes.

2004

2009 A National Verification (VN) process was developed to supplement the MoU process. The NV process was the result of several bilateral discussions between Thailand and neighboring countries, and it was meant as a mechanism to regularize all irregular migrants who were already living and working in Thailand. It included both registered and undocumented migrants.

2012 As of the end of November 2012, only 200,000 migrants who were living and working in Thailand had entered through the procedures set out by the MoUs, of which only 34,000 were Myanmar nationals.

The latest statistics provided by Thailand's Ministry of Labour indicate that over one million Myanmar migrants completed the NV process and held a valid work permit as of 14 December 2012, the official closing date of the NV process.

2014 Thailand's Ministerial Regulation for the Protection of Agricultural Workers came into effect

2015 Thailand's Sea Fishery Workers Act was implemented to define the working conditions for workers in Thailand's sea fishing sector.

2017 The Royal Ordinance on Foreign Worker Management (B.E. 2560) was introduced, imposing stiff penalties on both employers and migrant workers who violate provisions concerning the legal employment of migrant workers. After two postponements in June and December 2017, the law was implemented on June 30th, 2018

2018

© The information compiled in Figure 3 was taken from the following sources: Gruss, 2017; Chantavanich, Middleton, & Ito, 2013; Mon, 2010; UN-ACT

Thematic Area 1 – Migrant Profiles

According to the Myanmar Census, over two million Myanmar nationals were living abroad in 2014. IOM (2015b) estimated that the number of Myanmar migrants might be much higher, with about 2.3 million residing in Thailand alone. The ILO (2015) also suspected that numbers of Myanmar nationals abroad are higher than reported in the census, and the newly released UNDESA report on international migrant stocks seems to confirm this. Including only official statistics, and therefore only regular migrants, the UNDESA (2018) report stated that in 2017 there were 2,894,741 Myanmar nationals residing outside their country of origin. Of the almost three million Myanmar nationals, 1,835,106 (63%) were officially registered in Thailand (see Table 4). Of the total migrant stock, 1,620,340 (56%) were male and 1,274,401 (44%) were female. Looking at Thailand as a country of destination, the female share of Myanmar nationals in 2017 was 46 per cent.

Table 4 - Myanmar Migration Statistics 2017

Total Stock of Emigrants (2017) [a]	**2,894,741**
To High Income Countries	**445,502**
To Middle Income Countries	**2,449,238**
To other South-East Asian countries	**2,155,884**
Thailand	1,835,106
Malaysia	308,337
Viet Nam	11,695
Other	746
To Southern Asia	**292,160**
Bangladesh	239,742
India	50,081
Other	2,367
To Western Asia	**242,623**
Qatar	242,510
Other	113
To Eastern Asia	**4,437**
Republic of Korea	4,437
To Northern America	**141,648**
To Oceania	**32,574**
To Europe	**24,910**
To Africa	**367**
To Latin America and the Caribbean	**138**

[a] UNDESA, International Migrant Stock 2017

Although these figures are not able to account for irregular migrants, they confirm the role that Thailand plays as a main country of destination for most migrants from Myanmar. The 2018 UNDESA report states that the gender ratio for Myanmar migrants in Thailand was 46 per cent female to 54 per cent male. The increasing share of female migrants shows a trend towards the feminization of migration from Myanmar. The growth in female migration can be ascribed to a combination of different factors, including economic, social and political factors, such as aspirations for a better life, lack of employment opportunities and income disparities back home, and a high labour demand in countries of destination for employment sectors where women are perceived to have an advantage, such as the garment and textile industries in Mae Sot (Ndegwa, 2016; Sijapati, 2015).

In a UNODC report from 2012 it was noted that most Myanmar migrants came from rural areas and were part of the following ethnic groups: Arakanese, Bamar, Indo-Myanmar, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Gurkha (Nepalese), Shan and Tavoyan. They were mostly single, between 12 and 55 years of age and had a relatively low education level. In the IOM (2013) study on Myanmar migrants (n=5,027), 38 per cent of the respondents were single; 58 per cent were married; and 4 per cent reported being divorced or widowed. Among married migrants, 90.2 per cent were living with their spouses in Thailand, and 68.6 per cent had at least one child below 15 years of age. Among those with children, 57 per cent reported that all of their children were with them in Thailand; 31 per cent indicated that their children were all in Myanmar; and another 11 per cent reported that they had children both in Myanmar and Thailand (IOM, 2013). According to the 2014 Myanmar Census, the majority of migrants from Myanmar originate from the states of Mon, Kayin, Tanintharyi, Shan, and the Bago region. The geographical proximity of sending states and destination areas plays a role in determining where most of the migrants go. Mon, Shan, Tanintharyi, Kayin and Kayah send the largest numbers of migrants to Thailand, as they are also the five states bordering Thailand (Ndegwa, 2016; IOM, 2013). With regard to education levels, more female than male respondents were represented at the lower levels of educational attainment (no education and primary education). Furthermore, there were three times as many male as female migrants who had received informal education, from places such as monasteries (IOM, 2013).

With regard to employment sectors, an IOM (2015b) study found that the largest numbers of Myanmar migrants were employed in construction (16%), fishery and fishery related work (15.5%), and agriculture/animal husbandry related work (12.5%). This aligns with the sectors mentioned in the Chantavanic and Vungsiriphisal study (2012) which stressed that the major labour market sectors for Myanmar migrants in Thailand include agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and services that absorb large numbers of low skilled workers.

Thematic Area 2 – Drivers of Migration

The reasons often cited for migration from Myanmar to Thailand include a mix of economic, political and social factors, which cannot be generalized for the whole Myanmar population. While many sources speak of push and pull factors, the theory of push-and pull factors has largely been disputed as it does not take into account the complex nature of migration. The reasons why people migrate are diverse and often complex and interrelated. As such, Chantavanich, Middleton and Ito (2013) write in their study that it is important to look at migration not as an either-or decision, but as a continuum. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that both the so-called push and pull factors are multilayered, including individual, family, community, national, regional and global considerations (i.e. micro, meso and macro levels), and that the decision to migrate more than likely results from a combination of factors (Chantavanich, Middleton, & Ito, 2013).

Looking at Myanmar's migration trends, these factors include poverty, unemployment, and the desire to improve livelihoods by accessing better opportunities elsewhere. Factors such as discrimination, conflict, insecurity, violence and natural disasters have also been past and current drivers of movement, contributing to the production of complex flows of individuals motivated by a diverse set of reasons (Ndegwa, 2016). Focusing on labour migration in this study, it is commonly stated that a combination of rural poverty, unemployment, lack of economic opportunity, and fragile livelihoods comprise the key drivers of both domestic and international migration from Myanmar (Ma, 2017; LIFT, 2016).

The IOM data from 2013 revealed that one third of migrants (35.7%) came from urban areas, while 64.3 per cent came from rural areas. Among the respondents, 60 per cent said their living conditions in Myanmar were "adequate," while 16 per cent said their conditions were "good" or "quite good" and 24 per cent reported their conditions to be "bad" or "very bad". In addition, around 75 per cent of the surveyed population named economic reasons, earning a higher income or better employment opportunities, as their primary reasons for migrating to Thailand. While another 13 per cent had personal reasons, (to follow family and friends; persuaded by family/friends to migrate; or the desire for personal experience), 7 per cent also cited security/safety issues; and 5 per cent reported better living conditions and services to be the primary reason for coming to Thailand (IOM, 2013). A study from the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) based in Myanmar also found that when in certain areas of the country a household experiences food insecurity, they have a household member migrate in response (LIFT, 2016).

When considering drivers of migration to Thailand, the geographical proximity of Thailand to Myanmar and Thailand's large supply of low-skilled jobs are another key determinant for why the largest share of Myanmar migrants reside in Thailand. Due to provincial-level agreements, such as border passes, entry into Thailand is also fairly easy (Mon, 2010).

Picture 4 - View of the Friendship Bridge next to an unofficial border crossing point

Thematic Area 3 – Pre-migration Preparations and Arrangements

Several topics fall under this thematic area. Understanding how well-prepared migrants are before their departure, if they have jobs lined up pre-migration, if they received support in acquiring those jobs, how they finance their migration, and how they access information on life in Thailand will ultimately help to shed light on migrants' vulnerability and their success during the migration journey. Some research studies have aimed at addressing the topic.

The 2013 IOM study on potential changes in the migration patterns of migrants from Myanmar showed that of the 5,027 respondents 43 per cent came to Thailand through arrangements made by friends and family, another 38 per cent through brokers and 19 per cent on their own. To reach the non-bordering provinces of Thailand, a much larger share of respondents reported to have made use of a broker [Samut Sakhon (77.5%), Bangkok (47.4%) and Surat Thani (33.8%)], indicating that for the border regions migrants most often arrange the journey for themselves or with the help of family members or friends.

The joint IOM/ILO study (2017) on the risks and rewards of labour migration conducted research on returned migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, which constitute the primary sending countries to Thailand. The data revealed that obtaining information about migration appears to remain a significant challenge for migrant workers of all four nationalities. Only one in six (17%) reported that they had obtained information about migration through any communication medium before leaving their home countries. Predominantly, migrants relied on channels of word of mouth from friends and family, or information from brokers, because they are perceived as trusted sources even if not authoritative (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017). Community meetings were the most frequent source of information on migration (6%), followed by radio (4%) and billboards and posters (4%). Somewhat surprisingly, Facebook and other websites were not stated to be significant sources of information (2%).

Regarding the costs of the journey IOM/ILO (2017) estimated the average cost to migrate to Thailand from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam to be USD 251. Irregular channels seemed to be more efficient and cost-effective compared to regular channels, and the difference was quite substantial. Migrating regularly required more than three times longer (104 days vs. 33 days) and three times the cost (USD 881 vs. USD 265) than migrating through irregular channels. Migrants are known to pay for migration by taking on debt. While more than half of Myanmar migrant workers surveyed in the IOM/ILO study used their own savings to pay for the cost of migration (53%), quite a large portion needed to borrow money to migrate (39%) or obtained a so-called loan from employers by paying for migration through wage deductions (15%). While friends and family represented the most reliable source of borrowing (54%) for Lao and Vietnamese migrant workers, Cambodian and Myanmar migrant workers relied much more on money lenders (43% and 49% respectively).

Brokers are known to play an important role in the facilitation of migration to Thailand as the complex procedures of the NV process and MoU process have made the use of brokers almost inevitable. Official brokers are known to bridge the gap between migrants' unfamiliarity with bureaucratic processes and the seemingly incomprehensible web of emerging regulation (Gruss, 2017). They simplify many of the steps and make migration more convenient, but this depends on a migrant's ability to afford such an official broker. In the IOM/ILO (2017) study it was revealed that nearly half of Myanmar migrant workers (47%) used unlicensed brokers. With the use of unlicensed brokers come certain risks and vulnerabilities. In a case study by Sakaew and Tangpratchakoon (2015) on "Brokers and Labour Migration from Myanmar in Samut Sakorn," the authors elaborate on potential challenges associated with the use of unlicensed brokers and agents. For labour migrants, "agents" can be referred to in both negative and positive ways. Some agents are instrumental in arranging for their travel into Thailand, voluntarily. On the other hand, the journey can quickly become involuntary, and migrants run the risk of being victimized for forced labour or other forms of human trafficking (Sakaew & Tangpratchakoon, 2015). The different forms of potential exploitation will be elaborated on in the next section.

Many migrants leave Myanmar intending to send remittances back once they have secured employment in Thailand. In the IOM/ILO (2017) study, 93 per cent regularly sent remittances home while working abroad. Overall, the hundi[2] or broker system (32 per cent) was the most popular channel used, followed by "hand carry by others" (20%), money transfer organizations (19 %), and banks (15%). Similar results were observed in the 2015 IOM study "Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of Myanmar Migrants". An average of 75 per cent had sent back remittances at least once while they lived in Thailand. The average amount per year was USD 962. The most frequently used channels, similar to those identified in the 2017 IOM/ILO report, were unofficial ones such as brokers or family and friends, since the barriers to receiving money formally, including the need for identity cards or bank accounts and the remoteness of recipients from urban centers, were considered too substantial (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017).

Thematic Area 4 – Migrants' Vulnerabilities

Looking at Myanmar migrants' vulnerabilities in their countries of destination, there are several indicators and indirect proxies that can be used to identify potential risks. Mon (2010) provides a comprehensive summary of the main factors that contribute to Myanmar migrants' vulnerabilities in Thailand:

> *A wide variety of factors contribute to the vulnerability of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand. These factors include the following: the constant threat of deportation, for migrants both with and without work permits; extortion by police and immigration officials; heavy debts to recruiters/traffickers, which often lead to bonded labor or similar conditions; restriction on their freedom of movement imposed by employers; and the lack of health care. All these problems are made worse by the Burmese migrants' inability to speak the Thai language, which makes it next to impossible for them to access the minimal rights they have under Thai law. (p. 40)*

As shown above, one main indicator is language proficiency – speaking Thai can help mitigate certain risks Myanmar migrants may face, for instance speaking Thai enables migrants to communicate with individuals and institutions in their host communities or consult NGOs when seeking assistance. Employers frequently only speak Thai, and often never fully explain to migrants their working and contract conditions in any other language (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017; Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012). In the Chantavanic and Vungsiriphisal (2012) study 54 per cent of respondents were able to communicate in Thai, and 10 per cent of them were able to read, write and speak in the language; the remaining 46 per cent were however unable to speak any Thai.

Migrant's documentation and legal status is another indicator of potential vulnerabilities. Many migrants that are in Thailand irregularly cannot access certain rights or voice their complaints to authorities without the fear of deportation. In a 2013 IOM study, around 65 per cent of all migrants surveyed indicated having full documentation; 18 per cent reported having temporary documentation; 13 per cent were without any documents, and 4 per cent had documents colloquially referred to as "colored cards".[3] Tak province, which includes Mae Sot and Phob Phra, was the location with the largest share of undocumented respondents (63%). The data revealed that the agricultural sector had the lowest percentage of documented migrants, followed by the labour sector, and work in fisheries and construction. It should be noted that legal status is far from static for migrant workers in Thailand. Migrants may initially migrate via regular channels and possess all the required documents to work,but become irregular later due to overstaying the period granted by the documents or changes in employment status (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017).

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[2] "The hundi system is an informal channel for sending remittances (and sometimes goods) operated by unlicensed financial brokers. While based almost entirely on bonds of trust between the parties involved, these types of money transfer systems are very popular in countries such as Myanmar, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and China because they are relatively cheap, fast, and do not require the sender to provide identification (OECD, 2006)" (IOM/ILO, 2017).

[3] "Colour cards" are identity cards of different colours with identification numbers given to members of ethnic minorities more than 12 years of age by the Ministry of Interior's Department of Provincial Administration, which has implemented this classification system for various groups of ethnic minorities in Thailand since 1992. (IOM, 2013)

On average, migrants with full or temporary documentation earn higher wages. Of the migrants who earned less than half the Thai minimum wage, most of them (65%) were undocumented (IOM, 2013). In the Chantavanic and Vungsiriphisal (2012) study, half of the respondents received daily wages at the minimum wage of 300 THB. This result is largely consistent with the study done by the IOM (2013), however not with the IOM/ILO (2017) study, which stated that in the case of Myanmar migrants the share of respondents receiving minimum wage, regardless of migration status, lies only at 19 per cent. Both studies, IOM (2013) and IOM/ILO (2017) revealed in their analysis that in most cases men were paid substantially more than women. Overall, men earned 14 per cent higher monthly wages. Looking at the different provinces, IOM (2013) reported that in Tak province 91.5 per cent of migrants received less than the minimum wage.

Low wages are not the only problem migrants may face at their work place in Thailand. Migrants often have to endure poor working conditions in Thailand. Workers in factories, on construction sites and in agriculture reported more health problems than those in other industries, mainly because of poorly maintained equipment and the lack of adequate safety measures. Health problems include injuries from accidents, exhaustion, sleep deprivation, as well as malnutrition (Mon, 2010). In the IOM study (2013), the majority rated their working conditions as "adequate" (59.8%) or "good" (32.8%), while only a small number reported "very good" (3%), "bad" (4.1%) or "very bad" (0.2%) conditions. Looking at the province of interest for this DTM study, the report revealed that Tak was among the provinces where fewer migrants had reported good or very good working conditions.

Picture 5 - DTM interview at the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge

For migrants, especially irregular migrants, challenges often include the lack of access to basic labour rights and lack of access to assistance. In addition, the IOM/ILO (2017) study revealed that irregular migrants were nearly twice as likely to encounter problems during their journey (51%) than those making use of regular channels (26%). Commonly reported problems experienced during migration were lack of legal documentation (27%), lack of information (13%) and delays in employment (12%). Among the surveyed Myanmar migrants, the majority (58%) sought assistance in cases of problems, especially through friends (34%) and family (40%). Recruitment agencies were substantially less often consulted (only in 12% of the cases). Few migrants sought assistance from official sources, which could be explained either by an inability or unwillingness to access such support (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017; ILO, 2017). The study further revealed that one in ten (11%) of all migrant workers were denied at least one of their labour protection rights, defined as paid holidays, minimum wage, annual leave, sick leave or maternity leave, having one day off per week or overtime pay. Again, irregular migrants were more likely not to be provided with labour rights (19%) (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017).

Another indication of migrants' potential vulnerability is the lack of a contract or any agreement with their employer. Having a written employment contract is known to aid in ensuring decent working conditions for migrants, as well as to reduce the risks of being exploited. The data from the IOM/ILO (2017) study showed that only about one in four migrant workers received a written employment contract before migrating (28%). There is a large discrepancy between workers who migrated to Malaysia who received a written contract in over 80 per cent of cases and workers who migrated to Thailand who only received a written contract in 13 per cent of cases; this discrepancy can be explained by the fact that migration to Malaysia mainly occurs through official channels. Migrants who had regular statuses received a written agreement 45 per cent of the time, compared to just 6 per cent for irregular migrant workers. Those employed in fisheries (60%) and in the manufacturing sector (46%) were the most likely to have written contracts. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents that worked in hospitality (55%) and construction (52%) did not have any written agreement.

Migrating through irregular channels is often aided by smugglers and informal brokers, who can be perceived as providing valuable support to migrants but may also be putting them at increased risk of exploitation. Vulnerable migrants often resort to smuggling networks to cross borders, as they may not have family networks to support them. Hundreds of thousands of Myanmar migrants are estimated to be smuggled each year to various destinations in South-East Asia and beyond – the majority to Thailand and Malaysia (Ndegwa, 2016). Language barriers and the unfamiliarity of the environment in Thailand are major obstacles for Myanmar migrants' safety and security. Therefore, migrants' reliance on brokers and mediators is heightened, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Irregular migrants are at much larger risk of falling into the hands of traffickers, as the smuggling business often uses techniques similar to those employed by traffickers, such as confiscating documents as a means of control (Ndegwa, 2016; Mon, 2010).

Thematic Area 5 – Return

All studies reviewed which cover the topic of return find the same pattern – the vast majority of Myanmar migrants want to return to Myanmar in the long run. Chantavanic and Vungsiriphisal (2012) report that in their sample almost 70 per cent expressed their desire to return to Myanmar, however only 10 per cent had a concrete plan for how and when to do so. Most of them wanted to return after 1-2 years in Thailand. Many however also stated that they would not return permanently, but only for a short time. Those findings are supported by the IOM study (2013). Most of the surveyed migrants, regardless of gender, economic and social background, ethnic group, place of origin, reason for migrating, current job in Thailand or current income level, wanted to eventually return to Myanmar. Thailand is only considered a temporary place of stay (IOM, 2013).

The most common reasons for wanting to return to Myanmar cited by migrants were largely personal (77.9%). Personal reasons included to return to families and friends after having saved enough and having stayed long enough in Thailand. Almost 12 per cent reported that their main reason for wanting to return was associated with improvements back home, such as better security and safety, greater employment opportunities, as well as improved infrastructure and services. Another 11 per cent however indicated that their main reason for wanting to return was related to bad conditions in Thailand, including the feeling of being exploited or discriminated against, not being able to save money, as well as having trouble obtaining legal status (IOM, 2015b; IOM, 2013). The IOM/ILO (2017) data reveals that nearly 50 per cent of migrants indicated they had more savings upon returning from abroad. However, looking solely at Myanmar migrant workers only 23 per cent reported having more savings now, after returning from Thailand, and almost half (49%) stated that they actually had less money saved than before migration (Harkins, Lindgren, & Suravoranon, 2017).

Data Gaps and DTM's FMS Contribution

The literature review shows that there have been efforts to paint a better picture of migration from Myanmar and the patterns associated with it. While the academic sector largely focuses on understanding the shift of policies and their implications, as well as the ethnographic dimensions of Myanmar nationals residing in Thailand, the international humanitarian community has made an effort to deepen its understanding of the nature of migration in the region, the associated risks, the decision-making process and the long-term effects. Although there has been an increase in the number of studies concerning Myanmar migrants in Thailand, overall the research remains limited. Many studies only discuss Myanmar as one of the many migrant sending countries in the ASEAN region, which leads to reports that don't include in-depth research on Myanmar migration patterns. Furthermore, the data that has been collected often consists of small sample sizes, which makes it difficult to generalize the results for a wider population. Furthermore, the proposed thematic areas in the IOM DTM study, have, in most cases, never been studied extensively, but have often only been part of much broader research.

The data collection exercise in Tak province aims to inform and provide a more comprehensive picture of the information presented in each thematic area. The use of the two tools, before and after migration, will enable a unique and original comparison, which will help to understand migrants' journeys from two points in time (before migration and before return). Receiving information at the pre-departure point and upon return will fill the gap in information on how well migrants are prepared for their journeys and what expectations they held. Furthermore, the focus on only one province in Thailand (instead of several) with a large labour migration population will enable the IOM Thailand to collect a larger sample size and so provide more in-depth and representative results. Unlike other datasets, this study will not only focus on long-term migration, but will also include daily-workers coming to Thailand, establishing a complete picture of the migrant worker population in Tak province.
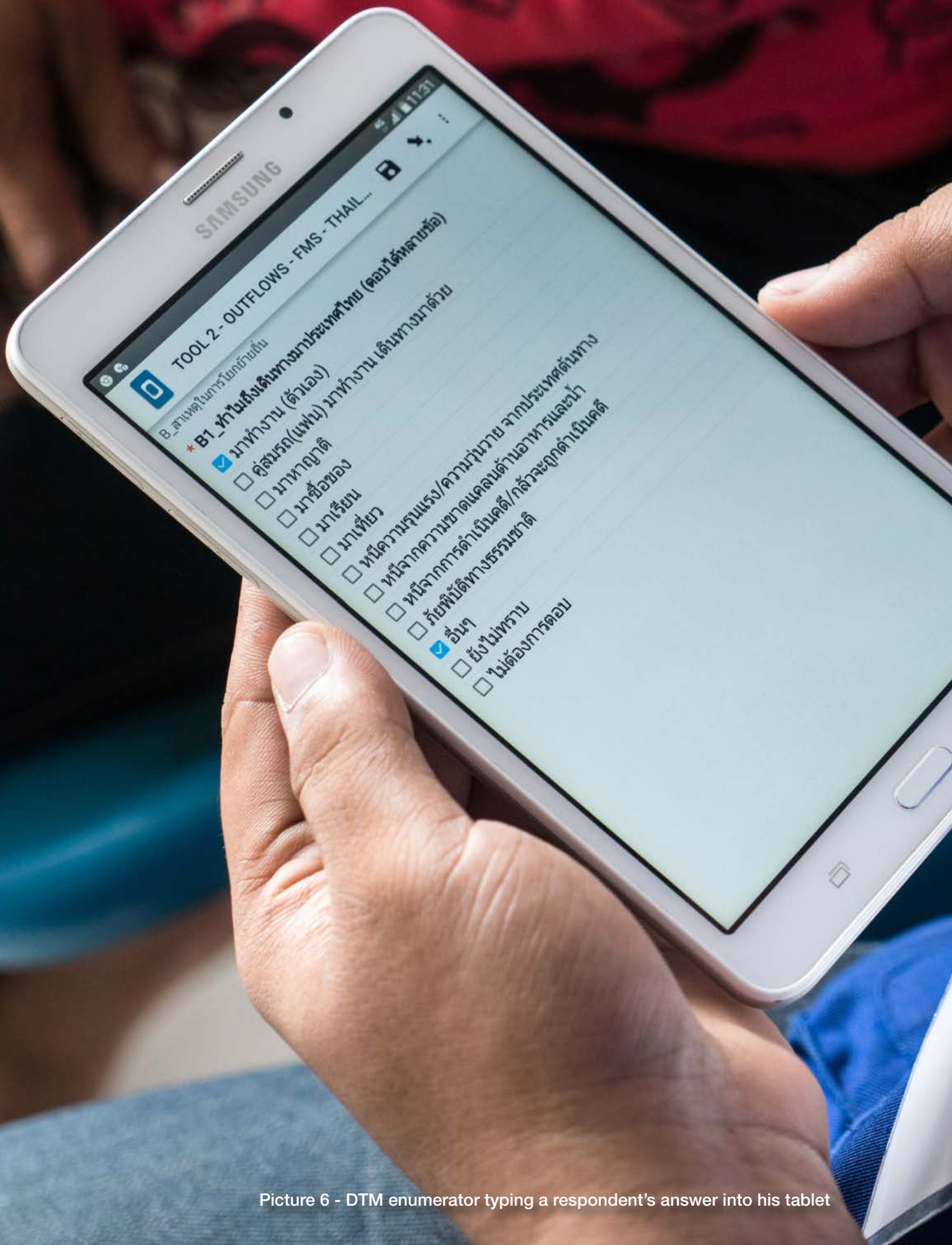
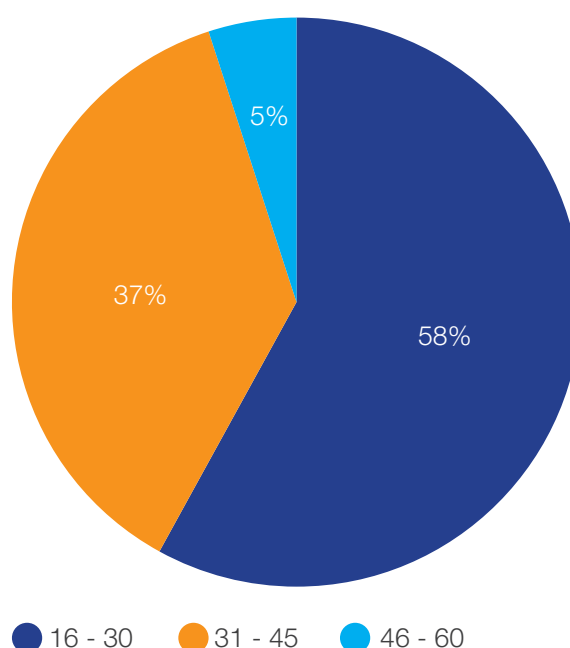Picture 6 - DTM enumerator typing a respondent's answer into his tablet

Data Analysis

Between 13 June and 12 August 2018 IOM Thailand collected a total of 4,284 surveys using two questionnaire tools designed using the DTM Flow Monitoring component and adapted to fit the context in Tak province. In order to only capture the migrant population traveling from Myanmar to Thailand, at the beginning of the Tool 1 survey migrants were asked if they intended to stay in Thailand or if they had plans to travel further. The results show that 154 survey respondents out of the 3,239 (respondents of Tool 1) surveys reported that they did not wish to stay in Thailand (4.75 %). Of these 154 respondents, the majority intended to travel on further to Malaysia (64%) and Indonesia (23%). After finding out that these respondents did not wish to stay in Thailand, the 154 surveys were removed from the sample; the total sample size for analysis in the end was then n= 4,130.

A total of 3,903 surveys were collected in the district of Mae Sot, and 227 surveys were collected in the district of Phop Phra. Looking at the two survey tools, 3,084 surveys were collected with Tool 1 (Incoming Myanmar nationals) and 1,046 surveys with Tool 2 (Returning Myanmar nationals). The analysis section below follows the same structure as the literature review, and it analyzes the data by thematic area; whenever possible the study also establishes relationships and cross tabulations between the different thematic areas.

Thematic Area 1 – Migrant Profiles

As the study is only interested in capturing the movement of Myanmar nationals migrating to Thailand, 99.5 per cent of the sample identified themselves as being of Myanmar origin. However, 0.5 per cent (23 individuals in total) reported that they would not identify themselves as Myanmar nationals, but rather as Myanmar Muslims. These respondents were still included in the analysis. The sample consists of 1,839 female (44.5%) and 2,291 male (55.5%) Myanmar nationals. The sex breakdown is almost identical across the two survey tools. This sex ratio appears to be relatively representative of the general Myanmar population living in Thailand, as it is similar to the one reported by the latest UNDESA report. The sample of inflowing migrants is slightly older with an average age of 31 years in comparison to an average age of 28 for the return sample. For both groups, the majority of the respondents are between the ages of 16 and 30 (54.28% for incoming migrants and

Figure 4 - Overall Age Breakdown

- 16 - 30
- 31 - 45
- 46 - 60

67.30% for returning migrants). For both Tools the majority reported being married (66% for incoming migrants and 63% for returning migrants). Respectively 27 per cent of the incoming migrants and 33 per cent of the returnees reported being single. As expected with the high percentage of married respondents, most migrants also reported having children (56.5%). For both samples, the majority (over 80%) reported that at least one of their children was still living in Myanmar. One quarter of the total sample population, however also indicated that they had at least one child living in Thailand. Both the marital status, as well as the location of children, differs from the IOM 2013 study results – the share of married respondents in the 2013 study was smaller, and the share of children living in Myanmar was significantly lower at only 30 per cent.

For respondents from the inflow sample, the largest share had only completed primary education (46%) and roughly 38 per cent had completed secondary education, while for the return sample, 43.5 per cent had completed secondary education and 42.5 per cent primary education (see Figure 5). Looking at the sex breakdown for both samples, there does not appear to be a significant difference between the education levels, although men appear to be more likely to have attended religious schools (0.5% vs. 4.5%).

Figure 5 - Education Breakdown by Population Group
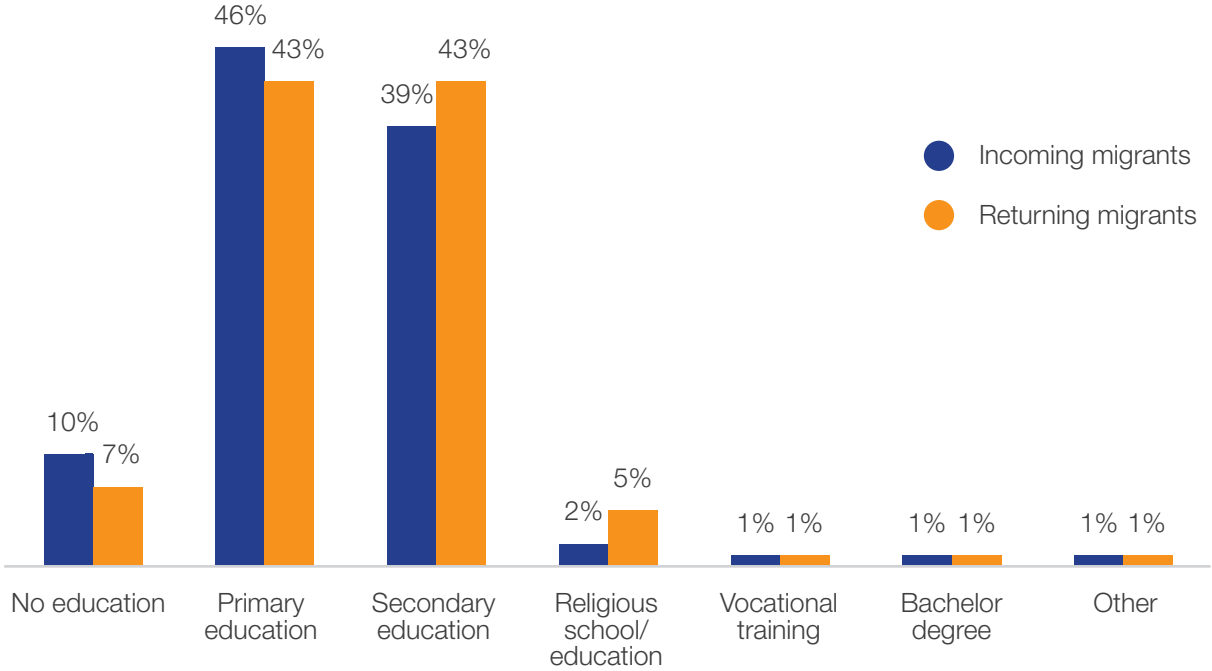
Almost all migrants reported that Myanmar was their last place of residence (99%) before migration. The remaining one per cent had lived in places like China, Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Looking at the last state of residence, the two samples are relatively similar (see Map 2). Both sample populations originate largely from Kayin State, Mon State and the Bago region.

Map 2 - Main States of Origin in Myanmar

Map legend:

PROPORTION OF MIGRANTS SURVEYED
- < 1%
- > 1% - 5%
- > 5% - 10%
- >10%

Border Crossing Point

MYANMAR
REGIONS OF ORIGIN

Data Source : Government of Thailand, GISTA, ESRi, HERE, Garmin, IOM, MIMU, OpenStreetMap

Disclaimer : This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.
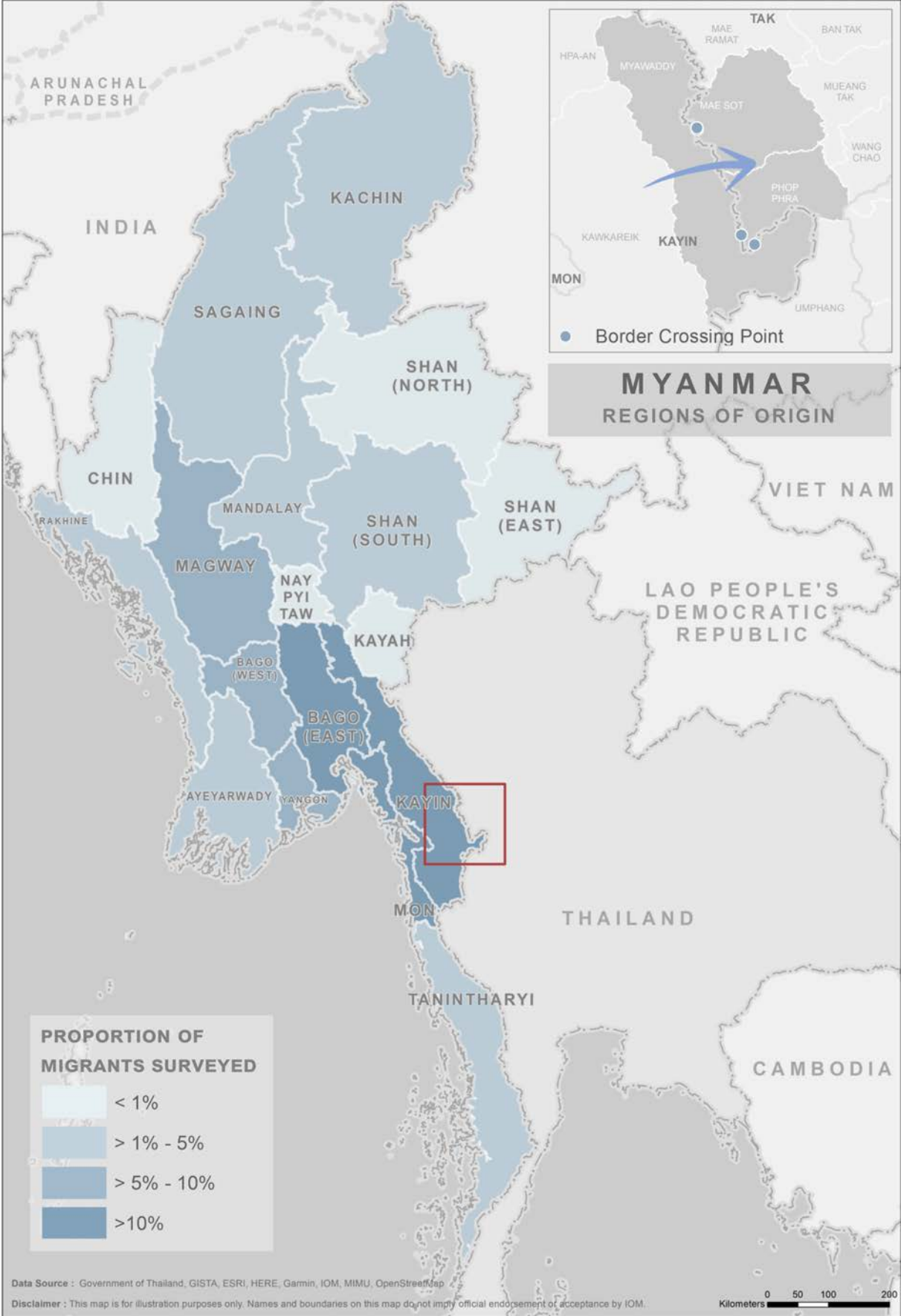
The states of origin largely correspond with the ethnicities of the respondents. Both sample populations predominately reported belonging to the Barmar, Karen, Mon and Pa-O ethnic groups (see Table 5). For both samples, Barmar, one of the most prevalent ethnicities in Myanmar, was the largest represented ethnic group.

Table 5 - Top Five Ethnic Groups

Inflows			Outflows		
Ethnicity	#	%	Ethnicity	#	%
1. Barmar	1,453	47.1%	1. Barmar	459	43.9%
2. Karen	729	23.6%	2. Karen	203	19.4%
3. Mon	509	16.5%	3. Mon	149	14.2%
4. Mixed	104	3.4%	4. Pa-O	109	10.4%
5. Pa-O	69	2.2%	5. Rakhine	38	3.6%

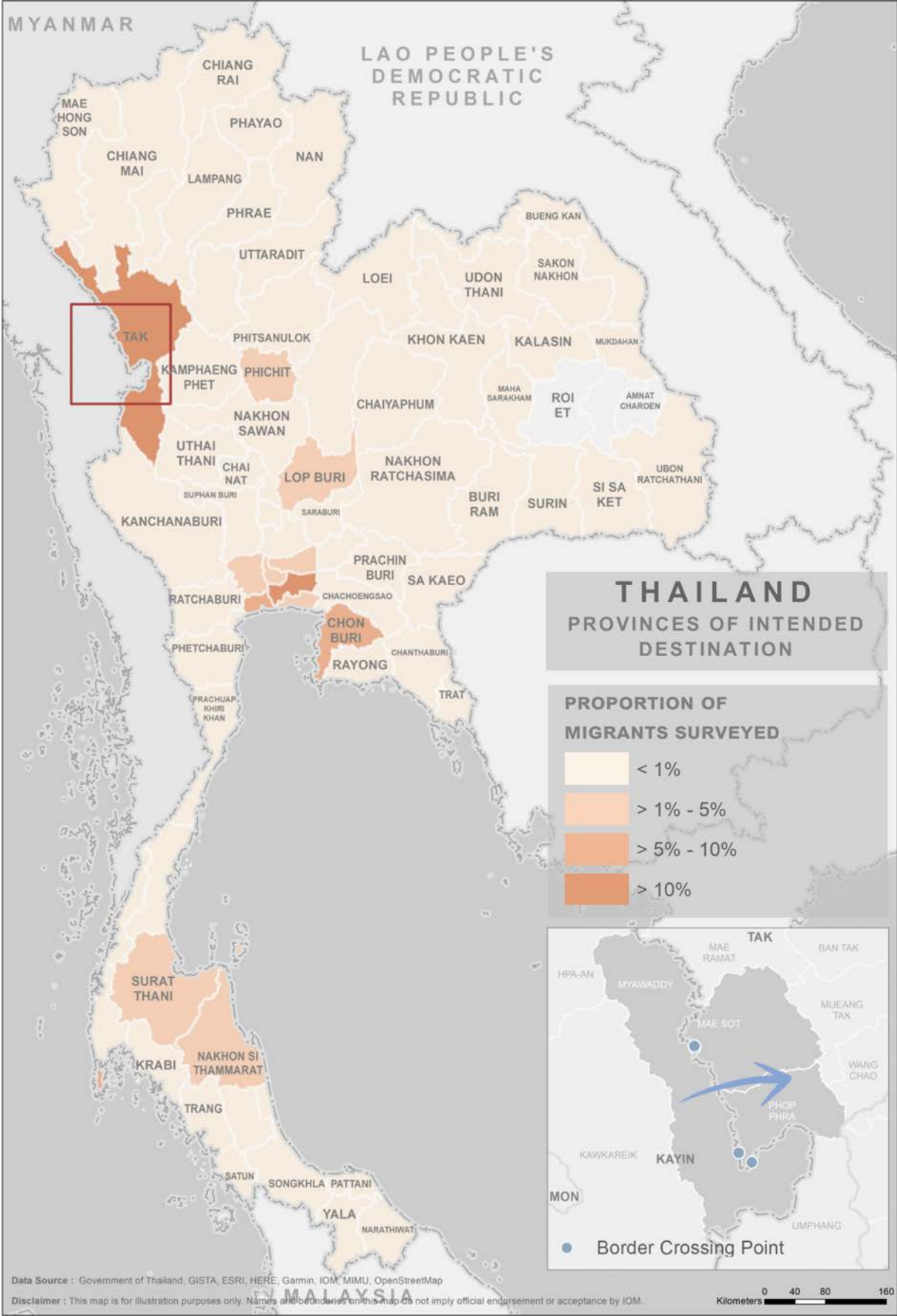In order to establish a comprehensive profile of Myanmar nationals migrating to Thailand it is also important to identify the intended provinces of destination within Thailand – the destinations can provide valuable information on migration patterns, as well as living and working conditions, ultimately allowing for more targeted programmatic interventions. While incoming migrants were asked about their intended destination province in Thailand (single-answer), returning migrants were asked which provinces they had lived in during their last migration experience (multiple-answer). Both samples named Bangkok as their main province of destination (33% for inflows and 38% for returnees). The remaining shares are distributed amongst the other 75 Thai provinces, however for incoming migrants, other than Bangkok, Tak (12%), Phuket (7%), as well as Chon Buri (6%) were reported most often. For returning migrants, after Bangkok, the highest reported provinces were Samut Sakhon (8%), Tak (7.5%) and Chon Buri (6%), as well as Phuket (5.5%).

Map 3 - Main Provinces of Intended Destination in Thailand (Incoming Migrants)

MYANMAR

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

CHIANG RAI
MAE HONG SON
PHAYAO
CHIANG MAI
NAN
LAMPANG
PHRAE
UTTARADIT
BUENG KAN
LOEI
UDON THANI
SAKON NAKHON
TAK
PHITSANULOK
KHON KAEN
KALASIN
MUKDAHAN
KAMPHAENG PHET
PHICHIT
CHAIYAPHUM
MAHA SARAKHAM
ROI ET
AMNAT CHAROEN
NAKHON SAWAN
UTHAI THANI
CHAI NAT
LOP BURI
NAKHON RATCHASIMA
UBON RATCHATHANI
SUPHAN BURI
SARABURI
BURI RAM
SURIN
SI SA KET
KANCHANABURI
PRACHIN BURI
SA KAEO
CHACHOENGSAO
RATCHABURI
CHON BURI
PHETCHABURI
RAYONG
CHANTHABURI
PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN
TRAT

THAILAND
PROVINCES OF INTENDED DESTINATION

PROPORTION OF MIGRANTS SURVEYED
< 1%
> 1% - 5%
> 5% - 10%
> 10%

SURAT THANI
KRABI
NAKHON SI THAMMARAT
TRANG
SATUN
SONGKHLA
PATTANI
YALA
NARATHIWAT

MALAYSIA

TAK
MAE RAMAT
BAN TAK
HPA-AN
MYAWADDY
MUEANG TAK
MAE SOT
WANG CHAO
KAWKAREIK
KAYIN
PHOP PHRA
MON
UMPHANG
● Border Crossing Point

Data Source : Government of Thailand, GISTA, ESRI, HERE, Garmin, IOM, MIMU, OpenStreetMap
Disclaimer : This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.
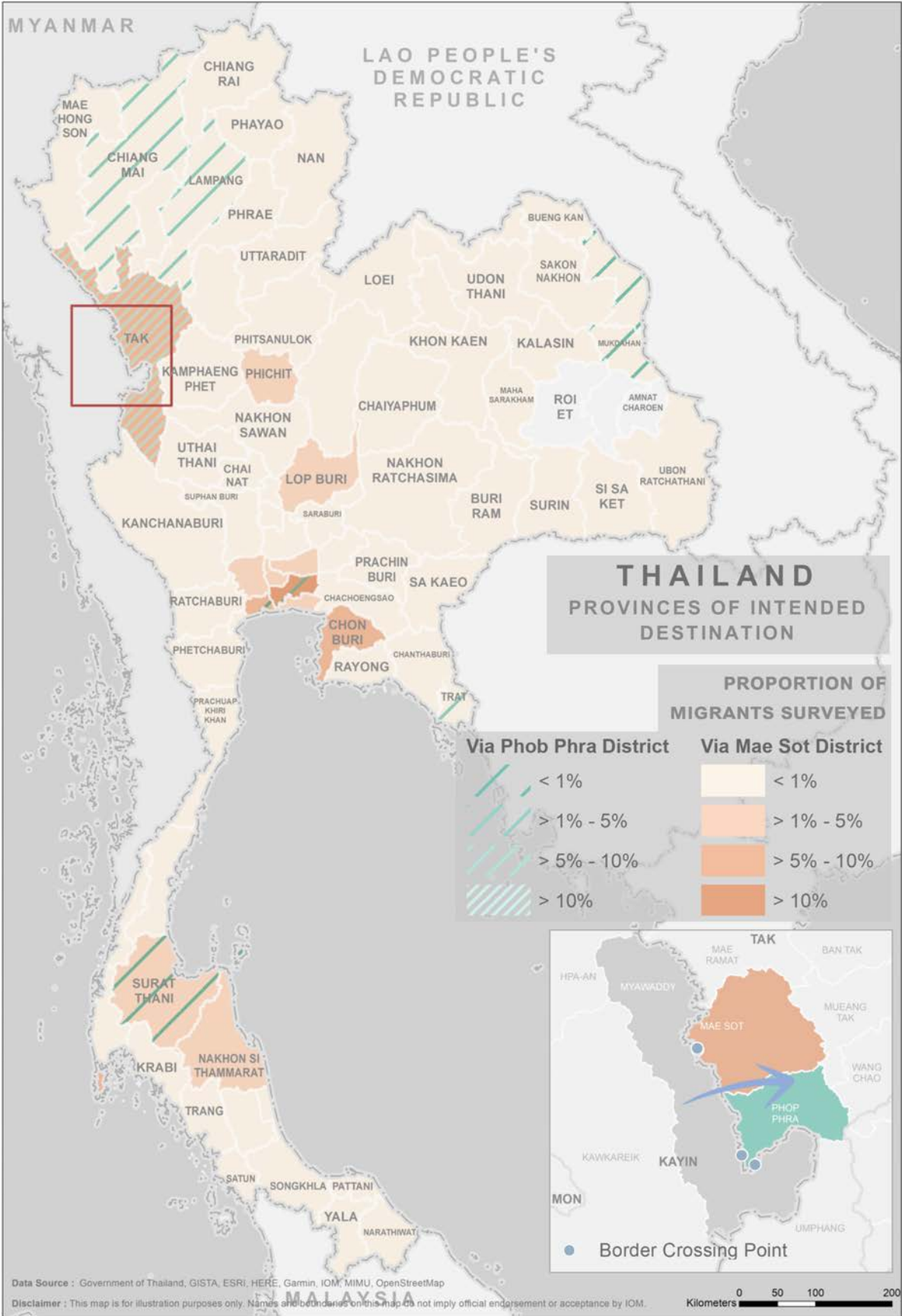
0 40 80 160
Kilometers

Looking more closely, these statistics give some indication of Mae Sot being a strategic transit point for Myanmar nationals migrating all over Thailand (see Figure 6 and Map 4). Incoming migrants identified in Phop Phra on the other hand predominately (82%) reported staying in the province of Tak. This is not surprising as Phop Phra is a key location in Tak province for agricultural work and many Myanmar nationals travel there to work on farms for either daily or seasonal work.

Figure 6 - Provinces of Destination by Entry/Exit Point

Mae Sot

- Bangkok
- Tak
- Phuket
- Chonburi
- Samut Sakhorn
- Pathum Thani
- Other 70 Provinces

Phop Phra

- Bangkok
- Tak
- Chiangmai
- Lampang
- Trat
- Do not know
- Other 71 Provinces
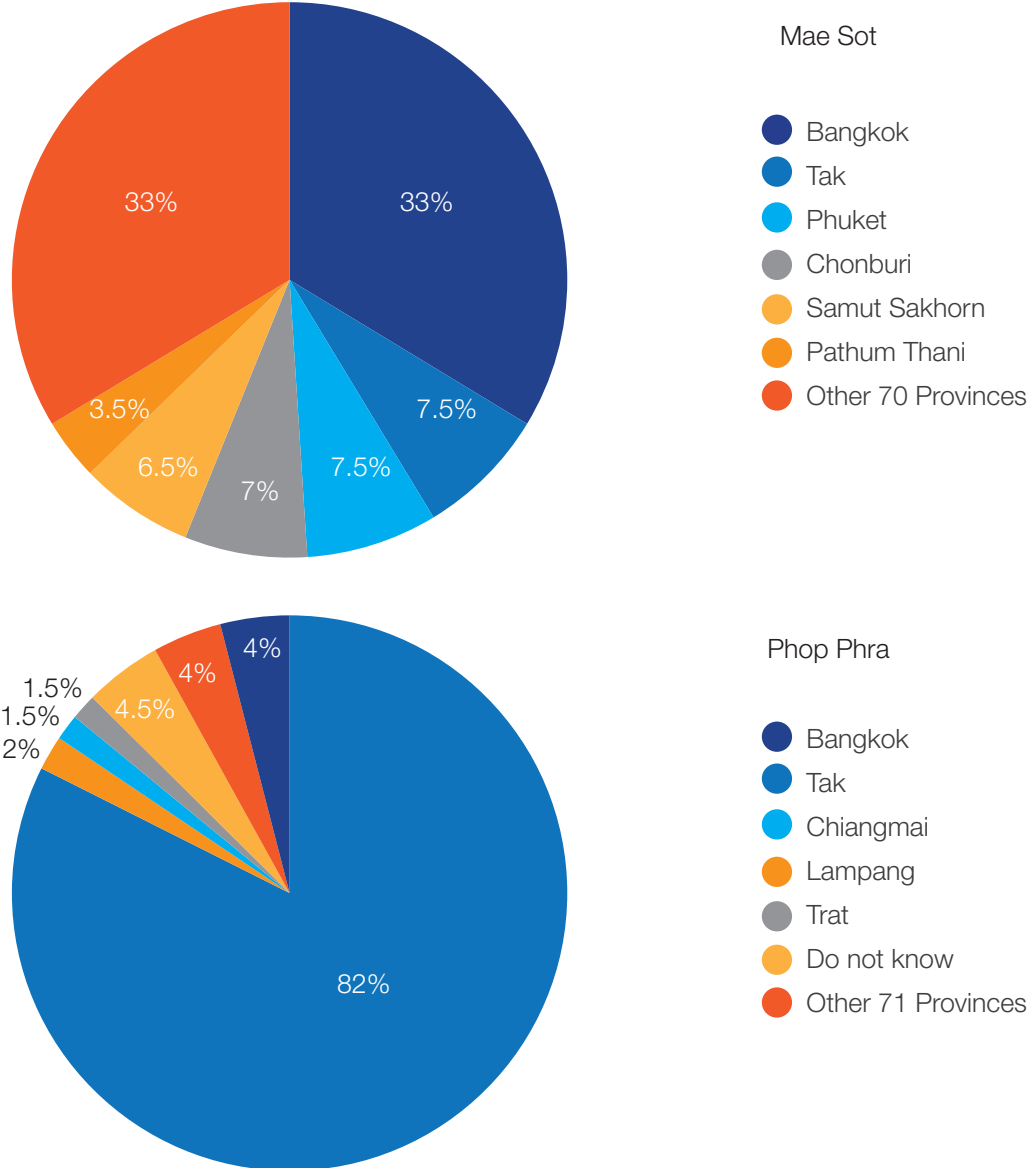
Map 4 - Main Provinces of Intended Destination in Thailand by Entry/Exit Point (Incoming Migrants)

MYANMAR

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

CHIANG RAI
MAE HONG SON
PHAYAO
CHIANG MAI
LAMPANG
NAN
PHRAE
UTTARADIT
BUENG KAN
LOEI
UDON THANI
SAKON NAKHON
TAK
PHITSANULOK
KHON KAEN
KALASIN
MUKDAHAN
KAMPHAENG PHET
PHICHIT
MAHA SARAKHAM
ROI ET
AMNAT CHAROEN
CHAIYAPHUM
NAKHON SAWAN
UTHAI THANI
CHAI NAT
LOP BURI
NAKHON RATCHASIMA
UBON RATCHATHANI
SUPHAN BURI
SARABURI
BURI RAM
SURIN
SI SA KET
KANCHANABURI
PRACHIN BURI
SA KAEO
RATCHABURI
CHACHOENGSAO
CHON BURI
CHANTHABURI
PHETCHABURI
RAYONG
PRACHUAP KHIRI KHAN
TRAT

THAILAND
PROVINCES OF INTENDED DESTINATION

PROPORTION OF MIGRANTS SURVEYED

Via Phob Phra District	Via Mae Sot District
< 1%	< 1%
> 1% - 5%	> 1% - 5%
> 5% - 10%	> 5% - 10%
> 10%	> 10%

SURAT THANI
KRABI
NAKHON SI THAMMARAT
TRANG
SATUN
SONGKHLA
PATTANI
YALA
NARATHIWAT

MALAYSIA

TAK
MAE RAMAT
BAN TAK
HPA-AN
MYAWADDY
MUEANG TAK
MAE SOT
WANG CHAO
KAWKAREIK
KAYIN
PHOP PHRA
MON
UMPHANG

● Border Crossing Point

Data Source : Government of Thailand, GISTA, ESRI, HERE, Garmin, IOM, MIMU, OpenStreetMap

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

Kilometers 0 50 100 200

The survey for incoming migrants includes the question of how long they expect or plan to stay in Thailand. The results show that the largest share (56%) plans to stay more than a year in Thailand. Roughly 20 per cent indicated that they did not know yet how long they want to stay, and 10 per cent reported that they planned to stay between six months and one year. The survey also captured four per cent of daily workers that planned to return to Myanmar the same day. The remaining eight per cent intended to stay for periods between one week and six months and two per cent considered migrating permanently. Those migrants that planned to stay over a year largely reported destination provinces further into Thailand such as Bangkok or Phuket, while those migrating for shorter periods of under six months more often intended to stay in the province of Tak.

Comparing those findings with the data from the return sample, the results are similar. The majority (52%) had left Myanmar over a year ago, while 12 per cent had left between four and six months ago. Eleven per cent had left Myanmar between two and three months ago, another 11 per cent between six months and one year ago and six per cent a month ago. The return sample was asked if this was also the time they expected to be away. A total of 42 per cent reported that this period was not the period they initially thought they would stay in Thailand. Another 29 per cent confirmed that this time was also the time they planned to be away, and 25 per cent reported that they did not know initially how long they wanted to stay away. Especially those that reported to have stayed under a year in Thailand, the majority reported that they had orginally planned to stay in Thailand at least a year.

Picture 7 - Myanmar nationals arriving at one of the FMPs in Phop Phra

Thematic Area 2 – Drivers of Migration

Although previous literature speaks of so-called 'push and pull factors' for migration from Myanmar, this analysis takes a more holistic approach to the process, in an attempt to shed additional light on why Myanmar migrants overwhelmingly choose Thailand as their destination over other countries in the region. Before turning to drivers, the socio-economic characteristics of migrants are analyzed to understand their conditions prior to departure.

The data reveals that the most common forms of previous employment in Myanmar for both populations were daily employment and self-employment, which can be explained by the fact that many of the respondents reported having previously worked on farms, which either belonged to them or on which they were hired on a daily basis.

Figure 7 - Employment Status by Population Groups
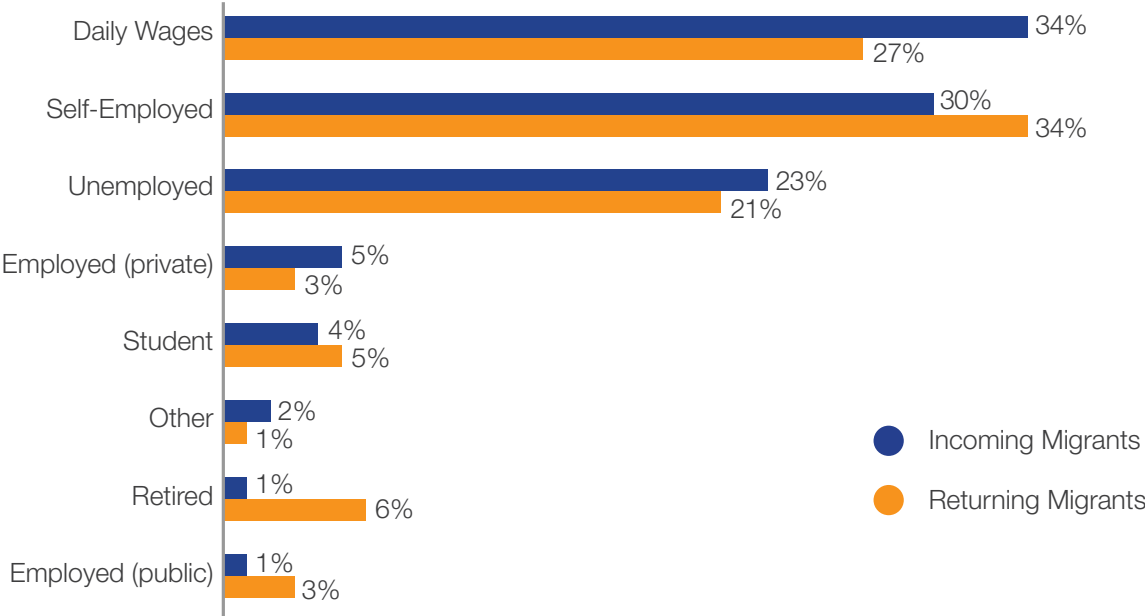
Men more often reported being reliant on daily labour than women. The unemployment pre-migration was almost equally distributed among men and women (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 - Employment Status by Gender
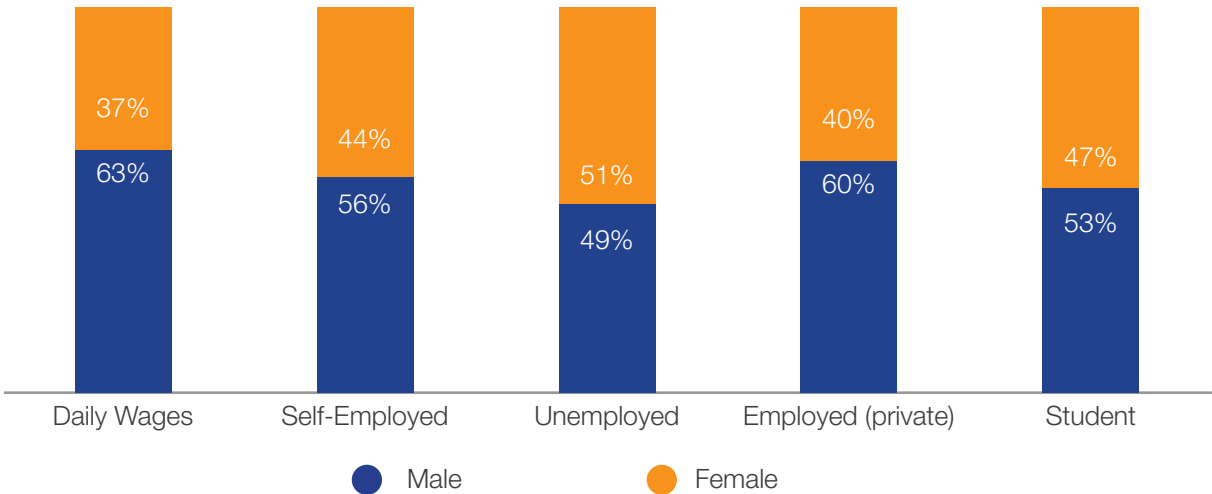
The respondents were asked to name their main reasons for leaving Myanmar. Many respondents did not only name one single reason but rather reported multiple reasons. The main ones cited for both samples was employment (for themselves) with 78 per cent for inflows and 85 per cent for outflows, followed by employment (for the spouse) in 10 per cent of the cases for inflows and 8 per cent of the outflows, as well as to visit family/friends on the Thai side (8% in incoming migrants and 5% in returning migrants). Against the often-made assumption that women would be more likely to follow their husbands for employment, the data also shows that the sex distribution of those that cited coming to Thailand because their spouse found work was relatively even. Reasons related to violence and persecution accounted for about two per cent of incoming migrants and only 0.5 per cent for returning migrants. However, six per cent of the incoming migrants reported leaving because of food insecurity. Those results largely correspond with findings from previous studies on drivers of migration, however the reasons related to insecurity seem to be lower in the study at hand.

Respondents that did not name employment (for themselves) as one of the reasons for coming to Thailand were asked if they still planned on working in Thailand (incoming migrants) or if they did work in Thailand during their stay although it might not have been their initial plan (returning migrants). For the inflow sample, 72 per cent reported that they intended to find employment, 16 per cent reported that they would not be looking to find work and 12 per cent were not sure yet. For the return sample, 80 per cent reported that they worked in Thailand although this was not their original plan, 18 per cent denied having worked during their stay and 2 per cent did not want to answer. This question was especially relevant in order to continue with the survey, as the following questions mainly relate to work experiences and expectations. Therefore, those that did not intend to work in Thailand or reported not having worked during their last stay in Thailand were excluded from the sample. The new sample size from this question forward is 3,765 individuals.
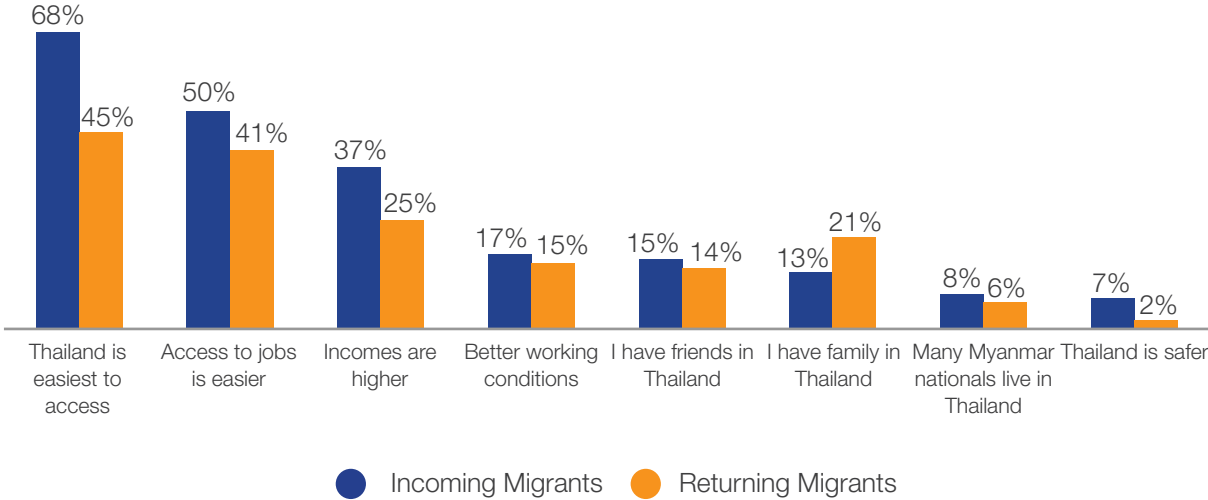
In order to understand the migration patterns of the sample population, the respondents were asked if this was their first time working in Thailand. While for the inflow sample 70 per cent reported that they had previously worked in Thailand the number is lower for the returnee sample with 57 per cent reporting they had worked in Thailand previously. For those that had previously worked in Thailand, the main sectors of employment were manufacturing, followed by domestic work, work in the hotel and service industry and agriculture.

Figure 9 - First Time Coming to Work in Thailand by Population Group
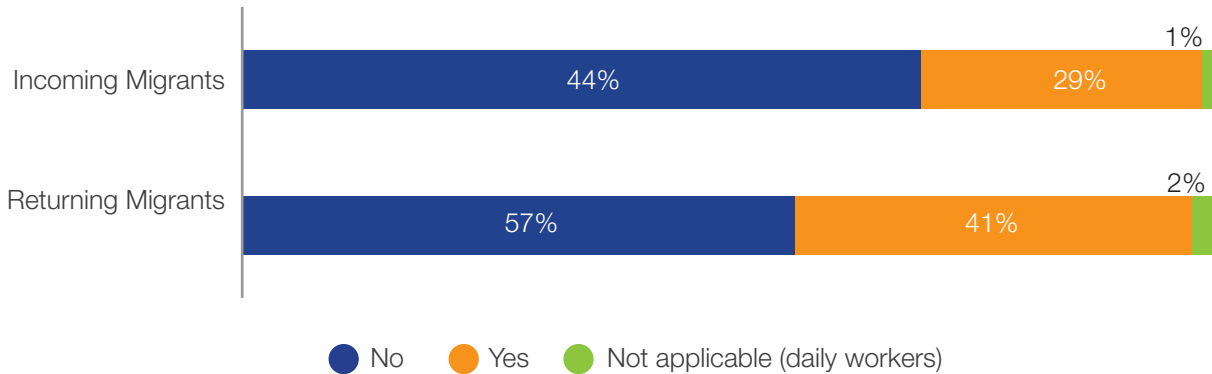
When asked why they preferred to migrate to Thailand over another country in the region, the majority named "Thailand being the easiest to access", as well as "access to jobs being easier" followed by "higher incomes" and "having family and/or friends in Thailand" (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 - Reasons for Preferring Thailand Over Other Countries in the Region by Population Group

In order to better understand the drivers of migration, respondents were also asked how they obtained their information about life in Thailand. For incoming migrants, the largest share received their information from family or friends living in Thailand (44%), followed by from people that had previously lived in Thailand (22%), knowing themselves from previous experiences in Thailand (21%), social media (18%), and from family or friends in Myanmar (10%). For returning migrants, the largest share also received information from family or friends in Thailand, however to a lesser extent than incoming migrants (34% vs 44%). In addition, they referenced their own previous migration experiences (17%) and other people that had lived in Thailand before (17%). Unlike for incoming migrants, 10 per cent of the returning migrants reported receiving their information from unofficial brokers and agents and 10 per cent also named social media.

Thematic Area 3 – Pre-migration Preparations and Arrangements

Understanding migrants' preparations and arrangements prior to migration is crucial in order to identify potential vulnerabilities that could emerge from the lack of informed decision making. Respondents were asked if they had a job in place before they made the journey to Thailand. For both sample populations, the majority of Myanmar migrant workers already had a job lined up when they arrived in Thailand (82% for incoming migrants and 65% for returning migrants). The share that came to Thailand without having a job was larger for the return sample (32%). The province of origin does not appear to be a determining factor in the likelihood of having a job lined up before coming to Thailand. When asked about how they found their jobs, the majority in both samples named relatives or friends in Thailand (75% for incoming migrants and 53% for returning migrants). Unlike the incoming respondents, among the return sample 15 per cent reported that they found a job through an agency (through self-initiation). Incoming migrants were more likely to know an employer (7%) who offered them a job. Knowing an employer beforehand can also explain why the share of incoming migrants that already had a job in place was larger than for returning migrants. Only roughly two per cent in both samples were approached directly by agents, offering them employment opportunities.

Those incoming migrants that already had a job lined up, as well as all respondents from the return sample, were asked about their sector of employment. The main sectors of employment are identical across the both samples, with the top three sectors being manufacturing, construction and the hotel/accommodation & restaurant/food services industries.

Table 6 - Top 10 Employment Sectors in Thailand

Employment	#	%
1. Manufacturing	996	30.2%
2. Construction	582	17.7%
3. Hotels/ Accommodation & Restaurants/ Food services	413	12.5%
4. Domestic work	306	9.3%
5. Wholesale and retail trade	220	6.7%
6. Agriculture/ forestry	168	5.1%
7. Repair of motor vehicles & motorcycles	105	3.2%
8. Public administrative and support services, including cleaning, landscape care, and other services to buildings	78	2.4%
9. Other service activities, including washing / (dry-)cleaning of clothes, hairdressing and other beauty treatment	77	2.3%
10. Fishing	72	2.2%

Taking the top five employment sectors, the data shows that there seem to be patterns in the province of destination. Bangkok as the main province of destination is also the most popular destination for each sector (particularly for domestic work), however the other provinces differ per sector (see Figure 11). Phuket for instance seems to be known for construction work, as well as for the hotel/accommodation and food services industry, while Samut Sakhon appears to be popular for manufacturing.

Figure 11 - Top Five Employment Sector by Intended Province of Destination in Thailand (Incoming Migrants)
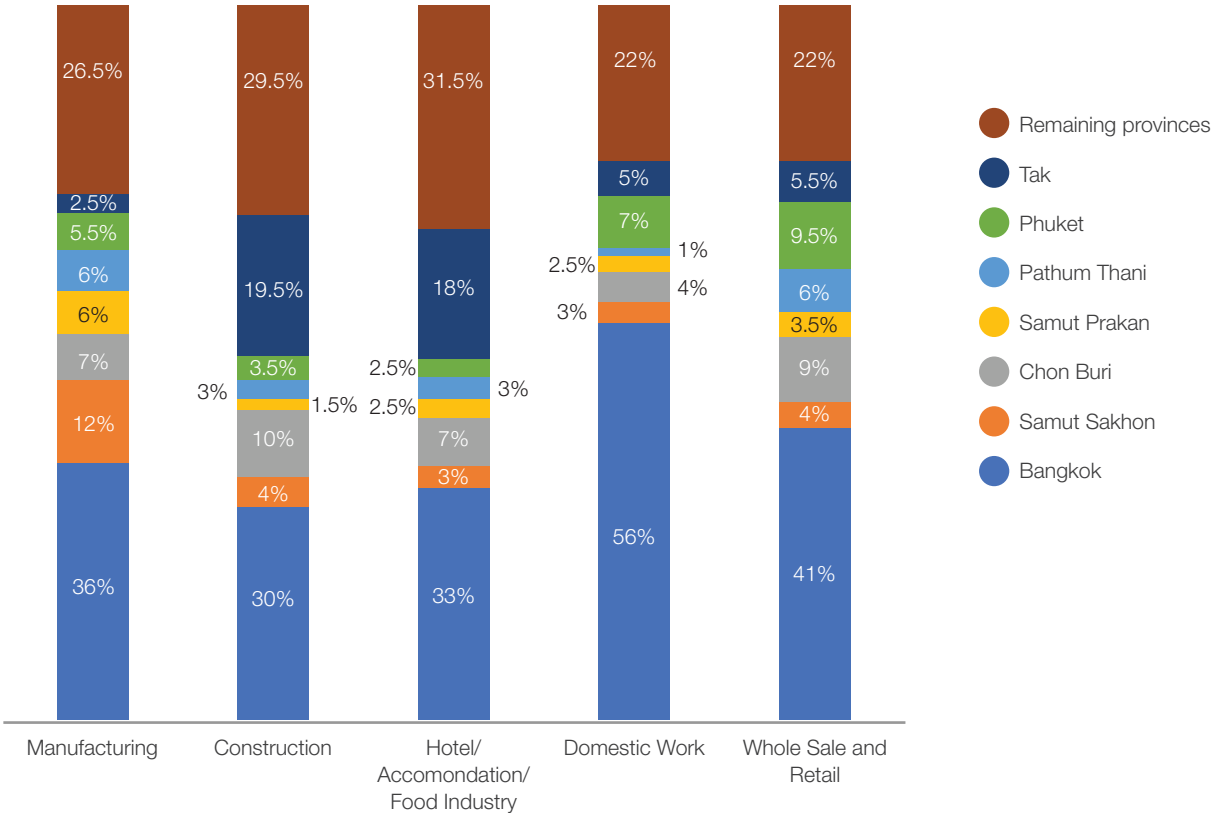
Migrants were also asked how much their journey cost them and how they were able to finance their migration. On average, returning migrants spent three times the amount that incoming migrants had paid, namely USD 282 instead of USD 96. Looking at the different categories more closely, it becomes clear that 56 per cent of incoming migrants reported to have paid between USD 1 and 50 while another 25 per cent spent between USD 51 and 100. For the return sample this distribution looks entirely different – the two largest shares (each 14%) had spent either between USD 1 and 50 or USD 351 and 400. Another 12.5 per cent reported to have paid between USD 51 and 101 and 12 per cent paid between USD 401 and 450. This might be explained by the fact that, as shown in the data, most of the respondents do not intend to stay in the province of Tak but want to move onwards. Returning migrants who have come from these further away places might therefore have spent more money after reaching Mae Sot/Phop Phra to travel further on. Looking at the return data, those migrants coming from places like Bangkok, Phuket or Chon Buri also seem to have paid on average more money than those reporting to have stayed in Tak. Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged that many of the returning migrants reported to have stayed in several locations, which might have increased the overall cost of migration as well.
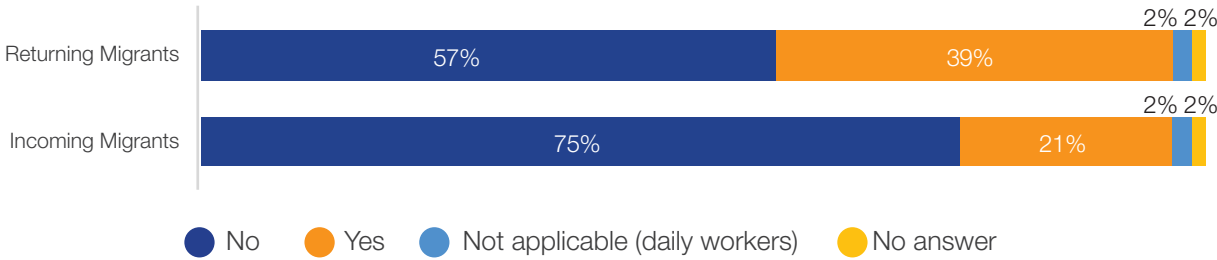
The costs of migration can give indications about migrants' vulnerabilities in the long run – taking out loans can especially increase the risk of becoming vulnerable. Therefore, migrants were asked how they were able to finance their journeys. Roughly half the migrants reported multiple sources. For incoming migrants, savings and income or wages appear to be the main sources used to pay for journeys, and while for the return sample these sources are important as well, borrowing money from family and friends or other actors seems to be a more commonly used resource.

Figure 12 - Main Sources to Finance the Migration Journey by Population Group
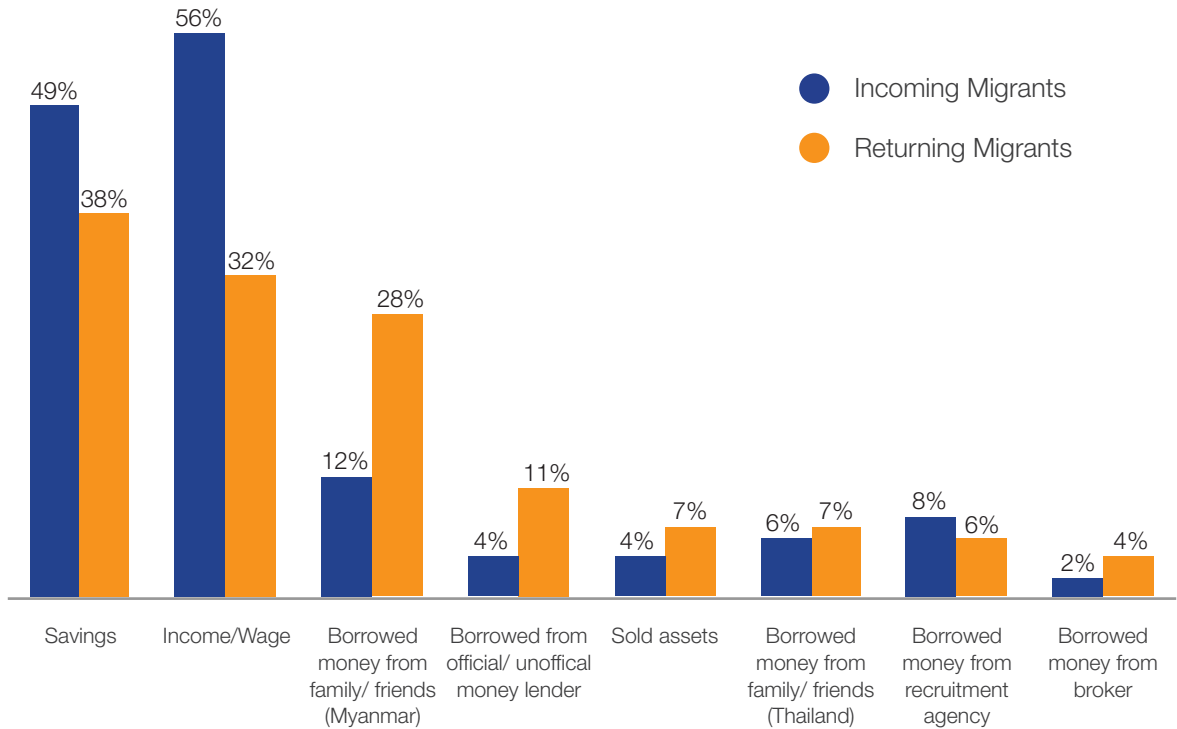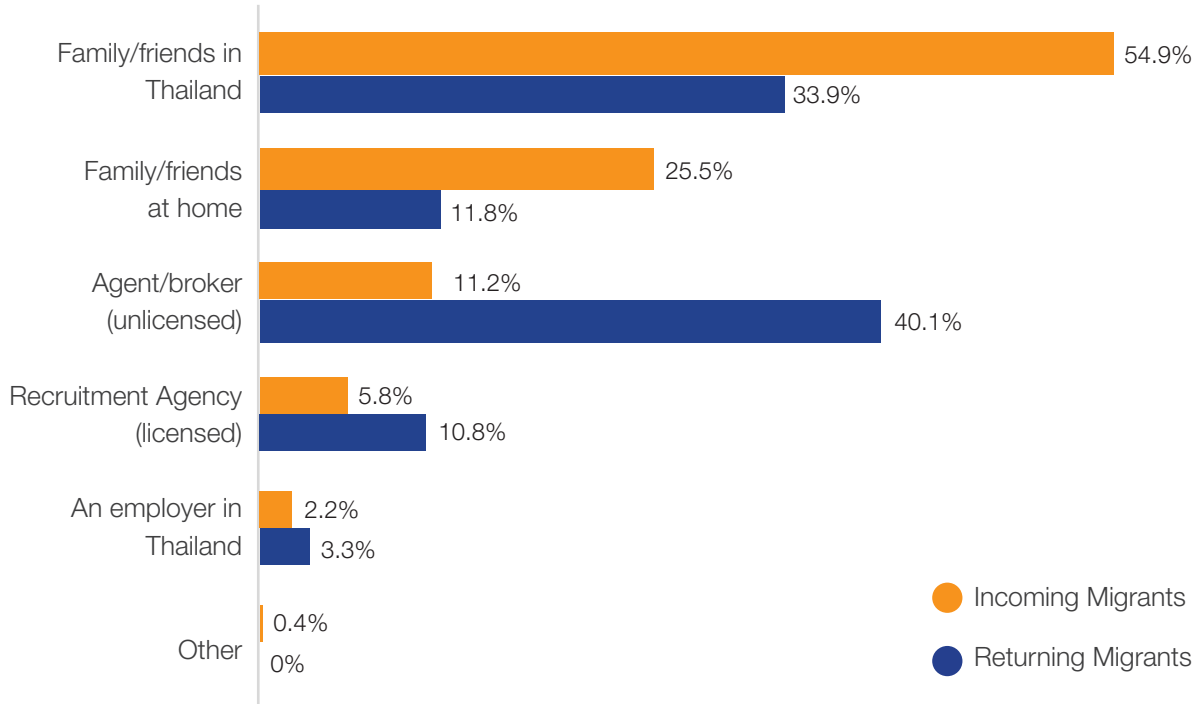

Respondents were also asked if someone helped them to prepare for their journey, and, if so, who helped them and how. This question can give some valuable insight into migration dynamics especially if brokers were involved or if migrants largely made their own arrangements. Across both samples, most migrants reported that they did not receive any support in preparing their journey (see Figure 13). In the inflow sample only 21 per cent had support in preparing for their migration. Looking at the sex distribution across both tools there does not seem to be any relation to receiving support for incoming migrants. The share of females and males that received support is relatively evenly distributed. For the return sample slightly more males (41% vs 36%) reported having received support prior to their migration.

Figure 13 - Support Received in Migration Preparations

Returning Migrants	No 57%	Yes 39%	2% 2%
Incoming Migrants	No 75%	Yes 21%	2% 2%

● No   ● Yes   ● Not applicable (daily workers)   ● No answer

Looking at the actors that were involved in supporting preparations, significant differences between the two samples become visible. While for incoming migrants the largest share (55%) had support from family or friends in Thailand or at home (25%), the largest share of returning migrants (40%) received support from an unlicensed agent or broker followed help from family in Thailand (33%).

Figure 14 - Actors Involved in the Migration Preparations

Family/friends in Thailand: 54.9% / 33.9%
Family/friends at home: 25.5% / 11.8%
Agent/broker (unlicensed): 11.2% / 40.1%
Recruitment Agency (licensed): 5.8% / 10.8%
An employer in Thailand: 2.2% / 3.3%
Other: 0.4% / 0%

● Incoming Migrants
● Returning Migrants

For both samples the main support consisted of arranging transportation (73% per cent for incoming migrants and 85% for returning migrants) and/or making employment arrangements (42% and 45%). Another 19 per cent of incoming migrants reported to have received help with their documents, however only seven per cent reported this in the case of returning migrants. While for incoming migrants, family or friends in Thailand predominately supported arrangements, for returning migrants unlicensed brokers seem to be mainly involved in making transportation arrangements, while employment was predominately arranged either by family or friends in Thailand or by licensed recruitment agencies. The documentation and legal status of respondents (which will be covered in more depth in Thematic Area 4), seems to be a determining factor in this regard. The data reveals that those with no documents were also more likely to make use of an unlicensed broker. This aligns with the fact that unlicensed brokers were mainly used for transportation purposes, ensuring entry into Thailand. Respondents were also asked if they received support from more than one actor, however in 60 per cent of the cases for incoming migrants and 47 per cent for returning migrants this was not the case.

The importance of the broker or agent for return respondents is also emphasized in the question "who did you travel with" – while for incoming migrants almost none of the respondents (only 0.5%) reported to have travelled with an agent or a broker, 10 per cent of returning migrants reported having done so. Incoming migrants seem largely to travel alone (57%), or with their spouses and/or children (22%), as well as with friends (18%). Returning migrants also travelled to a great extent by themselves (45%), with friends (25%), or with their spouses and/or children (18%). Only small shares in both samples (1% and 4%) reported to have travelled with a group of other Myanmar nationals, like fellow employees. When asked about the mode of transportation, almost all respondents reported that they had made use of several modes of transportation throughout their journey (see Figure 15).

Figure 15 - Modes of Transportation by Population Group
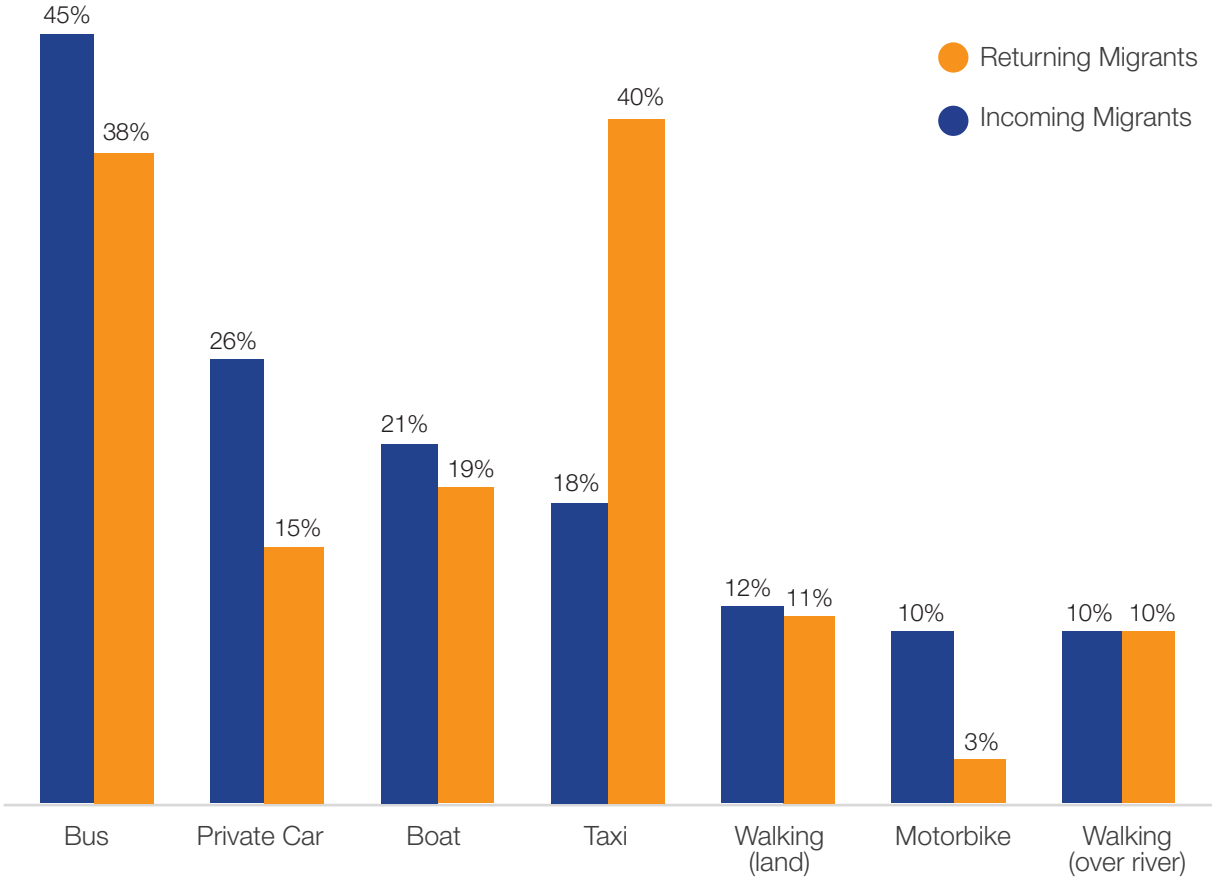
In terms of preparations, incoming migrants seem to have concrete plans to send remittances back to Myanmar once they arrive in Thailand. When asked if they planned to send remittances 61 per cent answered affirmatively. Another 25 per cent are not sure yet whether they will have the means to send money back home, and 12 per cent said that they would not send any money. This figure largely corresponds to the percentage (65%) of the return sample that reported they were able to send money back to Myanmar during their stay in Thailand. Thirty-one per cent however clearly stated that they were not able to send any money home. When comparing the average amount incoming migrants expect to remit per month with the actual average amount returning migrants were able to send the amount differs by roughly USD 100. Incoming migrants expected to remit on average around 612 USD in the first six months (approximately USD 100 per month). However, returning migrants reported that on average they remitted USD 244 per month.[4]

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[4] For the analysis large outliers were excluded for the average estimation (USD > 10,000 USD) in order to avoid a left-skewed bias of the results

Picture 8 - Three women crossing back to Myanmar


Picture 9 - Man crossing from Myanmar into Thailand

Thematic Area 4 – Migrants' Vulnerabilities

Migrants can become vulnerable at different points of their migration experience for a variety of reasons and circumstances. This study uses a number of 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). Surprisingly, the share of respondents ranking their speaking and understanding at the lowest level (1) was twice as large for returning migrants than for incoming migrants. Roughly 35 per cent of incoming migrants estimated their Thai speaking skills to be at the lowest level, while 68 per cent of the returning migrants ranked themselves at the lowest level. The numbers are similar for understanding Thai – 30.5 per cent of the incoming migrants and 63 per cent of the returning migrants ranked themselves at the lowest level. The share of respondents ranking their Thai speaking skills at the highest level (5) was 18 per cent for incoming migrants and only 1 per cent for returning migrants. Again, roughly the same shares can be found for comprehension skills – 20 per cent of incoming migrants reported their comprehension skills to be at the highest level while only 1 per cent of the returning migrants did so. One would expect returning migrants to have gained Thai language skills during their stay, however the high percentage for incoming migrants could potentially be explained by the fact that 70 per cent of the sample population had previously worked in Thailand. While the two samples look very different for speaking and understanding the Thai language, they look very similar for the third component: reading Thai. The clear majority, 91 per cent for incoming migrants and 96 per cent for returning migrants ranked their Thai reading skills at the lowest level.

Although the Thai speaking skills of returning migrants is in general relatively low, the breakdown by duration of stay in Thailand shows that migrants staying between one and six months have the least Thai speaking skills.

Figure 16 - Thai Speaking Skills by Duration of Stay in Thailand (Returning Migrants)

43
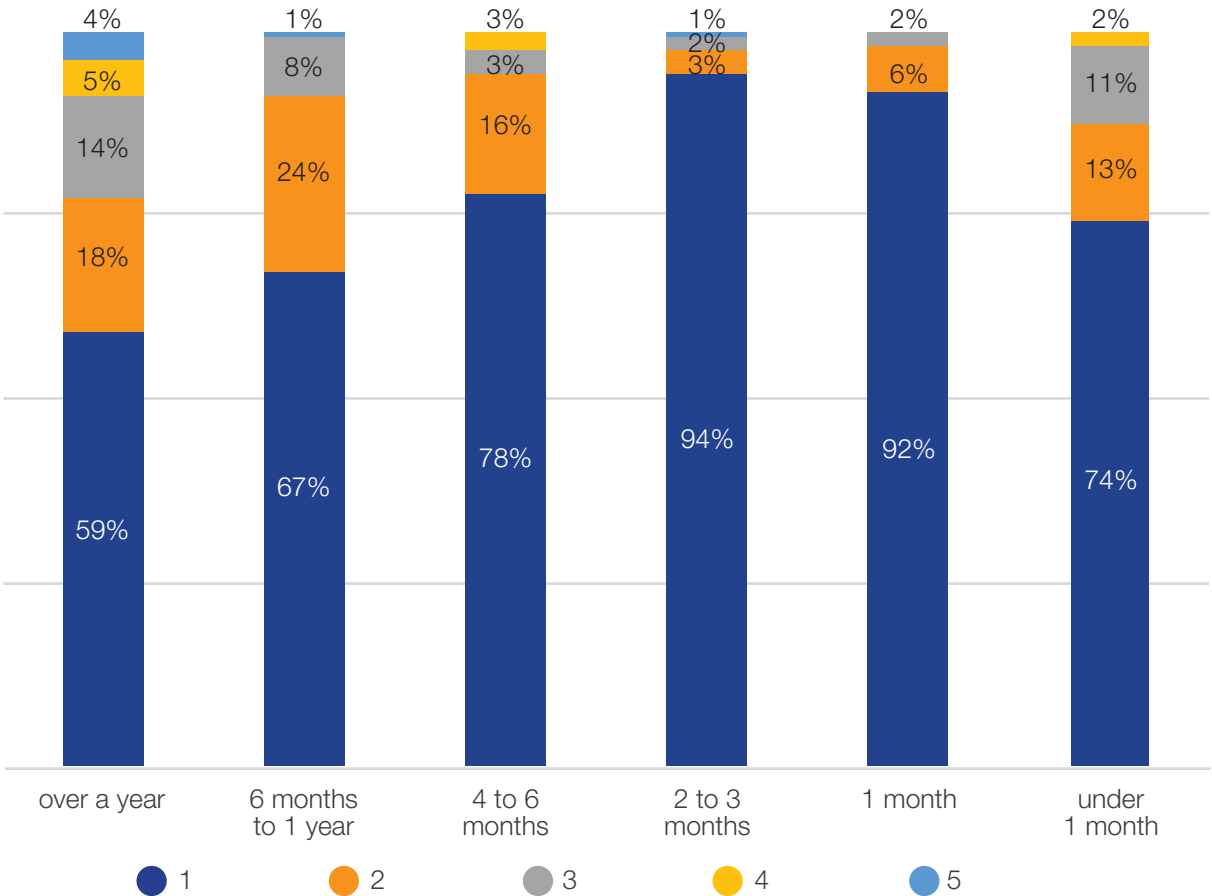
As expected those migrants that stayed over a year in Thailand have the highest level of ability, although those that rank their skills in the upper range (from 3 to 5) are still relatively few at only 23 percent.

The return sample was further asked if in their opinion their Thai language skills had improved during their migration experience, however results show that the majority (57%) only think their ability increased a little (see Figure 17).

A second indicator used in the survey to assess Myanmar workers' vulnerability is access to a legal status in Thailand. While for incoming migrants the most common form of documentation is the Certificate of Identification (CI) (45%), the majority of the returning migrants reported having no documentation (49%).

This result should be viewed with caution, as it is most likely biased given that 60 per cent of the returning migrants were interviewed in the Immigration Detention Center (IDC) in Mae Sot, before their return/deportation to Myanmar. Of those surveyed in the IDC, 77 per cent lacked documentation.

Figure 17 - Improvement of Thai Language Skills

- A bit
- A lot
- Not at all
- Do not want to answer

For the four per cent of incoming migrants that did not have any documentation, 80 per cent were interviewed in Phop Phra; of the 12 per cent holding an MoU contract, 99.5 per cent of the cases were interviewed in Mae Sot. This can most likely be explained by the large share of Myanmar nationals working in the agricultural sector in the district of Phop Phra. As explained in the IOM/ILO study conducted in 2017, the agricultural sector is most likely to employ undocumented migrants. Most of the work on farms in the area utilizes daily labour, which is known to be often not officially contracted.
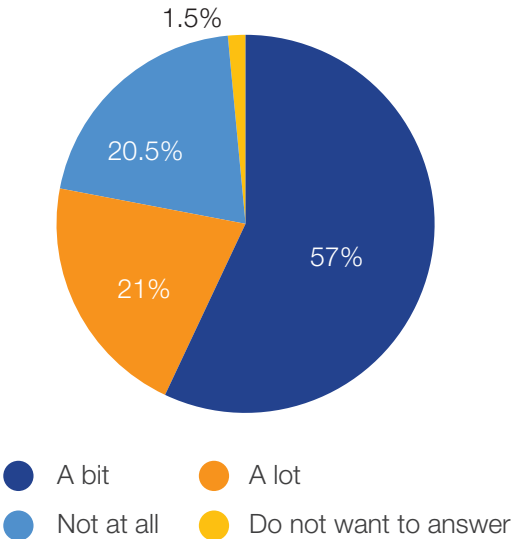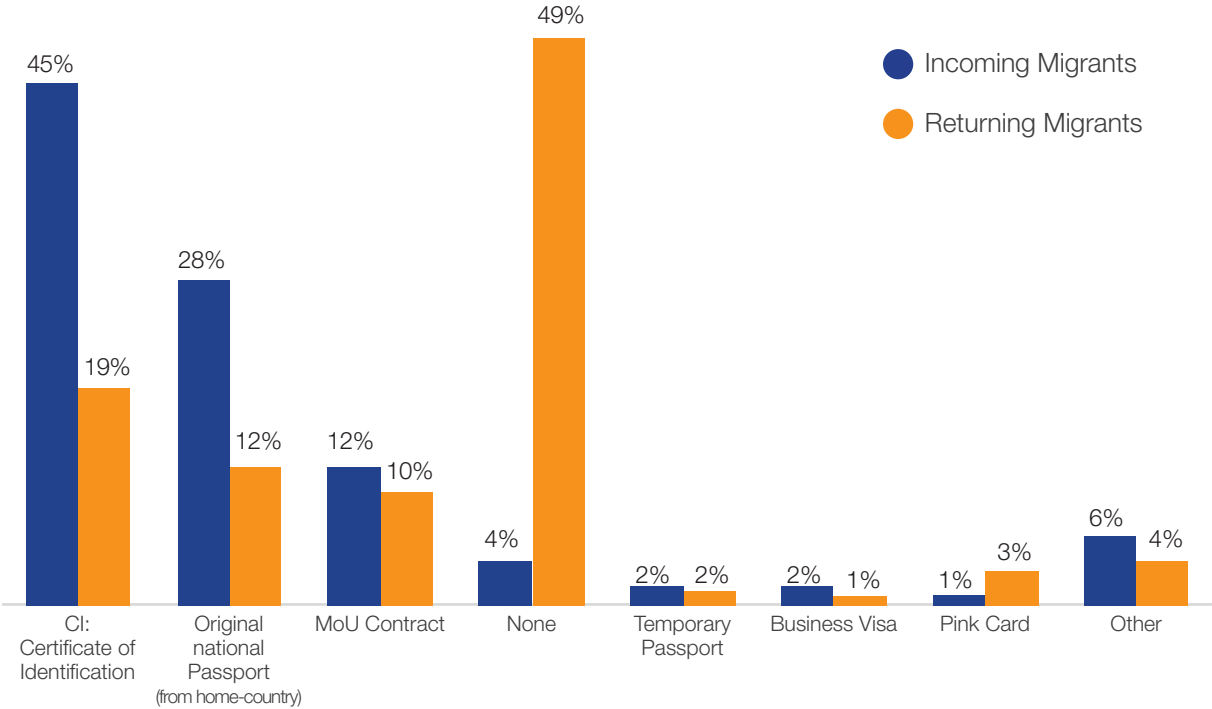
Figure 18 - Main Form of Documentation for Thailand by Population Group
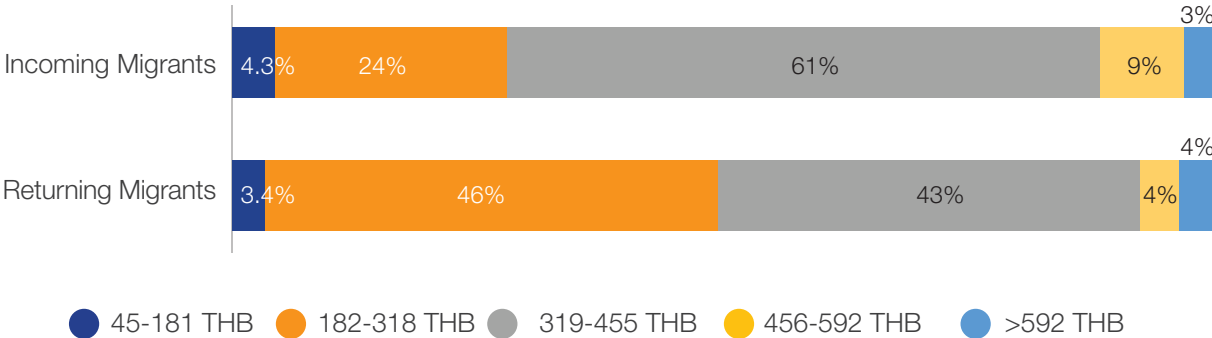
One might have expected the number of Myanmar nationals entering Thailand on an MoU contract to have increased after the introduction of the Royal Ordinance on 1 July 2018, however the data shows that the share remains relatively equal, and that the numbers only increased by a few percentage points. An increase can be noted for those entering with a Certificate of Identification, however, which is as expected.

Migrant workers that reported having 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 a work permit or employment contract. The sub-sample of 475 migrants was asked if they had ever seen their employment contracts. One quarter of the sample reported that they had never seen their MoU employment contract. The 75 per cent who had seen their contracts were then asked if they had signed the contract themselves. Only four per cent said they had not signed the contract themselves. The 96 per cent that signed their own contracts were then asked about the language of the contract. The results show that a large share of migrants saw and signed the contract in more than one language – most often in Myanmar language (82%) and/or Thai (65%) and English (44%). However, seven per cent also reported that they did not know the language in which they signed the contract. In order to gain more information about potential exploitation and misconduct by agents, returning migrants that had already experienced migration were asked if the name on the original contract matched the name of the first employer they worked for. Of the sub-sample (95 individuals), only eight per cent reported that the names did not match, while another 14 per cent were not willing to answer the question.

Working conditions 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. Roughly 80 per cent confirmed that they knew their daily wages beforehand. When comparing the expected daily wages of incoming migrants with the actual daily wages received by the return sample, there is only a small difference of THB 30.

On average incoming migrants expected to receive THB 364 per day while on average returning migrants earned THB 336. However, looking at the different wage brackets, it becomes clear that the majority of both samples lies across low-income categories between 182 and 455 THB (see Figure 19).

Figure 19 - Daily Wages by Population Group

| | 45-181 THB | 182-318 THB | 319-455 THB | 456-592 THB | >592 THB |

Incoming Migrants: 4.3%, 24%, 61%, 9%, 3%
Returning Migrants: 3.4%, 46%, 43%, 4%, 4%

Looking at the median minimum wage, 50 per cent of returning migrants reported that they earned wages below this amount. Gender also seems to be a determining factor in this regard. Taking the median minimum wage of THB 318, the data shows that women appear to be less likely than men to earn above the minimum wage (see Figure 20). This finding was also supported by previous studies.

Looking at wage distribution by employment sector for returning migrants, the data shows that migrants working in the agriculture/ forestry sector are least likely to earn above the median minimum wage, followed by those employed in the domestic work sector. Agriculture and domestic work appear to be the employment sectors that are least likely to pay above the minimum wage (see Figure 21).

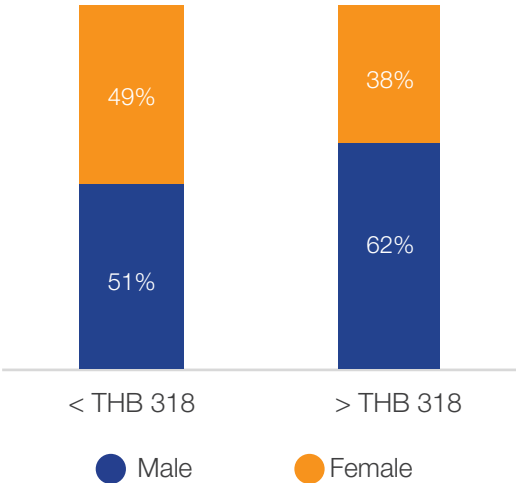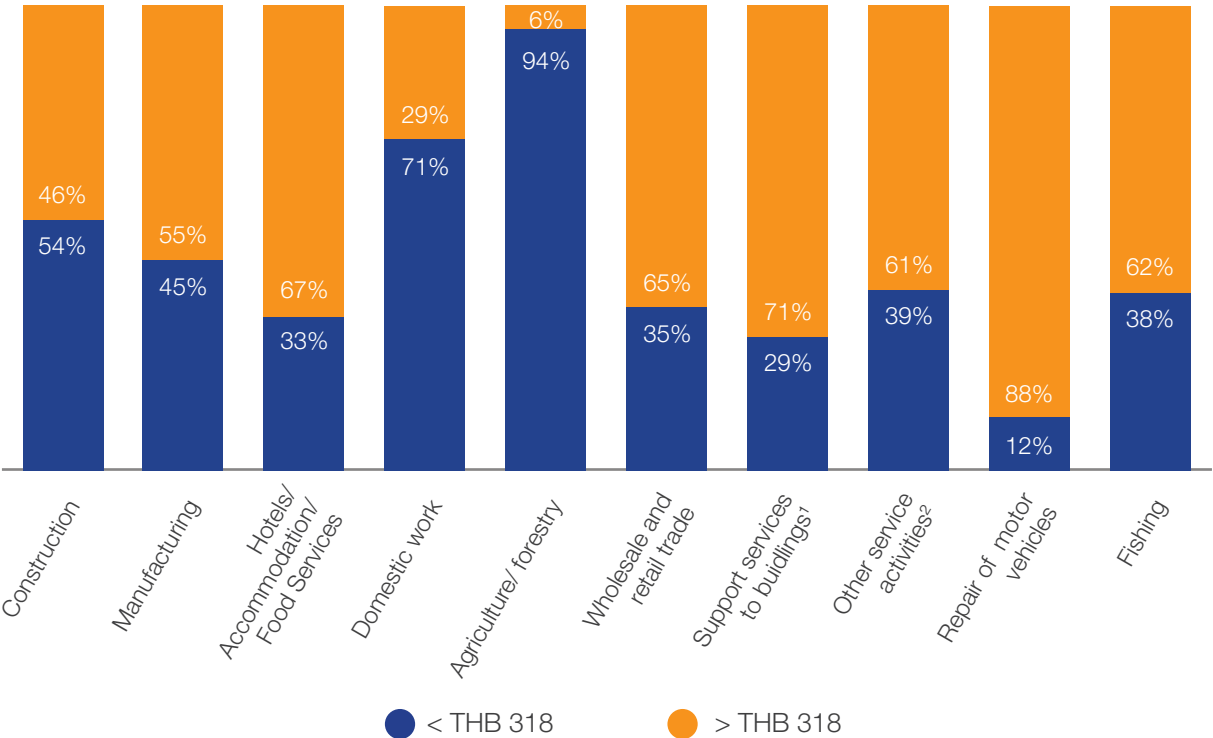**Figure 20 - Wage Distribution by Gender (Returning Migrants)**

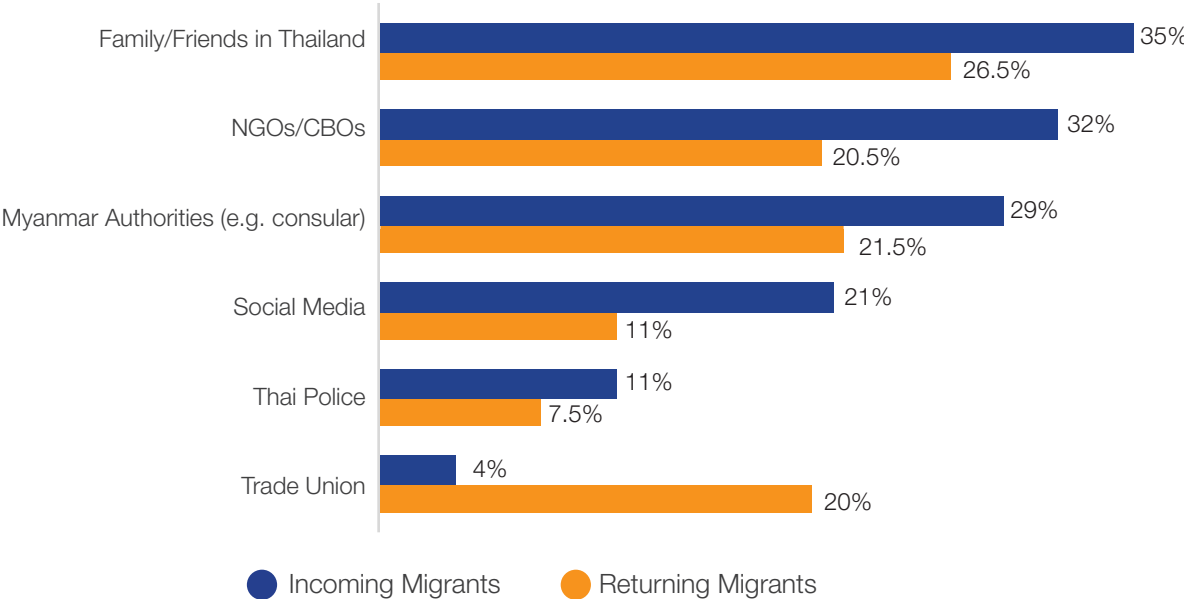**Figure 21 - Wage Distribution by Top 10 Employment Sectors (Returning Migrants)**

1   Public administrative and support services, including cleaning, landscape care, and other services to buildings

2   Other service activities, including washing / (dry-)cleaning of clothes, hairdressing and other beauty treatment (e.g. massage parlors)

The return sample was also asked if their original wage expectations were met, and 88 per cent confirmed that the expected and actual wage matched. Nine per cent stated that the actual wage was lower, and two per cent said it was higher. A similar question was asked about daily working hours. For both samples, the vast majority expected and actually worked between eight and twelve hours a day. Ninety-one per cent of the incoming migrants expected to work between eight and twelve hours, and 94 per cent of the return sample reported that they had worked on average between eight and twelve hours a day. Each respondent was also asked whether they had contact with their employer before starting the job. Results show that for the incoming sample roughly 52 per cent had contact with their employer prior to arrival, while the share for the return sample was smaller at only 32 per cent.

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/or problems at the workplace. Incoming migrants were asked about their expectations of problems at the workplace. The data shows that the largest share of respondents in both samples did not face any challenges during their journey. Only seven per cent of the incoming sample and 12 per cent of the return sample reported to having faced problems en route to Thailand. Of those respondents that did however face problems, most reported more than one problem. Of those that reported to have face problems large shares of both samples reported "misinformation" as a common problem along the journey (22% for incoming migrants and 30% for returning migrants), "psychological stress" (18% for incoming migrants and 35% for returning migrants), as well as "demands of bribes" (36% for incoming migrants and 18% for returning migrants) and "being charged more money than agreed upon before" (22% for incoming migrants and 7% for returning migrants). In the case of problems at the workplace, the differences between incoming and returning migrants become visible. While only five per cent of incoming migrants expected to face any kind of problems in the workplace, 20 per cent of the returning migrants reported having faced at least one problem. Most expected problems were related to wages. Roughly 50 per cent of the inflow sample were concerned that they might be paid under the minimum wage, be subject to illegal wage deductions or that wages might be withheld. With regard to wages, returning migrants especially reported problems with being paid under the minimum wage (14%), wages being withheld (13%), as well as irregular payments (12%). Further common problems were psychological stress (27%), long working hours (15%) and/or unsafe working conditions (11%). Problems seemed to predominately occur in the fishing industry (32%), the service industry (specifically massage parlors, hairdressers etc.) (33%), agriculture/forestry (19.5%) and manufacturing (20%).

To overcome these challenges, a proper support system needs to be in place. Migrants were asked if they knew of any support mechanisms in case of problems in Thailand. For incoming migrants, 42 per cent reported that they knew of actors who could help them in case of need. The share was slightly lower for returning migrants at only 35 per cent. The data reveals that family or friends in Thailand, as well as NGO/CBOs and official Myanmar Authorities, such as consular officials, are known support mechanisms (see Figure 22). Labour unions were surprisingly often mentioned (20%) by returning migrants. Labour unions as a support system had not been mentioned in previous studies. Returning migrants who had made use of the support mechanisms were additionally asked whether they were helpful in overcoming the problem. A total of 56 per cent reported that they had actually received the support they needed, 30 per cent said they did not seek help and had only heard of these actors, 16 per cent said they partially helped them and only three per cent said that they did not receive the required support when they asked for it.

Figure 22 - Main Known Support Mechanism in Thailand by Population Group

Family/Friends in Thailand: 35% (Incoming Migrants), 26.5% (Returning Migrants)
NGOs/CBOs: 32% (Incoming Migrants), 20.5% (Returning Migrants)
Myanmar Authorities (e.g. consular): 29% (Incoming Migrants), 21.5% (Returning Migrants)
Social Media: 21% (Incoming Migrants), 11% (Returning Migrants)
Thai Police: 11% (Incoming Migrants), 7.5% (Returning Migrants)
Trade Union: 4% (Incoming Migrants), 20% (Returning Migrants)

● Incoming Migrants   ● Returning Migrants

Thematic Area 5 – Return

Questions for thematic area five were only included in the survey for returning migrants as it centers on the topic of return. The questions are only relevant if the migrant worker is intending to return to their country of origin after their migration experience. When asked why they were returning to Myanmar several reasons were mentioned, the most common being end of visa/work permit (25%); deportation (21%); not having proper documents (17%); just to visit family/ friends (16%) and/or their family wanted them to come back (15.5%). At this point it should again be acknowledged that the results might be biased due to the large share of respondents from the IDC. In addition to their reason for return, respondents were asked if they expected to face challenges upon return to Myanmar. Approximately 65 per cent of respondents did not expect to face any challenges upon return. The remaining 35 per cent named challenges such as finding a job (13.5%), finding housing (6%), physical health problems (6%), as well as mental health problems (5%) and the repayment of debt (4.5%).

As the data has shown, many migrants do not only migrate to Thailand once, but several times throughout their lives. The migrant workers were therefore asked if they intended to migrate again and, if so, would Thailand be the destination country. The data shows that the share is relatively evenly distributed. Roughly 41 per cent confirmed that they would migrate again, and 40 per cent said they would not. Another 16 per cent stated that they had not yet decided whether they would want to leave again, and 3 per cent did not want to answer the question (see Figure 23). Looking at the age distribution, respondents over the age of 45 seemed least likely to migrate again. Those aged 21 to 30 were most likely to express a wish to migrate again (60%). Another factor determining migrants' decision to migrate again seems to be the length of stay in Thailand. As Figure 24 shows, the longer a migrant has stayed in Thailand, the more likely they are willing to migrate again.
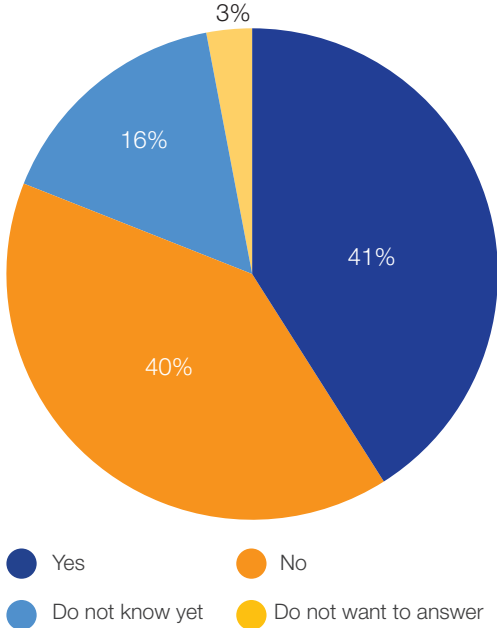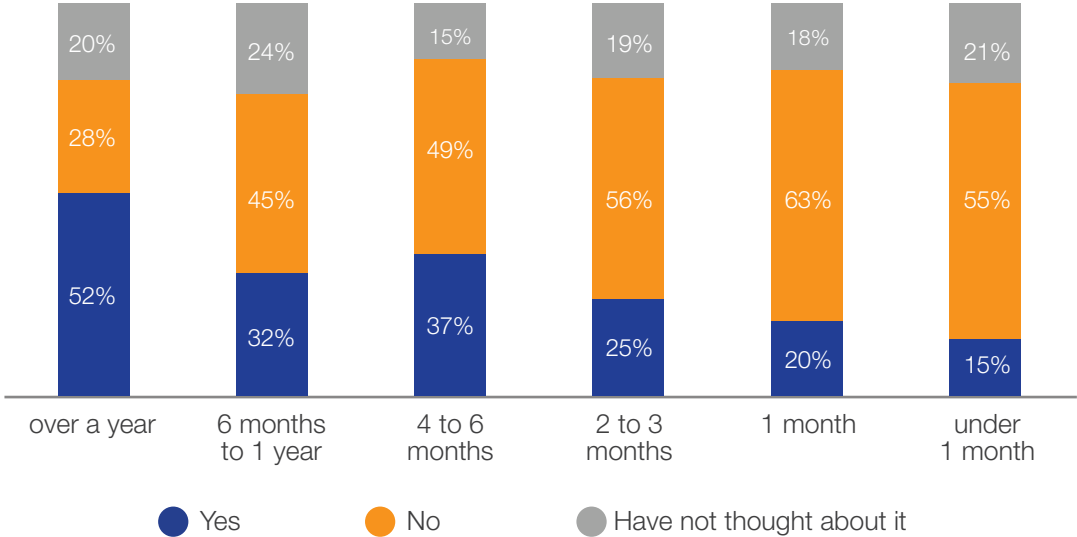
Figure 23 - Intention to Migrate Again

- Yes
- No
- Do not know yet
- Do not want to answer

Figure 24 - Intention to Migrate Again by Duration of Stay in Thailand

- Yes
- No
- Have not thought about it

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The data also shows that in 98 per cent of the cases where respondents did want to migrate again the respondents would want to return to Thailand. The remaining two per cent would want to go to places like Malaysia, China or Indonesia. When asked why they wanted to return the respondents usually gave more than one reason. The main ones were higher wages (62%), better employment opportunities (46%), better living conditions (31%) and/or to rejoin friends and family (20%).

As previous research has shown, migrants can incur debt during their migration experience, often by not anticipating certain costs or by expecting to earn more money than they actually do. The survey therefore included a few simple questions on the respondents' financial situation upon return. In answer to the question of whether the respondents had more or less savings than before their departure, 70.5 per cent reported that their savings had increased. Thirteen per cent stated that they had remained the same, eight per cent indicated that they had less savings now and nine per cent did not feel comfortable answering the question. Similar results are shown in answer to a question about the financial situation of returning migrants. When asked whether their financial situation had improved through migration, 70 per cent confirmed that it had. Another 13.5 per cent said it had stayed the same, 8.5 per cent reported that it got worse and eight per cent did not want to answer the question. The 8.5 per cent that reported their financial situation had worsened were asked why. The vast majority (78%) stated that they were not able to make enough money during their migration, with 16 per cent also saying that they were simply not able to find a good job and 13 per cent saying that they now faced debts upon return. Looking at sectors of employment, those working in agriculture/forestry followed by those employed in domestic work and construction were more likely to report that their financial situation had worsened. These sectors of employment were also those least likely to pay workers the median minimum wage (see Figure 21).

Picture 10 - DTM enumerator interviewing a Myanmar migrant worker at a van stop close to the Friendship Bridge

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The results of this study are useful in providing empirical data to confirm or challenge anecdotal knowledge or preconceptions about cross border movements and labour migration between Thailand and Myanmar.

The data collection activity in Tak province took place in Mae Sot and Phop Phra districts within a timeframe of eight weeks. A total of 4,130 Myanmar migrants were surveyed, of whom 3,084 were incoming migrants and 1,046 were returning migrants. A total of 3,903 surveys were collected in the district of Mae Sot and 227 surveys in the district of Phop Phra.

Migrant Profiles

The sex breakdown of Myanmar nationals in Thailand is largely concurrent with previously identified sex ratios (44.5% female and 55.5% male). However, unlike in other reports, this research showed that Myanmar nationals interviewed in Tak province were more likely to be married and aged between 16 and 30. The share of respondents having completed either primary or secondary education is relatively equal for both samples at roughly 80 per cent. With regard to place of origin, the data revealed that both sample populations originate largely from Kayin State, Mon State and the Bago region, and that they predominately belong to the Barmar, Karen, Mon and Pa-O ethnic groups. Results further show that the time incoming migrants expect to be away, and the time returning migrants actually spent in Thailand is very similar – most migrants intended to and actually stayed in Thailand over a year. There seems to also be a correlation between the length of stay in Thailand and the province of destination. The longer migrants wish to be away, the more likely respondents indicated they intend to travel to a province in Thailand further away from the border, i.e. Bangkok or Chon Buri. Migrants coming to Phop Phra were much more likely to stay in the province of Tak than those entering via Mae Sot.

Drivers of Migration

The data shows that the most common forms of previous employment in Myanmar for both samples were daily wages and self-employment. Migrants commonly reported more than one reason for coming to Thailand, and these reasons were primarily associated with finding employment for themselves, their spouse finding employment, as well as to visit family and friends. Reasons related to violence and persecution were rarely mentioned across both samples. Looking at the migration history of the sample population, incoming migrants appeared to be more likely to have migrated and worked in Thailand previously (70% vs 57%). Respondents stated that they preferred to migrate to Thailand instead of another country in the region due to "Thailand being the easiest to access" as well as "access to jobs being easier", followed by "higher incomes" and "having family and/or friends in Thailand."

Pre-migration Preparations and Arrangements

For both sample populations, the majority of Myanmar migrant workers already had a job lined up when they arrived in Thailand. When asked about how they found their jobs, the majority in both sample groups named relatives or friends in Thailand as a source of support. Unlike incoming respondents, among the outgoing sample a larger share reported that they found a job through an agency (through self-initiation). The top three sectors of employment for both samples were manufacturing, construction and the service industry (in hotels, restaurants and food preparation). Looking at the costs of the journey, on average returning migrants spent three times the amount that incoming migrants had paid, namely USD 282 instead of USD 96. This could be explained by the fact that returning migrants often come from places further away and might therefore have spent more money after reaching Mae Sot/Phop Phra to travel further. When asked about their means to finance the journey most migrants did not report one source but rather named several. For incoming migrants, savings and income or wages appear to be the main sources. While for the return sample those sources are important as well, borrowing money from family, friends and other actors seems to be more common. The majority of migrants reported that they did not receive any support in preparing their journey. For those that did receive support with preparations, there are significant differences between the two samples regarding the actors that were involved. While for incoming migrants the largest share had support from family or friends in Thailand, the largest share of returning migrants received support from unlicensed agents or brokers, followed by help from family in Thailand. For both samples, the main support consisted of arranging transportation; making arrangements for employment and/or securing proper documentation. Family and friends were more likely to help with employment arrangements, and agents or brokers were more likely to help with transportation. The data shows that Myanmar migrant workers prefer to rely on family or friends at home for financial support and on family or friends in Thailand for preparation and employment support.

Migrants' Vulnerabilities

Looking at migrants' ability to communicate in Thai, surprisingly, the share of respondents ranking their speaking and understanding at the lowest level (1) was twice as large for returning migrants as for incoming migrants. The larger number for incoming migrants could potentially be explained by the fact that 70 per cent had already worked in Thailand and may have picked up Thai language skills the last time they worked in the country. While the two samples show different levels of speaking and understanding of the Thai language, they look very similar for the third component: reading Thai. The vast majority (over 90%) ranked their Thai reading skills at the lowest level.

Migrants interviewed in Phop Phra were more likely not have any documents. This can most likely be explained by the large share of Myanmar nationals working in the agricultural sector in the district of Phop Phra. Migrant workers that reported having an MoU contract or a pink card were asked if they had ever seen their employment contract, and one quarter reported that they had never seen their MoU employment contract. The data collected on outgoing migrants showed that on average migrants earned THB 336 per day, which is closely aligned to the average amount incoming migrants expected to receive. The largest shares earned between THB 182 and 455 a day, and women were less likely to earn above the median minimum wage of THB 318. Regarding problems en route, as well as upon arrival, the data shows that the number expecting to face problems is lower than the number of people actually experiencing problems. This disconnect is particularly prevalent with regards to problems at the workplace; very few incoming migrants expected problems while one in five migrant workers actually faced a problem at the workplace during their employment. The most common problems experienced were psychological stress, long working hours, being paid below minimum wage, wages being withheld, as well as irregular payments and/or unsafe working conditions.

Return

When asked why they are returning to Myanmar, returning migrants mention a number of reasons, the most common being end of visa/work permit; deportation; not having proper documents; just to visit family/ friends; and/or their family wanted them to come back. More than half of the respondents did not expect to face any challenges upon return. Those who did expect challenges were concerned with finding a job or housing, as well as physical and mental health problems. Just under half expressed a desire to migrate again, predominantly to Thailand. Overall the financial and saving situation of Myanmar nationals seemed to have increased positively through migration, as almost two thirds stated that their savings and/or financial situation had improved through migration. However, for some the situation also worsened due to a lack of sufficient income or the accumulation of debt.

Next Steps

The findings presented in this report were part of a first round of data collection under the FMS activities in Tak province. There will be two more rounds of data collection lasting until mid-December 2018. Having three rounds of data collection will help to verify current findings and control for robustness of results.

Picture 11 - Myanmar migrants on their way back to Myanmar

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