

ASSESSING POTENTIAL CHANGES IN THE MIGRATION PATTERNS OF LAOTIAN MIGRANTS AND THEIR **IMPACTS** ON THAILAND AND LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



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Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of Laotian Migrants and their Impacts on Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic

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Foreword

Migration has a well-documented potential to impact positively upon countries and communities of origin and destination, as well as the lives of migrants themselves and their families, through the circulation of skills, knowledge and remittances. However, this potential has not always been realized, and rarely realized to its fullest extent.

Laotian workers (in addition to Cambodian and Myanmar migrants) have migrated to Thailand in high numbers for many years, contributing vitally to the economy of Thailand and playing a critical role in filling labour shortages in numerous key sectors, a trend that is likely to continue in the future. However, due to cultural and linguistic similarities – particularly in the North-east of Thailand, as well as the relatively lower number of Laotian migrants compared to those from Myanmar and Cambodia, the situation of Laotian migrants in Thailand, and linkages between migration to Thailand and poverty reduction and development in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, has never been comprehensively investigated and understood.

This study was conducted to shed light on the situations of Laotian migrant workers in Thailand and to understand their aspirations, challenges and future prospects. Critically, the study also aims to understand the extent to which Laotian migrants in Thailand contribute, and could potentially contribute, to poverty reduction in Lao People’s Democratic Republic through remittance flows, skills circulation and potential return to their country. Furthermore, in the context of a rapidly evolving region, the study also investigates the extent to which economic developments in both Thailand and Lao People’s Democratic Republic are likely to impact upon Laotian nationals’ decisions to migrate, to return, or stay in Thailand.

We believe that these issues are of key importance to migration and development policymakers in both Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand. The hundreds of thousands of Laotian migrants in Thailand have immense potential to contribute positively to poverty reduction, as well as social and economic development in their country, a potential that should be recognized and promoted by the Government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic through provision of the necessary support for migrant workers to enjoy their rights in Thailand, while also using the skills, knowledge and financial capital gained through their migration experience productively upon their return.

Similarly, Thailand’s ability to effectively manage migration at this critical juncture will have lasting impacts on its growth and development in the years to come, given the country’s high reliance on migrant workers, particularly in certain specific job sectors. Thailand – having experienced years of healthy economic growth and one of the world’s lowest unemployment rates and smallest labour shortages, particularly in low-skilled and low-wage employment sectors – continues to need migrant workers. If Thailand’s economy and society are to continue benefiting from migration, it is essential that the Royal Thai Government and its partners make rights-based and judicious decisions on migration policy.

This study was conducted with these contexts in mind, with the aim of providing evidence-based support to policymakers in Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand towards the development of transparent and rights-based migration policies that maximize the positive contributions of migration to the economies and societies of both countries, as well as the well-being of the migrants and their families. It is our hope that this study will enable a range of stakeholders and development partners in Thailand and Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and beyond, to understand, plan for, maximize and manage the impacts of migration on poverty reduction and socioeconomic development in a rapidly evolving and dynamic migration context.



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List of Acronyms

ARCM	Asian Research Center for Migration
IAS	Institute of Asian Studies
IFAD	The International Fund for Agricultural Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LAK	Lao Kip
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NELM	The New Economics of Labour Migration
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
THB	Thai Baht
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Executive summary

Over the past few decades, economic growth in Thailand has provided ample employment opportunities for migrant workers. Although Lao People's Democratic Republic has also seen notable growth and development over the same period, the widening disparities between urban and rural areas and between the two countries continue to motivate many Laotian migrants, particularly from rural communities where jobs are scarce and low-paid, to migrate to Thailand. The current population of Laotian migrants in Thailand is estimated at approximately 300,000. Despite this figure being smaller in absolute terms when compared to the numbers of other migrant populations in Thailand, it accounts for over half of all migrants from Lao People's Democratic Republic and, through remittances, is responsible for between 25 and 50 per cent of the income of rural households in the country.

The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic has committed to halving national poverty and graduating from Least Developed Country status by 2020, and also raised the minimum wage significantly in early 2015. At the same time, the demand for migrant workers in Thailand continues to grow, with labour shortages projected to increase in the coming years. These developments may have different impacts on migratory patterns in the short, medium and long term, and further emphasize the need for a comprehensive understanding of motivations and circumstances that influence mobility in both directions and how these movements are linked to development and poverty reduction in both host and origin communities.

This research study was conducted in these contexts, with the objective of enhancing the evidence base on the situations of Laotian migrants in Thailand, the effects of migration on poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic, and potential changes in migration patterns of Laotian migrants to Thailand in the future. The study comprised 1,209 quantitative interviews with Laotian migrants in Thailand, 148 quantitative interviews with returned Laotian migrant workers in Lao People's Democratic Republic, and 160 qualitative interviews with Laotian migrant workers, Government officials, employers, and civil society organizations.

The key findings of the study highlight existing and potential linkages between migration to Thailand and poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic, as well as numerous factors that contribute to enhancing the migration experience of Laotian migrants in Thailand. A summary of the key findings, together with recommendations, is presented below:

Firstly, the study highlighted the importance of ensuring an effective regular channel for the recruitment and employment of migrant workers, as well as the continuation of opportunities for irregular migrant workers in Thailand to regularize their status. Fully documented Laotian migrants in Thailand enjoyed easier access to services, including healthcare and banking services, and higher wages, emphasizing the importance of providing passports and work permits to all migrants in Thailand and allowing frequent opportunities for registration and regularization of irregular migrants in Thailand, given that the numbers of migrants going through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) continue to represent only a minority of Laotian migrants in Thailand. At the same time, the Governments of Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand should continue constructive dialogue with a view to implementing a streamlined, efficient and cost-effective regular migration channel under the MOU, in order to promote more orderly, regular and safe migration of Laotian migrants to Thailand. The value of the MOU channel was demonstrated by the fact that a greater proportion of migrants migrating through this channel expressed high levels of satisfaction with their living and working conditions than those migrating irregularly. Enhancing the effectiveness of the MOU channel would benefit both Governments by ensuring that a greater proportion of migrants are documented and accountable for, better protected, and more productive in the workplace.

Female migrant workers on average earned lower wages than males – with an average monthly wage of approximately THB 9,400 per month, compared to THB 9,800 per month for males. This finding further emphasizes the need to promote gender equality in Thailand and to encourage employers to treat male and female workers equally, for example, through promoting employer-based equal opportunity initiatives such as entrepreneurial training and skills development for female migrant workers, as well as personnel policies that incorporate diversity and equal opportunity principles.

There was also a surprisingly large range of average wages across different provinces of Thailand (ranging from THB 5,150 per month in Ubon Ratchathani to THB 11,513 per month in Songkhla and THB 11,575 per month in Khon Kaen). This finding highlights the importance of providing migrants with clear information on work and salary prospects in Thailand prior to migrating (and if possible, prior to making the decision to migrate), including potential variances across geographical areas and sectors. This would serve to best equip the Laotian migrant workforce with

the knowledge they need to make informed migration decisions (including on province of destination and sector of work) and reduce their potential vulnerability to exploitative practices.

A significant proportion of workers (28.3% overall) reported receiving less than the minimum wage. Those migrants with no documentation were more likely to receive less than minimum wage, but there were still significant proportions of documented migrants receiving less than the minimum wage, which could have the effect of discouraging migrants from regularizing their status if they do not associate fully documented status (and the costs involved in acquiring this status) with greater benefits or higher wages. Therefore, the Government of Thailand should take concerted steps to ensure that all employers pay their migrant workers at least the minimum wage and ensure strict sanctions for those who do not do so. This is important not only in terms of ensuring a protected and productive workforce, but also given the significant labour shortages that Thailand faces and will continue to face in the future.

Given the significant sector-specific variances revealed by this study, the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic could consider promoting out-migration for work in specific sectors with comparatively better wages and working conditions. For example, migrants in the manufacturing sector reported the highest average monthly wages (THB 10,843 per month), and also the highest levels of documentation (95.7% reported being fully documented). The manufacturing sector could therefore be seen as a comparatively better sector to work in for "low-skilled" migrant workers, and the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic and its partners could therefore work together to ensure the potential migrant workforce are prepared and trained for working in the manufacturing sector, which could give Laotian workers a comparative advantage over other nationalities in competing for the better jobs in Thailand, also given the similarity between Thai and Laotian languages and cultures.

The remittances sent by Laotian migrants in Thailand were substantial – averaging THB 39,980 per migrant, and if aggregated by the estimated total Laotian migrant population in Thailand, would total 331 million USD per year (based on the total estimated number of documented Laotian migrants in Thailand). Males reported remitting more than females (an average of THB 46,068 versus THB 35,883 per year), which is likely explained by the fact that more males than females had families and children to support in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The top five utilizations of remittances were family expenses (on which 82% spent some portion of remittances), savings (37.3%), children's education (24.9%), buying land or properties (22.0%) and house repair (21.9%). The large proportion spent on family expenses and consumption implies that remittances are likely to have a significant poverty reduction effect at the family/household level in Lao People's Democratic Republic, although their impact beyond this, for example on broader economic growth, is less clear. Furthermore, it should be noted that there were significant fees associated with sending remittances through various channels, including bank transfer, typically ranging from 3 to 10 per cent, which in addition to challenges in accessing remittance channels particularly in rural areas, is likely to significantly reduce the value of the remittances reaching households in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The importance of remittances to migrants' households is further emphasized by the finding that the vast majority of migrants (over 90%) viewed remittances as important or very important for their families. The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic should therefore work together with its partners to encourage cheaper and easier access to financial services and remittances among families and communities in the country, particularly among rural areas, as well as educating households on how remittances can be used productively. The Government could also consider providing incentives for migrants sending remittances, or returning migrants, to put their financial capital towards business start-ups or other initiatives that would boost the economic and social development of Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The majority of migrant workers viewed migration as having a positive developmental impact on their communities of origin. Given that employers in Thailand also benefit from hiring migrant workers to meet demand in the labour market, these findings should further reinforce the view that migration is primarily a positive and natural phenomenon with significant potential for developmental impacts. The Governments of Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic should therefore take concerted steps to promote this understanding among a range of stakeholders (including the general public) and therefore reduce the negative stereotyping and discrimination that is often associated with migration and migrants. However, the perspective of respondents towards the overall impact of migration on communities of origin was less overwhelmingly positive than when considering remittances alone, a finding which emphasizes the need to look beyond flows of money in evaluating the impact of migration on poverty reduction and development to include family and societal effects at the household and community levels.

Over 80 per cent of migrants reported gaining valuable skills during their time in Thailand. The largest proportion (35.2%) reported obtaining improved Thai language skills, followed by service skills (29.0%), manufacturing-related skills (25.7%), business skills (22.1%) and mechanical skills (21.2%). The Government of Lao People's Democratic

Republic should therefore put in place mechanisms to recognize the skills gained during the migration experience, and where appropriate – to certify these skills upon return, as well as mechanisms for returning migrant workers to be able to further develop and channel these skills productively in order to contribute towards the social and economic development of the country.

There were however, significant differences between male and female migrants in skills gained. The top three skills that female migrants obtained from working in Thailand were language skills, service skills and business operation while male migrants obtained mechanical skills, language and manufacturing skills. There were also significant proportions of both male and female migrants who reported not obtaining any skills. Furthermore, a significantly smaller proportion of females than males (47.5% versus 62.6%) reported that the skills gained were useful for them in acquiring better jobs, wages, or working conditions. Therefore, it is critical that skills development programming for migrant workers incorporates a clear strategy for outreach and engagement of the female migrant worker population particularly, and a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism to understand what impact skills training has on male and female migrant workers' employment prospects and conditions, and the reasons for the differences. Skills training programmes should also be gender-sensitive, as the study revealed significant differences in the skills that male and female migrant workers find most interesting and appealing.

The findings on the impact of skills development on employment opportunities and conditions suggest a large potential to enhance the impact of skills development of Laotian migrant workers on poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The highest proportion of workers in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors reported that the skills gained helped them to find a better job while in Thailand, although significant proportions of workers across nearly all sectors also reported that the skills they had gained enabled them to find a better job or acquire better wages or working conditions in the same job. Findings reveal that there is scope to implement skills development programming at all stages of the migration cycle, although institutional constraints, particularly in regard to the reluctance of the Government of Thailand and employers to support skills training for migrant workers and facilitate certification, suggest that pre-departure and post-return skills training, rather than in-country training in Thailand, may be most feasible and simple to implement in the immediate term. Skills development programming should build upon the sectors in which better employment opportunities and conditions are most clearly associated with improved skills (including the agricultural and manufacturing sectors) with the aim of equipping migrant workers to become more able to meet the demand for skilled workers in these sectors. Overall, just over half of the respondents expressed no interest in further skills training, with the primary reason being that they did not have enough time. Therefore, for skills training to be successful, it is crucial that employers are engaged in the process so they can see the benefits themselves of having a more skilled and productive migrant workforce, and support the participation of their workforce in skills development programmes.

With regard to return prospects, around half of the Laotian migrant workers interviewed stated that they were not considering returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic, while of those who were considering return, the majority had no timeframe in mind. Around 45 per cent of workers stated that the recent increase in the minimum wage in Lao People's Democratic Republic would affect their decision on whether to return to their country of origin. This finding is highly significant as it indicates that there is considerable potential for the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to attract back large proportions of its migrant workers if the right policies are in place to ensure access to jobs, livelihoods, decent wages, and a reasonable standard of living upon return.

The vast majority of those who expressed their wish to return wanted to do so to be with family and friends and intended to return to their home communities. As such, although the poverty reduction effects at the household level associated with return migration are likely still substantial, the wider and longer-term potential positive impacts of return migration are perhaps less likely to be realized without appropriate support mechanisms to, for example, support and encourage productive use of financial capital, such as investments or entrepreneurial activity, and ensure that returning migrants can further utilize, build on and channel the valuable skills they have gained during the migration experience.

The findings on return prospects have significant implications for both the Governments of Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic. Firstly, it is recommended that the Government of Thailand should recognize the reality that a significant proportion of Laotian migrants do not yet have any intention to return home and ensure that those migrants who wish to stay and continue contributing to Thailand's economy, are given the opportunity to do so in regular status, for example, through some form of adjusted immigration status or permanent residency. Similarly, the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic should take steps to incentivize Laotian migrants in Thailand to return, which could include business start-up grants/support, investment support, job placement services, as well as social reintegration services, and develop a clear strategy for supporting and empowering returning migrant workers to return and use the skills and knowledge gained through their migration experience to contribute to further economic and social development in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, economic growth in Thailand has provided ample employment opportunities for migrant workers. Although Lao People's Democratic Republic has also seen notable growth and development over the same period, the widening disparities between urban and rural areas, and between the two countries, continue to motivate many Laotian migrants, particularly from rural communities where jobs are scarce and low-paid, to migrate to Thailand. The current population of Laotian migrants in Thailand is estimated at approximately 300,000. Despite this figure being smaller in absolute terms when compared to the numbers of other migrant populations in Thailand, it accounts for over half of all migrants from Lao People's Democratic Republic and, through remittances, is responsible for between 25 and 50 per cent of the income of rural households in the country.

The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic has committed to halving national poverty and graduating from Least Developed Country status by 2020. In addition to the projected continuation of economic development and increasing foreign investment in Lao People's Democratic Republic, it was announced that the monthly minimum wage in the country was to increase to from LAK 626,000 (THB 2,505) to LAK 900,000 (THB 3,601.53) in early 2015. As most Laotian migrants in Thailand are engaged in low-skilled, manual sectors, such developments could potentially incentivize migrants to return to their home communities in the future. Furthermore, it remains unclear how recent and potential crackdowns on irregular migration in Thailand will affect the situations and mobility patterns of Laotian migrants. Within such a dynamic context, understanding the situations of Laotian migrants, as well as their motivations and aspirations to potentially return home, will be key to understanding more fully how return migration can contribute to Lao People's Democratic Republic's continued growth and development.

At the same time, the demand for migrant workers in Thailand continues to grow, with labour shortages projected to increase in the coming years. This may, in fact, result in increased numbers of Laotian workers migrating to Thailand to work. In a report released in September 2012, the office of the National Economic and Social Development Board said that labour shortages are expected to worsen in the near future. In 2015, when the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic integration was intensified, there were 39.36 million Thai workers against the 43.26 million required, resulting in a deficit of 3.9 million. Ten years later, the gap is expected to grow to 5.36 million.

In the second half of 2014, more than 213,000 irregular migrant workers from Lao People's Democratic Republic and over 9,000 of their dependents registered with the Thai authorities to receive temporary permits to allow them to stay and work legally in Thailand. In early 2016, the Government of Thailand announced the opportunity for these migrant workers to stay in Thailand for a further two years, in addition to the approximately 76,000 Laotian migrant workers in Thailand in regular status.

These developments may have different impacts on migratory patterns in the short, medium and long term, and further emphasize the need for a comprehensive understanding of motivations and circumstances that influence mobility in both directions and how these movements are linked to development and poverty reduction in both host and origin communities.

However, there remains a limited understanding of the situation of many Laotian migrant workers in Thailand and the linkages between migration and development in Lao People's Democratic Republic, as few systematic assessments of migration between the two countries have been conducted. Of the three main migratory flows into Thailand (from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao People's Democratic Republic), the one from the latter is arguably the least understood. This is despite the large proportion of Laotian workers who migrate to Thailand and the well-documented potential of migration to significantly impact upon socioeconomic conditions in both countries of origin and destination through the exchange of knowledge and skills, transfer of remittances, promoting access to health services and education, movement of persons and capital, and development of rural communities. The large proportion of Laotian migrants in Thailand means the potential impacts for poverty reduction and development of rural communities could be larger, in relative terms, than in Thailand's other neighbouring countries despite those countries having larger absolute numbers of migrants in Thailand. Furthermore, the recent political and economic developments in both Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand – such as the increase in the Lao minimum wage and the recent efforts of the Royal Thai Government to regularize migrant workers – could potentially lead to considerable shifts in migration patterns of Laotian migrants to Thailand. These changes will need to be closely monitored and analysed in order for policymakers and stakeholders to develop timely and sensible policies and strategies to ensure that both countries are able to maximize the developmental benefits of labour migration.

This research study therefore aims to more fully understand the migration patterns and situations of Laotian migrants in Thailand and the effects of migration on poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The

specific objectives of this research include, firstly, understanding the aspirations and concerns of Laotian migrants in Thailand and identifying the dynamics and characteristics of migration from Lao People’s Democratic Republic to Thailand. The study also incorporates a specific focus on the effects of migration on poverty reduction in host and origin communities and aims to identify the various ways in which migration contributes to poverty reduction in Lao People’s Democratic Republic and how such positive impacts can be maximized. The study has been conducted with particular consideration given to the gender dimensions of migration between Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand, including the situations and specific vulnerabilities of Laotian women engaged in domestic work in Thailand. Finally, the assessment also analyses and predicts potential and likely changes in migration between the countries and their possible socioeconomic effects in the future.

Methodology

Data collection and analysis

This study involved a review of relevant literature and both quantitative and qualitative surveys of Laotian migrants and local stakeholders (including government officials, employers and civil society organizations) in nine border and non-border provinces of Thailand that host large numbers of Laotian migrants. The assessment framework, methodology and questionnaires were jointly developed by ARCM and IOM, pre-tested prior to the implementation of the surveys, and translated into Laotian and Thai. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected by staff members of five partner non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who were identified by ARCM as having the capability to reach the migrant communities in the target provinces. ARCM and IOM provided training to the data collection staff on data collection methodologies and use of the quantitative and qualitative surveys prior to initiation of the research. On-site monitoring and quality control of the data collection process was conducted jointly by IOM and ARCM. Completed questionnaires were sent back to ARCM, where the data entry was done. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software.

Population and sample size

While data regarding documented migrant workers are collected and managed by the Government of Thailand, accurate data on the geographic distribution and number of undocumented migrants in Thailand do not exist. The target provinces for data collection (see Map 1) were therefore identified based on two main criteria: 1) provinces with the highest number of migrants registered with the Government of Thailand in 2015 (Bangkok, Samut Sakhon, Nonthaburi and Songkhla); and 2) provinces in which it is estimated there is a high presence of Laotian migrants in North-east Thailand due to cultural, geographical and linguistic similarities, often working in an irregular status on a short-term or seasonal basis. Within this group of provinces, both non-border provinces (Khon Kaen, Udon Thani, Nakhon Ratchasima) and border provinces (Nong Khai and Ubon Ratchathani) were selected for inclusion in the study, despite having lower numbers of registered migrants, to provide a comparative perspective.

The sample sizes of 1,209 for the quantitative survey, and 160 for the qualitative interviews, were distributed among the target provinces as closely as possible based on representational sampling, incorporating estimated numbers of irregular migrants in North-east Thailand. The sampled population in each province was further divided among the major employment sectors, based on statistics from their respective Provincial Employment Offices. To understand gender-based differences, the sampling attempted to have a similar number of males and females in each of the target provinces.

The quantitative survey was designed to collect data representative of the Laotian migrant population in Thailand. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane simplified formula of:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n = sample size

N = population size

e = level of precision

The total number of registered Laotian migrants was 195,618 (135,012 who had registered at One Stop Service Centers, 26,297 who had entered under the MOU and 34,309 who had completed the Nationality Verification process to regularize their status, as of June 2015). According to the formula, with 95 per cent confidence and ± 3 per cent or 0.03 per cent error, a minimum sample size of 1,111 was calculated.

In addition, a further 148 migrant workers in Lao People's Democratic Republic were interviewed following their return to the country. These migrant workers were interviewed about their previous experience living and working in Thailand, as well as their situation upon return. While the quantitative survey tool was based closely on the questionnaire used to interview workers in Thailand and adapted accordingly to fit the post-return context, the

differences in context and surveyors in Lao People's Democratic Republic (who did not undergo the training of surveyors) mean that comparisons between findings gathered among Laotian migrants in Thailand and those gathered among returned migrants in Lao People's Democratic Republic should be drawn with caution. Furthermore, the vast majority of the returning migrants interviewed were from Vientiane province, again making broader conclusions difficult to draw.

Limitations of the study

It is highly likely that the proportions of documented and undocumented Laotian migrant workers varied considerably from one province to another. IOM attempted to balance this disparity by employing representational sampling based both on the official government statistics on documented migrants, and estimated numbers of irregular migrant workers in provinces with lower rates of registration/documentation. However, given the challenges in making accurate estimates of numbers of irregular migrants, it is probable that the sample sizes captured through this research study are not a wholly accurate representation of the numbers of Laotian migrants in Thailand.

Furthermore, gaining access to and obtaining the consent of undocumented migrants was generally more difficult than doing so with documented migrants, particularly as a result of the strict measures taken by the Thai Government to reduce irregular migration during the period of the research and reluctance of employers to allow access to irregular migrants. As a result, the voices of irregular migrants are less represented in this assessment than those of regular migrants.

Though sampling in each province aimed to capture proportionate numbers of male and female respondents and proportionate numbers of interviewees engaged in the key employment sectors of that province (as indicated in Ministry of Labour statistics), it was not possible to strictly implement the desired sample distribution due to accessibility issues.

Another study limitation arose from the fact that, owing to the geographic disparity of the target provinces, separate survey teams had to be formed in each target province. As a result, the data collection processes were not as consistent as if one survey team had conducted the survey in all provinces. The project team tried to overcome this limitation by gathering all interviewers in Bangkok for survey training, and by making field visits and conducting quality control.

Literature review: Theoretical perspectives on migration and development in Lao People's Democratic Republic

In the discourse on migration and development, research is heavily focused on remittances as the primary factor for analysis, as a tangible direct effect of migration upon social and economic development in countries of origin, therefore making it possible to disaggregate its effects on poverty reduction (Murrugarra, Larrison and Sasin, 2010), growth and income distribution (Chami, Fullenkamp and Jahjah, 2003; Ratha, 2003) or inequality (Taylor, 1999). Jongwanich differentiates, when analysing the economic effects of migration, between economic growth and poverty reduction, pointing out that development studies have increasingly focused on the latter in recent times as the “overarching goal of economic development” (Jongwanich, 2007).

Migration must nonetheless be conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon, carrying costs and benefits in both the economic and social spheres, in both countries of origin and destination (Ratha, Mohapatra and Scheja, 2011). Migration research has gradually shifted, in the last decades, towards a holistic approach in which migration determinants, capabilities and social dynamics all contribute to a deeper understanding of the effects of labour mobility upon development. Such a shift was reflective of the change in the way that social sciences – and in turn migration studies – have conceived human development, clearly influencing empirical analysis. It is thus important to disentangle the theoretical debate on migration and development in order to contextualize and cast further light on the interpretation of the empirical data which will follow.

Particularly, here the focus is on Hein de Haas's work, which summarizes the conceptual framework on the migration and development nexus along a historical perspective (De Haas, 2007). With reference to the wider debate between developmental “optimists” and historical structural “pessimists”, the author explains how the different conceptualizations of the migration-development nexus cannot be isolated from the broader economic paradigms they are embedded in. In this respect, optimists conceived migration as a process boosting economic development in labour-sending countries through the transfer of remittances, skills and knowledge from the Global North to the Global South in the wave of the 1950s–1960s boom. On the other hand, pessimists are influenced by the economic downturn following the 1970s crisis, and viewed labour movements as reinforcing global economic disparities through a brawn/brain drain mechanism from South to North, eventually generating passive, remittance-dependent communities in countries of origin (De Haas 2007:5). One substantial point of contention between the two trends concerns the role of remittances, which optimists saw as a catalyst for investments and is nowadays reflected in the paradigm of neoliberal financial institutions such as the World Bank (Ratha, 2003; Sirkeci, Cohen and Ratha, 2012). Pessimists, on the other hand, conceive it as a mere consumption/debt repayment instrument, likely to generate inflation and worsen economic conditions (Lipton, 1980; Russell, 1992).

Eventually in the late 1970s a new theory came to surface, more “pluralist” in nature, which attempted to overcome the deterministic view of the other two. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) moved away from an individualistic level of analysis (i.e. individual migrants who are active or passive objects of the dominant economic paradigm) and conceived migration as a deliberate and concerted decision taken at the household level. Theorized by Stark and Bloom, NELM conceives migration as determined by a sense of relative deprivation rather than absolute poverty, and driven by the intention to insure the household against various capital and market risks – particularly in rural areas – through a diversification and increase in income (Stark and Bloom, 1985). As noted by several authors, the theory sharply changed the theoretical and empirical interpretation of remittance behavior and use, as these must be necessary analysed as a collective (household) rather than an individual strategy (De Haas, 2010; Massey et al., 1993; Taylor, 1999). Taylor particularly notes how remittances have both direct (through increased income) and indirect (by stimulating production in migrant-sending areas) development effects on countries of origin, and may have beneficial multiplier effects for the sending community as a whole, even when they are only used for consumption purposes.

The emergence of NELM represented a turning point in the studies on migration and development, as in de Haas's view, it bridges Sen's capability approach and migration theory (De Haas, 2007). In his seminal book, Sen defines human development as the expansion of people's enjoyment of freedoms; and as such development indicators go well beyond income to include material and non-material elements such as gender and income inequality, skills, poverty levels and access to services (Sen, 1999) –hence the necessity of assessing various welfare indicators in addition to economic ones. The idea of human agency thus becomes central to the migration process, as migrants actively pursue a strategy to diversify and improve livelihoods, which must necessarily be measured by a variety of

indicators beyond income. Thus, migrants may migrate to insure against failing markets or state policies, as well as a lack of social security or welfare benefits.

Nonetheless, development indicators are influenced not only by the agent (migrant) but also by the overall structure (socioeconomic context of the household, its community and area of origin) the migrant is embedded in. While remittances may represent a source for investments in resource-scarce areas (Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz, 2005), their development potential may be hindered by underdeveloped services and infrastructure (Taylor, 1999).

Such conceptual frameworks have implications at the empirical level, particularly in assessing specific indicators: poverty, economic growth, inequality and use of remittances (whether for investments or consumption). Theoretical developments contributed to the emergence of a brighter view of the remittances-development nexus, looking beyond purely economic indicators. Extensive literature exists on the linkages between migration and poverty reduction, looking at both internal and international migration (De Haan and Yaqub, 2009; Deshingkar, 2010), the outcomes on micro, meso and macro-levels (Newland, 2003; Siddiqui, 2012), and even the effects for workers of specific economic sectors (Cole, Wong and Brockhaus, 2015; Deshingkar, Zeitlyn and Holtom, 2014).

Jongwanich analysed the impacts of remittances on both economic growth and poverty reduction in developing countries in the Asia Pacific region during the decade 2003–2013 (Jongwanich, 2007). She found that while remittances had positive but marginal, indirect impacts on economic growth (mainly through investment and capital channels) they had direct, significant impacts on poverty reduction. The author estimated, analysing panel data that an increase of 10 per cent in remittances led to a poverty incidence of 2.8 per cent, without taking into account other positive, indirect impacts.

Chappell et al. take a holistic approach, showing how migration's impacts on development, either positive or negative, must necessarily include both qualitative and quantitative indicators (Chappell et al., 2010). Migrants' own perspectives and beliefs, retrospective questions and econometric analyses all come together to explain the impacts of migration in respect to health, education, and income, and on both individuals and households. All these indicators as a whole contribute to explain the impact of migration on development, and are likely to generate the most comprehensive policy recommendations aimed at fostering the benefits of migration.

Empirical studies on Laotian migration to Thailand

Empirical research on the remittance behaviour of Laotian migrants in Thailand, as well as on the linkages between migration and poverty reduction, is scarce. Furthermore, as reported by Hugo, the importance of remittances in development in the Asian region has been neglected for a long time, primarily because transfers occur mainly through informal channels (Hugo, 2005). Given substantial improvements in the techniques for estimating remittance flows (including the possibility to obtain country-disaggregated data), paired with a steady upgrade of banking systems, the previous decade has seen growing interest in the developmental impacts of remittances in the region.

A 2009 study on migration and remittances in South-East Asia, sampling migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic, casts some light on the remittance behaviour of Laotian migrants, although drawing on a limited sample (Jampaklay and Kittisuksathi, 2009). Data show that Laotian migrants are active remitters, with 95 per cent reporting to send remittances, with an annual range of USD 20–3,000. Also, differences were found across genders, as women tend to send higher amounts compared to men, even at lower levels of income. The research highlights that the transfers were primarily used for consumption, while only a small portion of the sampled population used remittances for income-generating activities. Laotian migrants reported higher incomes prior to migration in comparison to the other nationalities; nonetheless, the median household income grew for all the surveyed groups, confirming the pivotal role remittances play in driving migration patterns. Finally, the research also sheds light on the remittance channels used and migrants' preferences, describing Laotian migrants as poorly informed about the available options and mainly using the services of informal brokers.

A recent study drafted for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation on remittances to Lao People's Democratic Republic, primarily used World Bank data to estimate the amount of migrant transfers (both cash and in-kind), found that Thailand steadily remains the top source country of annual remittances to Lao People's Democratic Republic, followed by the United States (Southichack, 2014). Regarding Thailand as a source country, World Bank data on remittances are reported to be extremely low when compared to four different survey findings. Combining the five data sets through the average of averages method, the author estimates a likely "true" range of annual remittances to be between USD 90.3 million and USD 139.8 million in 2012, accounting for 48–59 per cent of global remittances to Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2013. Southichack also analyses the impact of cash

transfers on poverty levels at the microlevel, pointing out that, as not all the migrants surveyed came from poor households, the actual impact on poverty reduction could not be clearly assessed. The author estimates that 50-75 per cent of remittances were going directly to poor households in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) provides a summary of studies on remittances in the Asia-Pacific region (IFAD, 2013). Although being focused broadly on the region, the paper reports data from Orozco (2013, cited in IFAD, 2013), who specifically looks at the impact of remittances from Thailand on rural poor households. Comparing Laotian migrants in Thailand to those in developed countries, the author explains that the impact of remittances on poverty reduction is higher for the first group, as its members generally come from rural areas. This finding seems also to confirm that found by other research and general theories of migration, which affirm that, generally, poorer migrants tend to move to closer, less advantageous destinations (Murrugarra, Larrison and Sasin, 2010).

Along the same lines, Manivong et al. investigate whether migration to Thailand, conceived as a livelihood strategy among others, is challenging the Laotian Government's strategy of pursuing market-oriented rice farming production as a path for development (Manivong, Cramb and Newby, 2012). The authors highlight how the impacts of migration depart from this objective, in that it generates severe labour shortages as a result of out-migration of young household members. On the other hand, migration ensures a steady flow of financial transfers through remittances, contributing 7 per cent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2008 (MPI and UNDP, 2009). Drawing on a household survey in rural Champasak province, where a wide range of different livelihood strategies are practiced, the research shows that migration allows households greater diversity in sources of income and therefore insurance against market risks. Specifically, remittances contribute to increased income for consumption needs for households with a production deficit, while enhancing farming-related investments among those with production surpluses.

Southiseng and Walsh interestingly examined how remittances are shaping women's role in society (Southiseng and Walsh, 2011); however, it must be noted that the inferential analysis is limited by the small sample size – 40 female respondents, mainly receivers of remittances – as the research was characterized by a qualitative approach. Furthermore, most of the respondents did not report on their income earned at the time of the research, as the question was deemed to be extremely sensitive. In line with other research, findings show that most of the remittances were primarily used for consumption, from buying food and household appliances to paying for utilities. Smaller amounts were also used for business-related and community activities, while most of the respondents agreed that remittances improved their quality of life, as women are able to take on greater responsibilities – for instance managing remitted money and/or starting businesses – generating positive outcomes on their communities as well.

Cole et al. offer a review of theoretical and empirical studies assessing the impacts of labour migration and remittances on the management and use of forests and land in South-East Asia (Cole, Wong and Brockhaus, 2015). The paper represents a unique attempt to bridge literature concerning land-use, livelihoods and migration, strongly drawing on NELM and livelihood theories. Moving from the recognition of the importance of the forestry-related economy for rural areas in the region, the paper highlights how household (e.g. education and network) and contextual factors contribute to shape households' migration strategies, particularly concerning expected returns on investment and labour supply for land-related activities.

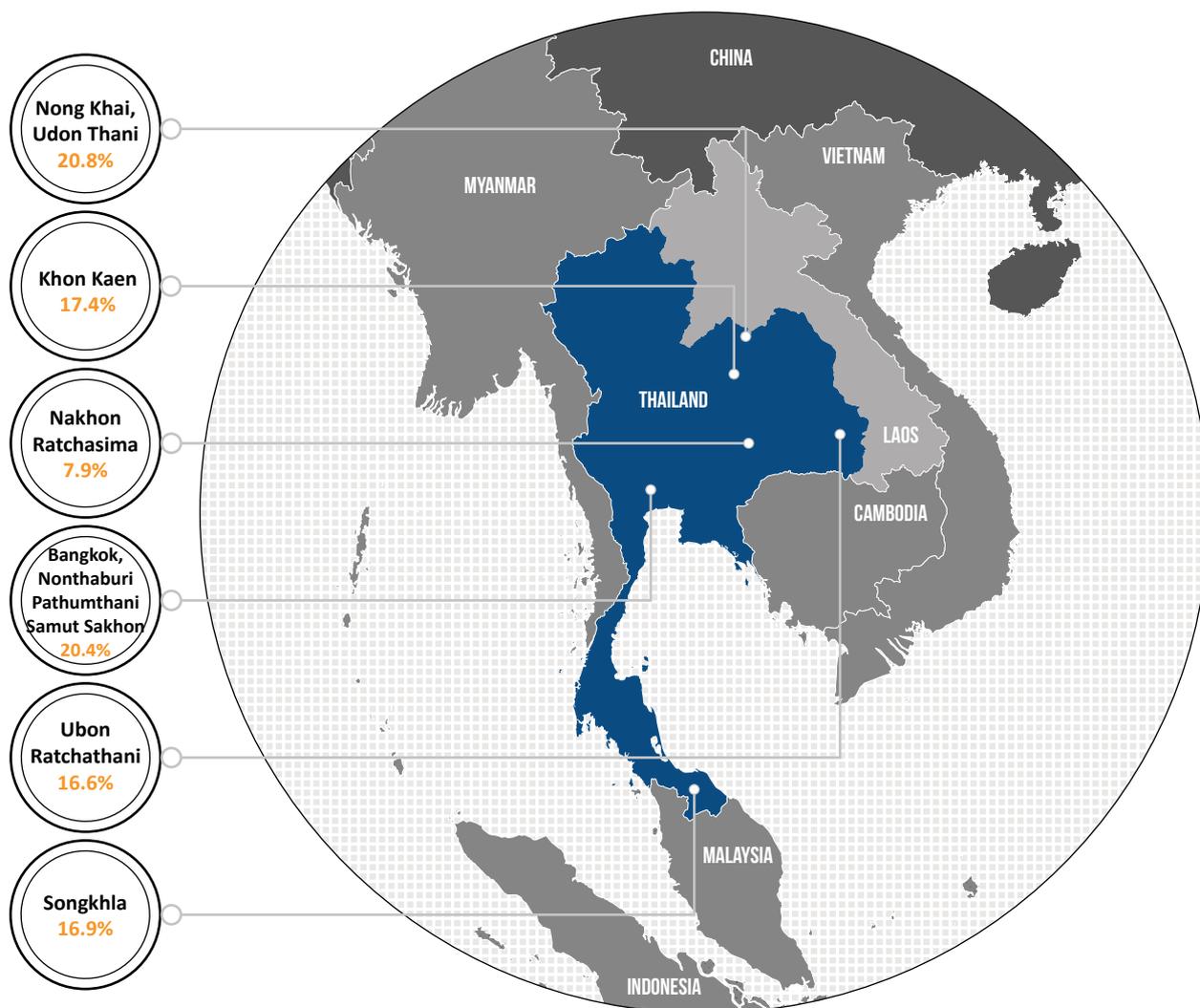
This brief review of the available literature assessing the linkages between migration and poverty reduction in the Asia Pacific region, particularly in regard to migration between Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic, highlights the various gaps in data that exist in trying to understand more fully the linkages between migration and different dimensions of socioeconomic development and most specifically, poverty reduction.

For example, while the impact of remittances upon poverty levels has been comparatively well-studied, the impact of other potential benefits of migration, such as the circulation of knowledge and skills or levels of entrepreneurial activity among returning migrants, are much less well researched and understood. This study therefore aims to fill some of these gaps in the available data on linkages between migration and development and poverty reduction, by assessing Laotian migrants experiences and aspirations with regard to migration, their future migration plans including post-return, the linkages they maintain with their home communities and families whilst in Thailand, and the types of skills they gain while in Thailand, while also aiming to further complement and build on the evidence base on remittances and poverty reduction. Furthermore, the study aims to incorporate a strong gender dimension, looking at the different migration experiences of both male and female migrants, and how these experiences affect poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Chapter 1 – Characteristics of the surveyed migrants

The total sample of 1,209 Laotian workers was spread across Nong Khai, Udon Thani (20.8%), Khon Kaen (17.4%), Ubon Ratchathani (16.6%) and Nakhon Ratchasima (7.9%) in North-east Thailand; Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani and Samut Sakhon (20.4%) in the central area; and Songkhla (16.9%) in Southern Thailand (Map 1).

Map 1: Target provinces of data collection



The proportion and number of respondents in each province and top employment sectors are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of respondents in each province and top employment sectors

Province	Number of Respondents	Percentage of total sample	Top employment sectors of the surveyed Laotian migrants
Bangkok and vicinity (Samut Prakan, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Chonburi, Nakhon Pathom)	120	10%	Manufacturing (20.2%); Food & beverage sales (15.1%); Domestic work (11.8%); Garment production and Sales (11.8%)
Samut Sakhon	127	10.5%	Food & beverage sales (25.4%); Labour work (23.8%); Domestic work (9.5%); Services (9.5%)
Khon Kaen	212	17.4%	Manufacturing (97.6%); Garment production and sales (1%)
Nakhon Ratchasima	95	7.9%	Manufacturing (79.9%); Agriculture & husbandry (15.8%); Fishery-related (4.2%)
Nong Khai and Udon Thani	252	20.8%	Food & beverage sales (45.2%); Services (14%); Wholesale and retail trade (13.6%)
Songkhla	202	16.9%	Fishery related (25.4%); Services (15.4%); Manufacturing (14.4%)
Ubon Ratchathani	201	16.6%	Labour work (40.6%); Food and beverage sales (24.9%); Services (15.7%)
Total	1,209	100%	

In addition to the quantitative survey of 1,209 Laotian migrants, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with various groups of informants – Laotian migrants, employers, civil society representatives and government officers – totaling 160 persons. The qualitative interviews aimed to provide more information on the situation of Laotian migrants, the challenges they face while working in Thailand, their contribution to poverty reduction in communities of origin, skills obtained while working in Thailand, future needs and opportunities for further skills training.

The informants can be classified as follows:

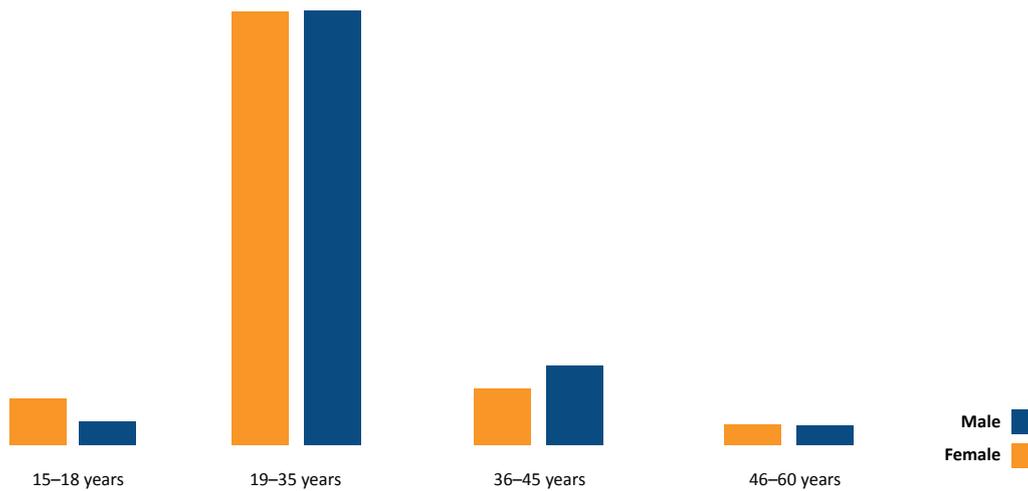
Informants	Numbers of interviewees	Provinces	Working sectors
Laotian migrants	88	Bangkok, Pathum Thani, Samut Sakhon, Songkhla, Khon Kaen, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nong Khai, Ubon Ratchathani	General labourer, retail trade, manufacturing, food processing, fishery related, construction, garment production, domestic work, traditional massage, agriculture
Employers	48	Bangkok, Pathum Thani, Samut Sakhon, Songkhla, Khon Kaen, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nong Khai, Ubon Ratchathani	Garment factories, food processing company, construction, food and beverage shop, karaoke, small traders, hair dressing, hotel manager, resort owner, small steel factories services (9.5%)
Civil society	12	Bangkok, Samut Sakhon, Songkhla, Khon Kaen, Nong Khai, Ubon Ratchathani	NGOs (Health, environment, women's group, fisheries, development), community leaders, civil groups
Government officers	12	Bangkok, Samut Sakhon, Songkhla, Khon Kaen, Nong Khai, Ubon Ratchathani	Local administration offices, provincial offices, immigration offices
Total	160		

Sampling profile

Gender, age and religion

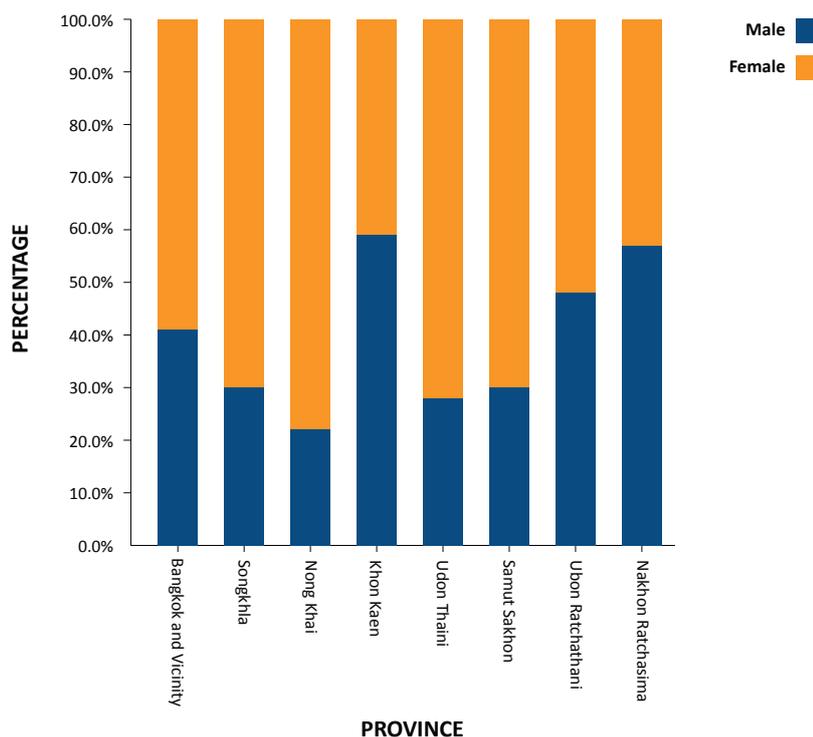
The 1,209 respondents comprised 59.7 per cent female and 40.3 per cent male. 77.9 per cent of female migrants and 78 per cent of male migrants were between the ages of 19–35 years; 10.1 per cent of female and 14.2 per cent of male migrants were aged between 36 and 45 years; 8.3 per cent of female and 4.3 per cent of male migrants were aged between 15 and 18 years; and 3.7 per cent of female and 3.5 per cent of male migrants were aged between 46 and 60 years, as shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Age group and gender of respondents



As shown in Figure 2, there was a higher proportion of female Laotian migrants in Bangkok and Pathum Thani (59:41, 70:49); Songkhla (138:63); Nong Khai/Udon Thani (192:58); Samut Sakhon (86:40); and Ubon Ratchathani (101:96), whilst there was a higher proportion of male Laotian migrants in Khon Kaen (123:84) and Nakhon Ratchasima (55:40).

Figure 2: Proportions of male and female migrants in each province of Thailand



The majority of young female migrants (15–18 years of age) were located in Ubon Ratchathani (14.3%); Samut Sakhon (11.5%); Songkhla (10.6%); Bangkok (10%); and Udon Thani (9.1%), with smaller numbers in Nong Khai (5.8%); and Nakhon Ratchasima (2.5%). Young male migrants were primarily located in Bangkok (12%); Nakhon Ratchasima (7.3%); Ubon Ratchathani (6.3%); Nong Khai (2%); Khon Kaen (1.6%); and Samut Sakhon (2.5%).

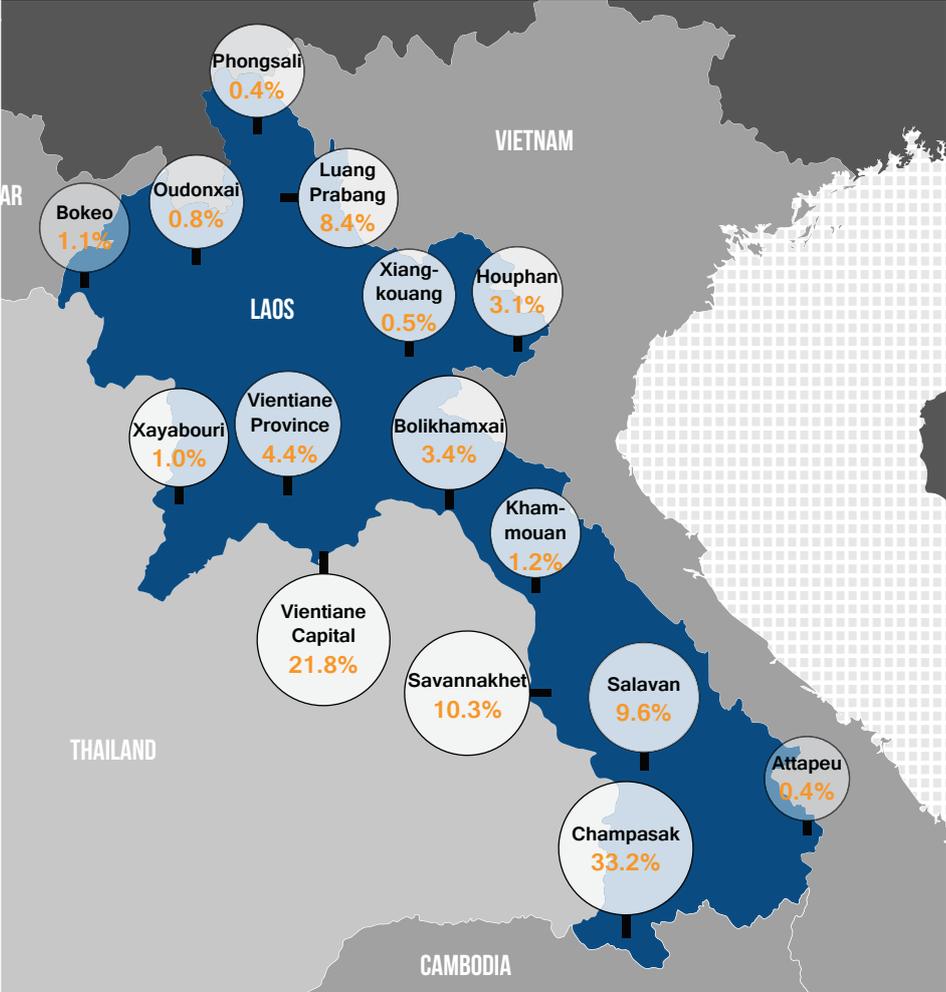
The vast majority of respondents were Buddhist (94.1%); 1.7 per cent were Christian; 3.6 per cent had another religion; and 0.6 per cent did not specify their religion.

Ethnicity and place of origin

The significant majority of the sample were Lao Loum (86.5%), with smaller numbers of Lao Terng (10.9%) and Lao Soong (Highland) (2.2%), while 0.4% did not specify their ethnicity.

Almost three quarters of the respondents came from areas bordering Thailand (72%), with the highest proportion of respondents coming from Champasak (33.2%), Vientiane (21.8%), and Savannakhet (10.3%), as shown in Map 2 below. Over two-thirds of respondents (71%) came from rural areas.

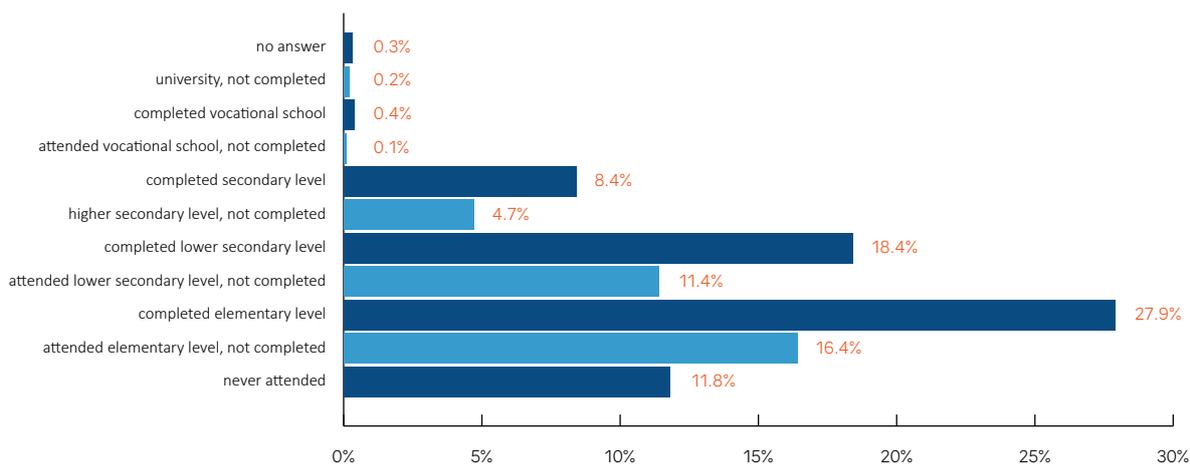
Map 2: Places of origin in Lao People’s Democratic Republic



Educational background

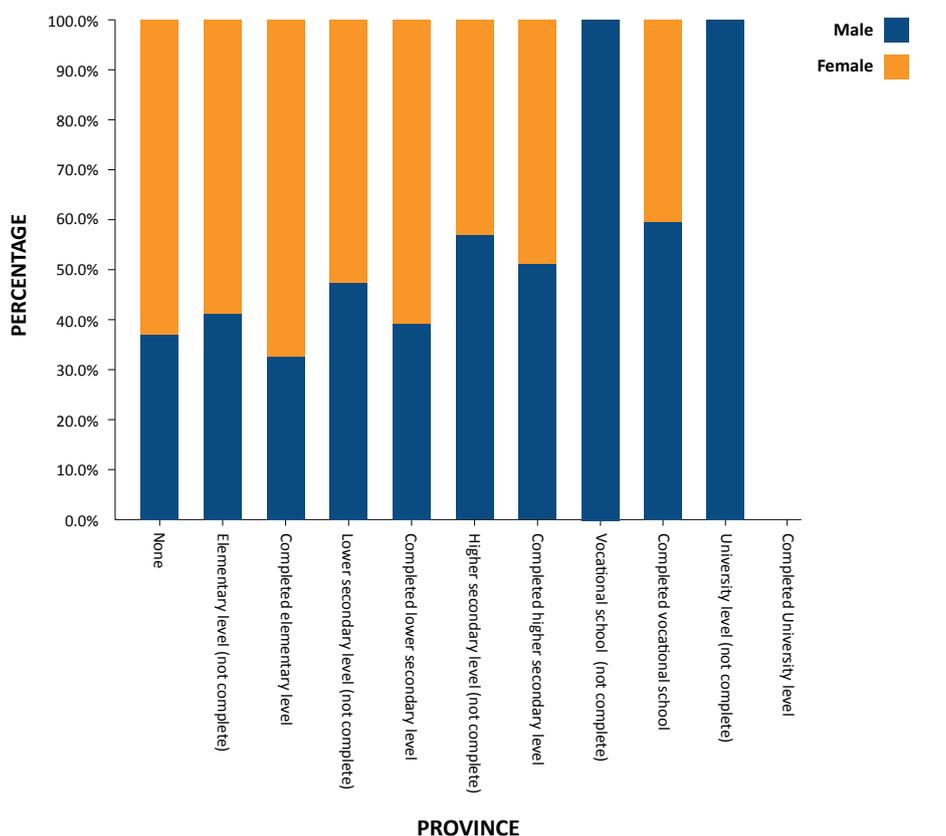
Figure 3 shows the majority of respondents (88.9%) had some form of education. Twenty-eight per cent completed elementary level education; 16.4 per cent attended, but did not complete elementary level education; 11.4 per cent attended but did not complete lower secondary level education; 18.4 per cent completed lower secondary level education; 4.7 per cent attended higher secondary level education; and 8.5 per cent completed higher secondary level education. Very small percentages of migrants had higher education levels, and none of the migrants had completed university education.

Figure 3: Educational background



In terms of education levels among male and female migrants, male migrants reported having a higher overall education level. Of those migrants with no education at all, a far larger proportion were female (63.6%) than male (36.4%), and the ratio of female–male migrants generally decreased as education levels increased (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Education levels by gender



Marital status, family members and children

Almost half of the respondents were single (48.2%); while a similar proportion (47.2%) were married; 3.7 per cent were divorced; and 0.9 per cent were widowed. Of those respondents that were married, 78.3 per cent of spouses were Laotian; 21 per cent were Thai; and 0.4 per cent were of other nationalities. The significant majority of married couples lived together in Thailand (82.9%); while 2.7 per cent lived separately in Thailand; 13.9 per cent lived in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; and 0.4 per cent lived in another country.

The majority of married respondents had children under 15 years old (72.7%); of these, 83 per cent had 1–2 children, and 17 per cent had 3–6 children. Over half of them had their children in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (58.2%); 34.1 per cent brought their children to live together in Thailand; 2.4 per cent had children living elsewhere in Thailand; and 5.0 per cent had some children living in Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

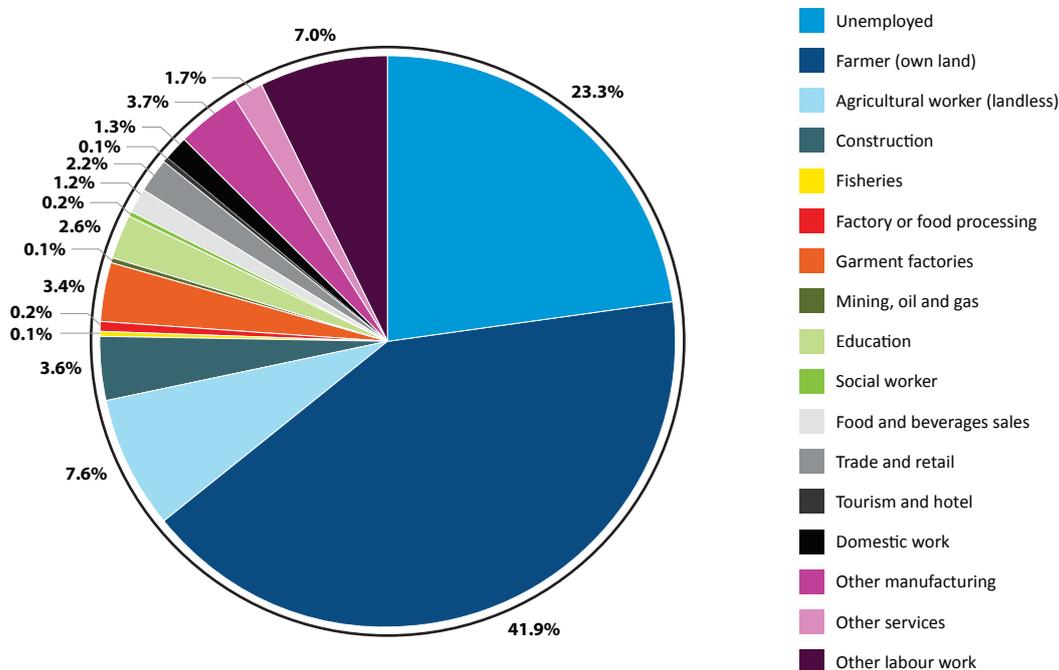
Family members

As regards family size, the majority of respondents (55.2%) had families with 4–6 members, followed by 6–8 family members (32.1%), with smaller numbers having 9–10 family members (6.2%) and over 10 family members (6.5%).

Occupations, properties, income and living conditions prior to migrating to Thailand

Prior to migrating to Thailand, 23.3 per cent of respondents were unemployed; 41.9 per cent were farmers on their own land; 7.6 per cent were employed in agriculture; 7.0 per cent worked as general labourers; 3.7 per cent worked in manufacturing; 3.6 per cent worked in construction; 3.4 per cent worked in garment factories; 2.6 per cent worked in the education sector; 2.2 per cent worked in trading and retail; 1.7 per cent worked in the service sector; 1.3 per cent worked in the domestic sector; and 1.2 per cent worked in food and beverage sales. Smaller numbers worked in food processing factories, social work, fisheries, tourism and hotels, and mining, oil and gas (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Previous occupations



A higher proportion of females than males were unemployed prior to migrating to Thailand (27.9% versus 16.4%), while a significantly higher proportion of males than females were farmers on their own land (47.6% versus 37.8%). Smaller proportions of both male and female migrants were employed in other occupations, with landless farmers (7.7%); general labourers (7.5%); garment factories (4.3%) and trade and retail (3.2%) the next most common occupations for females, and landless farming (7.6%), construction (6.8%), general labour work (6.2%) and manufacturing (5.3%) the next most common among males. The higher proportion of unemployed among females

is a cause for concern with regard to promoting access to livelihoods in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, while also giving an insight into the potential motivating factors for migration among male and female Laotian migrants, bearing in mind that this study revealed a considerably higher proportion of female Laotian migrant workers than males.

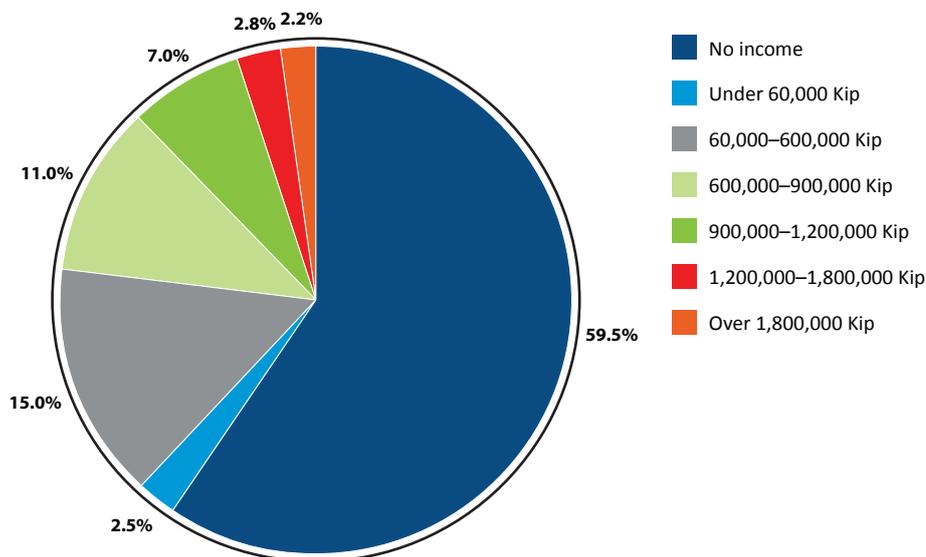
Property

Before migrating to Thailand, over half of the respondents (59.2%) owned land, of which 29.6 per cent owned less than 6 Rai (1 Hecta); 18.1 per cent owned 6 Rai; 7.9 per cent owned between 11–20 Rai; and 3.6 per cent had more than 20 Rai. In addition to land, 69.1 per cent had their own businesses; 4.8 per cent had lived in their own or family houses, and 0.1 per cent had their own shop.

Income

Before migrating to Thailand, over half of the respondents (59.5%) reported not earning any income. 2.5 per cent earned less than 60,000 Kip per month; 15.0 per cent earned between 60,000 and 600,000 Kip per month; 11.0 per cent earned between 600,000 Kip and 900,000 Kip; 7.0 per cent earned 900,000–1,200,000 Kip; 2.8 per cent earned 1,200,000–1,800,000 Kip; and 2.2 per cent earned more than 1,800,000 Kip per month, as show in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Previous income per month



Over half of the respondents from Savannakhet (70.5%); Oudomxai (70%); Champasak (66.7%); Xaisomboun (66.7%); Blikhamxai (63.4%); Phongsali (60%); Salavan (58%); Vientiane province (56.6%); Vientiane Capital (55.8%); Luang Prabang (53.5%); and Khammouan (50%) had no income generation prior to migrating to Thailand (Figure 7). Female migrants also constituted an economically vulnerable group, with almost two thirds of female migrants not having had any income generation prior to their departure (62%), and over 80 per cent earning less than 600,000 Kip per month (Figure 8). In regard to ethnicity, there were only minimal differences across ethnic groups. The Laos Soong ethnic group had a higher proportion of migrants earning between 60,000 and 600,000 Lao kip (19.6%), and a lower proportion of migrants earning no income (51.9%), although the Laos and Laos Terng ethnic groups had higher proportions of migrants earning over 600,000 kip per month (23.5% and 21.5% respectively, as compared to 14.7% of Laos Soong).

Figure 7: Monthly income in provinces of origin prior to migrating to Thailand

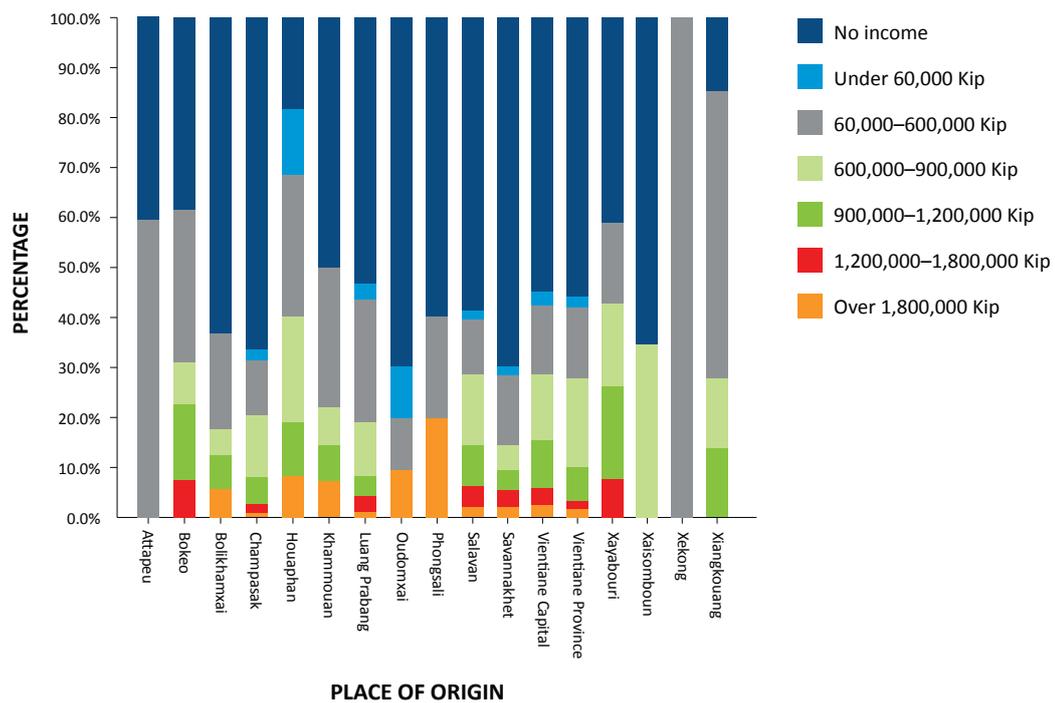
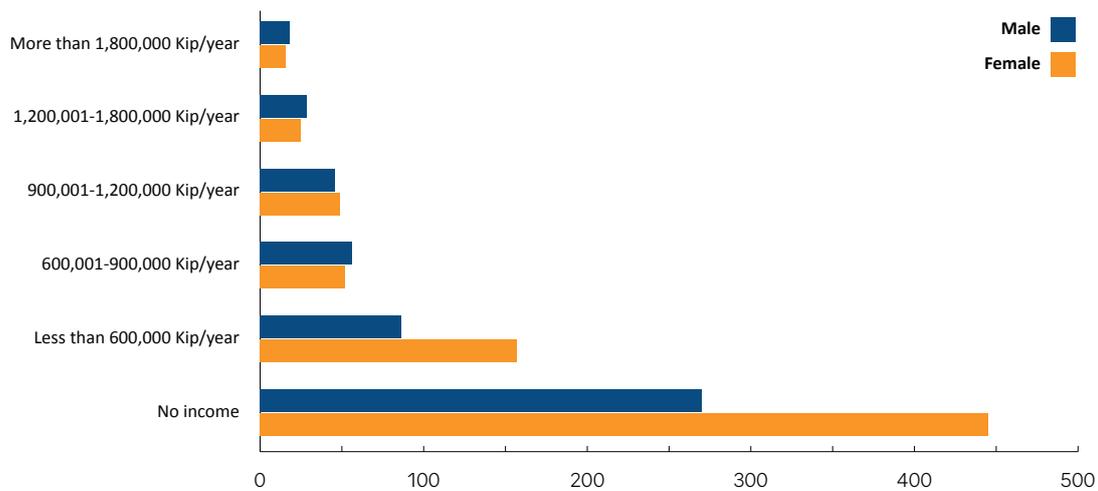


Figure 8: Income of female and male migrants prior to migrating to Thailand



Living conditions

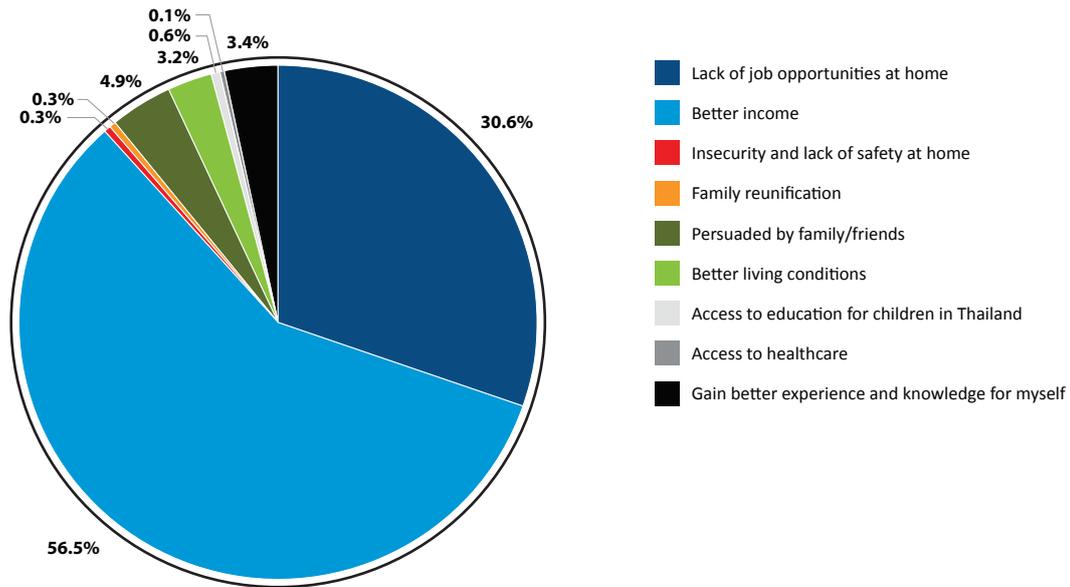
Almost one third of the respondents (30.4%) rated their living conditions in Lao People’s Democratic Republic prior to migration as good; 2.4 per cent rated them very good; 44.7 per cent rated them adequate; 17 per cent rated them very bad; 5.4 per cent rated them bad; and 0.2 per cent did not answer.

Migration history

Reasons to migrate

The economic situation constituted the primary reason given by respondents for migration to Thailand, with 56.5 per cent seeking better income, and 30.6 per cent lacking employment opportunities in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. This was followed by social reasons: 4.9 per cent were persuaded by families or friends; 3.4 per cent wished to gain new experience and knowledge; 3.2 per cent sought better living conditions; 0.7 per cent sought better social services (education for children, healthcare, etc.); 0.3 per cent sought family reunion; and 0.3 per cent cited insecurity or an unsafe situation at home as shown in Figure 9 below.

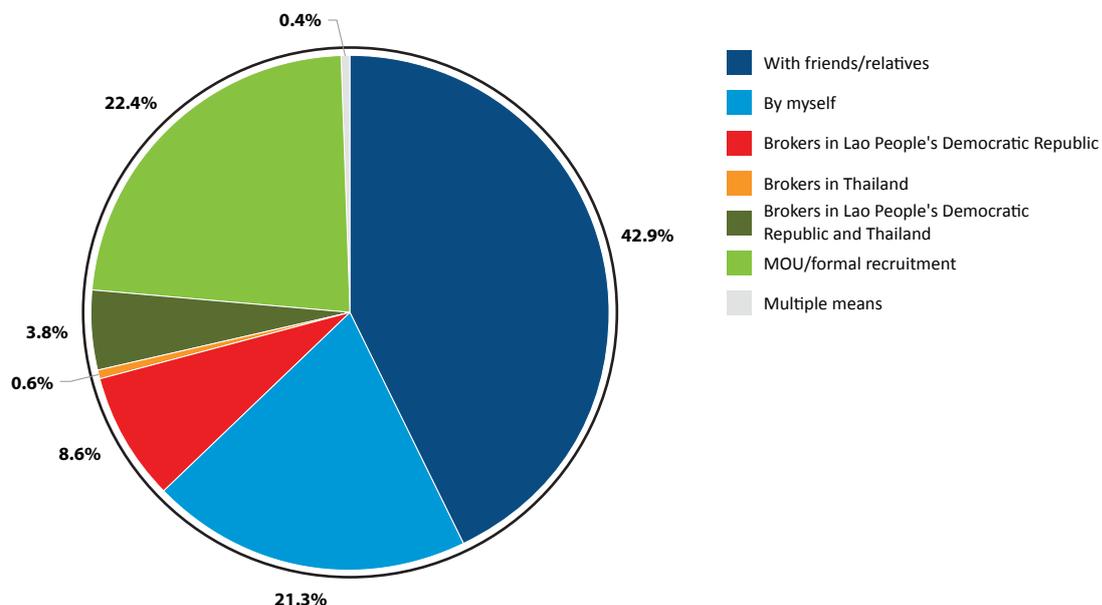
Figure 9: Reasons to migrate to Thailand



Migration routes, entry points and assistance

Two thirds of the respondents had migrated to Thailand for the first time (68.2%), whilst the remaining respondents had migrated to Thailand before. Figure 10 shows that almost half migrated with friends or relatives (42.9%); 21.3 per cent migrated on their own; 8.6 per cent migrated with assistance from brokers in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; 3.8 per cent were assisted by brokers in Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand; 0.6 per cent were assisted by brokers in Thailand; and 22.4 per cent came under the MOU scheme on Employment Cooperation between Thailand and Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The remainder reported using multiple methods for migration. It should be highlighted that the proportion who reported migrating with the assistance of brokers is relatively low at 13.0 per cent, a finding that is likely partially explained by the strong cultural and linguistic linkages and family/social connections between Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Thailand (particularly the North-east of Thailand), making reliance on intermediaries less necessary in the case of Laotian migrants than for other nationalities.

Figure 10: Migration assistance

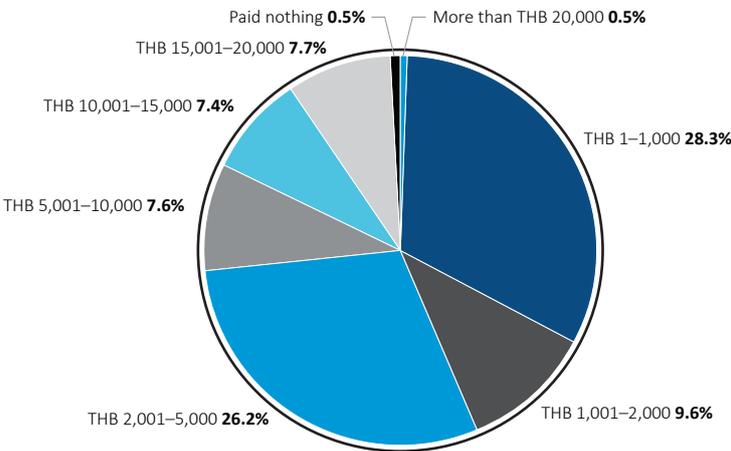


The key entry points used by the respondents to enter Thailand were Champasak-Chong Mek (Ubon Ratchathani), utilized by 35.1 per cent of the respondents; Hatsaifong-Nong Khai, utilized by 14.2 per cent; the Friendship Bridge (Vientiane-Nong Khai), utilized by 11 per cent; Vientiane-Ponepisal, utilized by 8.5 per cent; Savannakhet-Mukdaharn, utilized by 8.3 per cent; and Saravan-Ubon Ratchathani, utilized by 3.6 per cent.

Expenses

To migrate, respondents paid expenses of up to THB 30,000. Around half paid over THB 2,000, with just over 8 per cent paying over THB 15,000 to migrate. 12.8 per cent did not respond (see Figure 11 below). Of those who paid over THB 5,000 to migrate, the majority had entered Thailand through the MOU (60.3%) and a further 15.7 per cent of migrants in this category reported using the services of brokers in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Of those who paid over THB 5,000, they main cost was for passports, with 83.7 per cent who reported paying this amount paying for passports, while only 35 per cent reported paying for brokers, 35.8 per cent for transportation, and 1.8 per cent reported paying for other costs. Of those who entered through the MOU, 94.0 per cent paid expenses of over THB 5,000. There was also a higher percentage of those who had entered through the MOU that reported still being in debt while in Thailand (36.4%) than of those who had entered through other means. Overall however, 72.5 per cent of respondents had completely paid off all debt associated with their migration to Thailand.

Figure 11: Expenses for migrating to Thailand



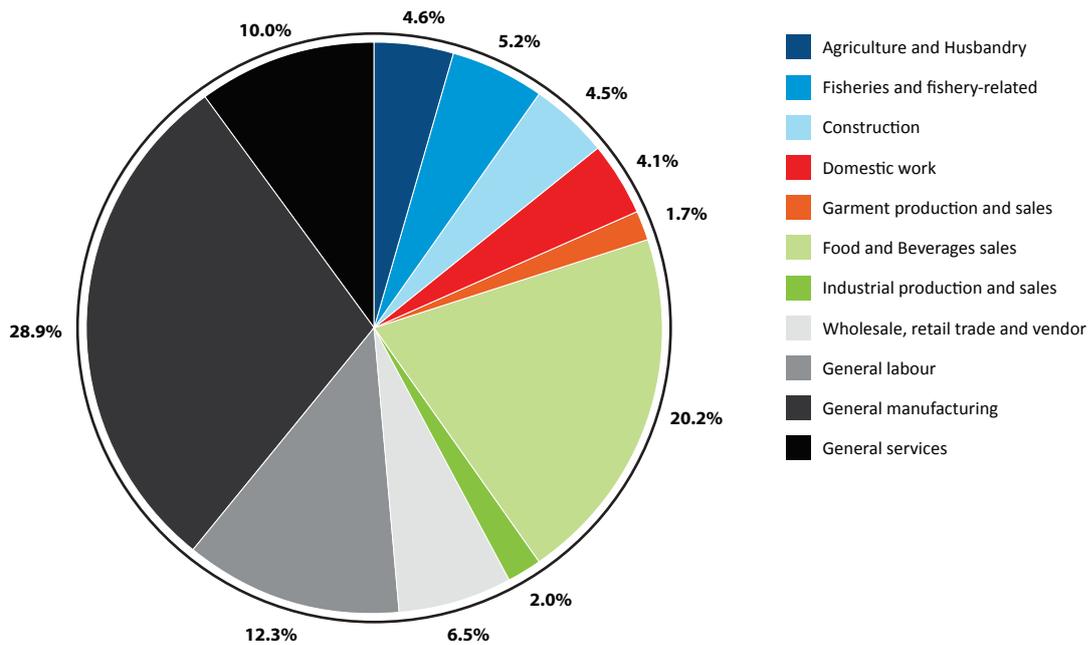
Savings were utilized by 42.5 per cent of respondents to pay for the costs of migration, while just over 10 per cent were supported by families. Other means of attaining the required funds included the selling of properties (0.4%), borrowing money from relatives or friends (10.1%); borrowing from a private lender (2.4%), or having expenses paid by a broker (10.1%) or employer (11.4%). The expense of migrating primarily related to the cost of travel (64.4%); passports (59.6%); broker fees (14.5%); bribes (0.5%); and other expenses (5%). Although the proportion of migrants paying broker fees was comparatively low, interestingly of those who did report having paid these fees, the largest proportion (42.9%) had come through the MOU. Combined with the findings above, this indicates that the MOU channel remains comparatively more expensive for migrants, and therefore likely less appealing, than migrating irregularly.

Current status, occupations and living conditions in Thailand

Current occupations

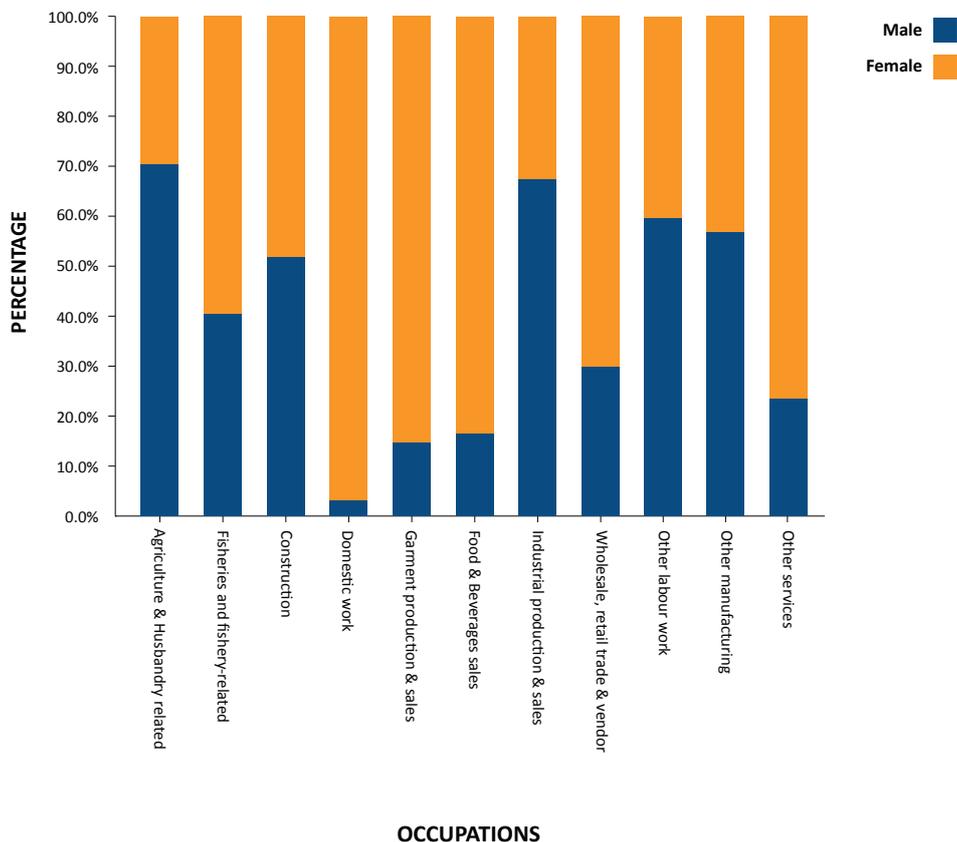
As regards the current occupation of respondents, 98.8 per cent of respondents said they had a job in Thailand. Of these, over 70 per cent were active within four sectors, namely manufacturing (28.9%); food and beverage sales (20.2%); general labour (12.3%); and general services (10.0%), with smaller proportions in wholesale, retail and trade, fishery-related work, construction, agriculture and husbandry, domestic work, garment production and sales, industrial productions and sales, and fisheries (see Figure 12 below).

Figure 12: Current occupations in Thailand



The proportion of female workers was found to be significantly higher in food and beverage sales (83.4% of all workers in that sector); services (76.7%); domestic work (95.9%); wholesale and retail trade (70.5%); garment and production sales (85.0%); and fishery-related work (59.7%). The proportion of male migrants was found to be significantly higher in labour work (58.5%); agriculture and husbandry-related work (70.9%); and industrial production and sales (66.7%). The proportions in manufacturing (56.2% male and 43.8% female) and construction (51.9% male and 48.1% females) were roughly equal (see Figure 13 below).

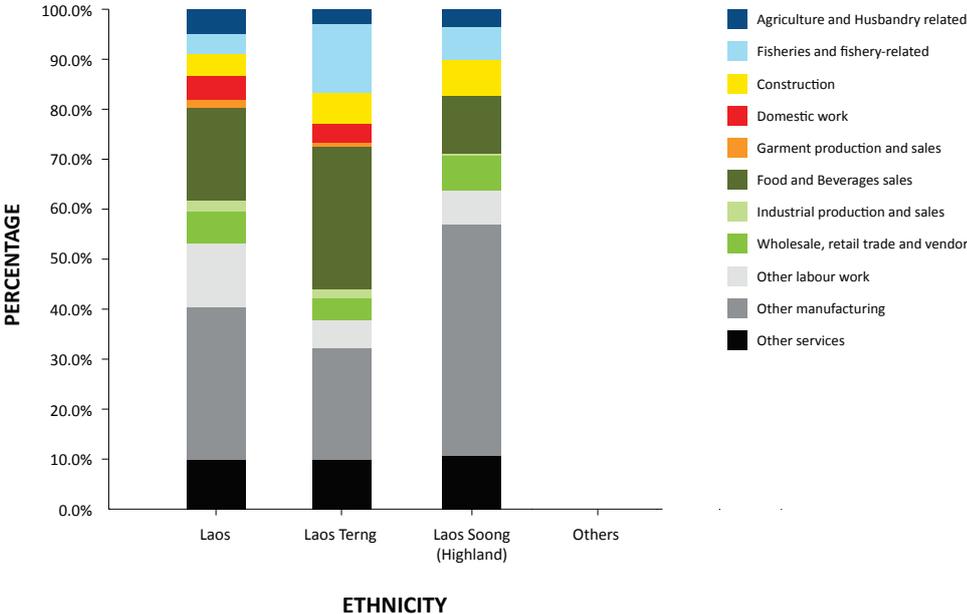
Figure 13: Current occupations in Thailand by gender



Young female migrants (15–18 years) were found to be working principally in food and beverage sales (40.7% of all young females were working in this sector), followed by fisheries and related work (16.9%); the service sector (10.2%); wholesale, retail trade and vending (8.5%); domestic work (8.5%); and labour work (8.5%). Young male migrants (under 18) were found to be working principally in manufacturing (41.2%) and food and beverage sales (35.3%). The highest proportions of female migrant workers over 30 years of age were seen in the agricultural sector (68.8%), construction (53.8%) and labour work (42.7%), whereas the highest proportions of male migrant workers over 30 were seen in construction (50.0%); general services (42.8%); labour work (40.7%) and agriculture (35.9%).

In terms of ethnicity, there was a considerably higher proportion of Laos Soong in manufacturing (44.4%) than Laos (29.7%) or Laos Terng (20.9%). There was a higher proportion of Laos Terng (28.7%) in garment production and sales than Laos (11.1%) or Laos Soong (19.1%), and also a slightly higher proportion in fisheries and related work (13.2%, as compared to 7.4% and 4.0% among Laos Soong and Laos respectively), as shown in Figure 14.

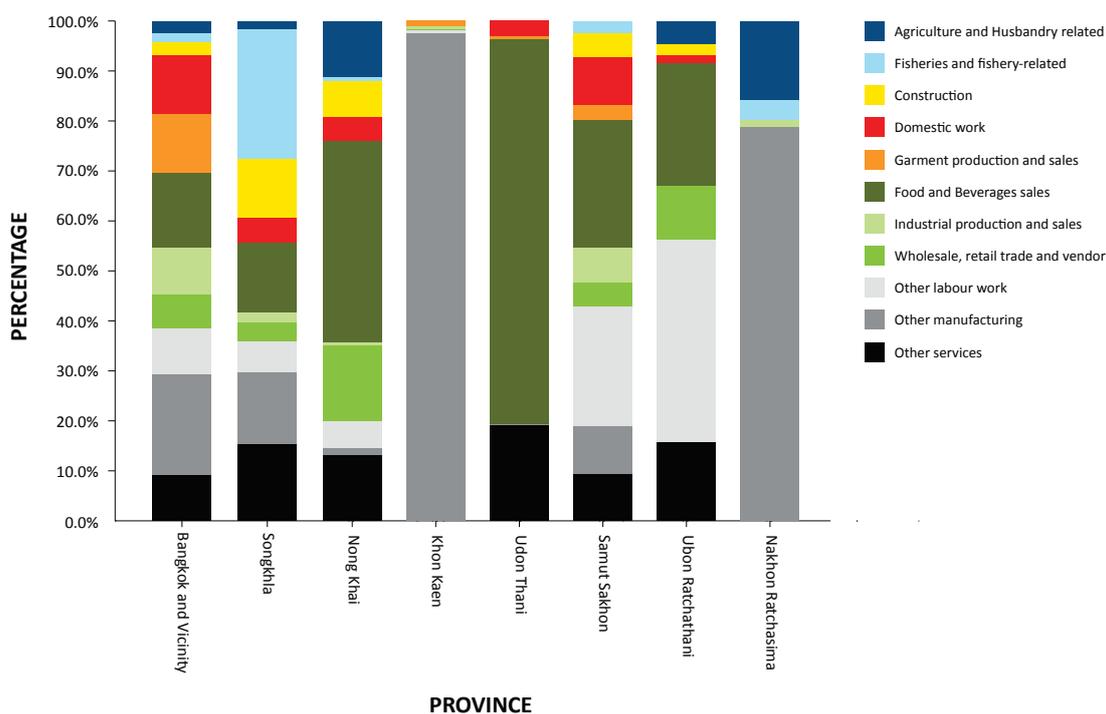
Figure 14: Current Occupations in Thailand by ethnicity



Overall, the level of education was low across all sectors. However, there were also some notable differences. Migrants in the construction sector generally had lower levels of education than other sectors (with 59.3% reporting having no education or not completing elementary level education), closely followed by workers in the fisheries sector (50%). The highest proportion of migrants who had completed higher secondary level education or above was seen in the service sector (15.1%) and wholesale, retail trade and vendor (14.4%).

Looking at key sectors of employment across different provinces, Figure 15 shows migrants in Khon Kaen (97.6%) and Nakhon Ratchasima (78.9%) provinces were overwhelmingly engaged in the manufacturing sector, whereas the picture was more varied across other provinces. In Udon Thani, migrants were predominantly engaged in food and beverage sales (although the sample was small), which was also common across several other provinces including Nongkhai, Samut Sakhon and Ubon Ratchathani. The highest proportion of domestic workers was in Bangkok and the central area (11.8% of all Laotian migrants in Bangkok and vicinity and 28.6% of all Laotian domestic workers interviewed in Thailand).

Figure 15: Current occupations in Thailand across provinces



Documents

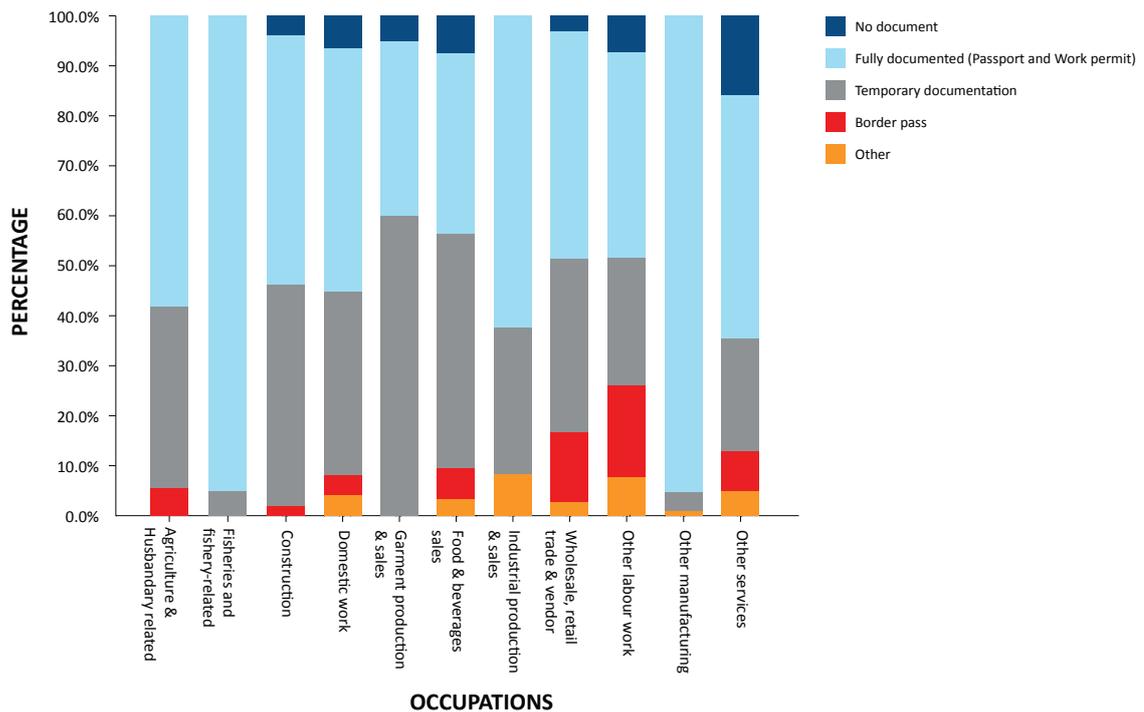
Overall, almost two thirds of the respondents were fully documented and in possession of a passport and work permit (61.5%); 25.2 per cent were in possession of temporary documents (e.g. registration card or “pink card” and a temporary work permit); 5.7 per cent were in possession of a border pass; and 4.5 per cent were not in possession of any document. 3.1 per cent reported having “other” forms of documentation.

The majority of the respondents or 61.1 per cent reported keeping their documents with them. 32.1 per cent of the respondents said their documents were kept by their employers, and 1.8 per cent said their documents were kept by their brokers, implying that over one third of the migrants (33.9%) did not enjoy freedom of movement and full access to rights due to the unlawful retention of their documents.

Looking at documentation status across sector in Figure 16, the highest proportion of migrants reported having full documentation in fisheries and related work (95.2%) and the manufacturing sector (95.7%), primarily as higher proportions of workers in these sectors had entered Thailand through the MOU. There were higher proportions of migrants with temporary documentation across other sectors, with the highest in the garment production and sales sector (60.0%). The highest proportion of undocumented workers (15.8%) was seen in the service sector.

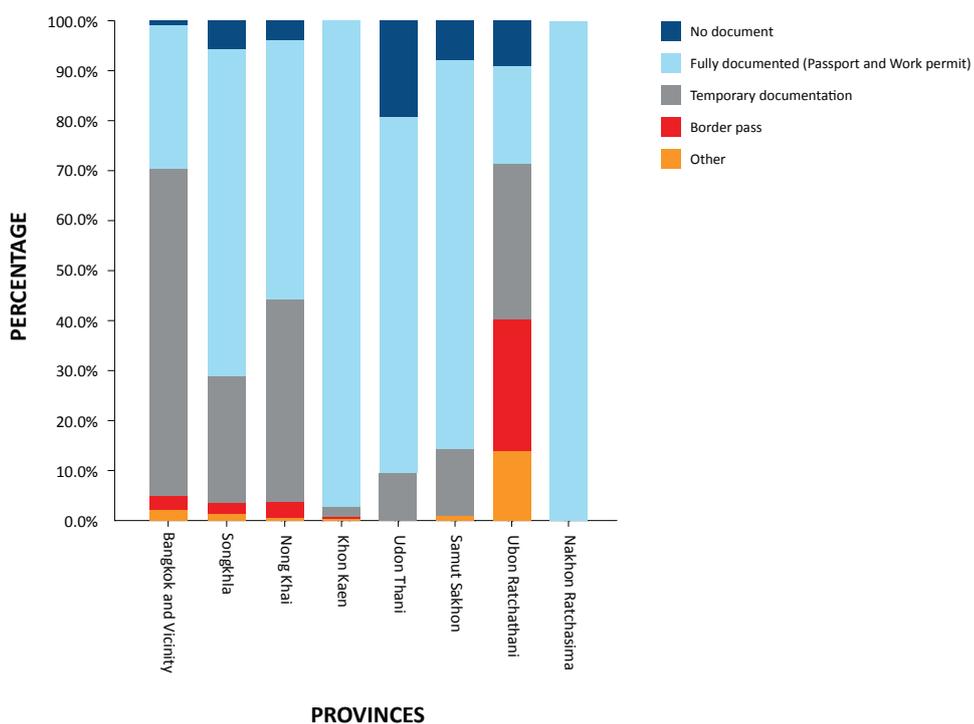
Of female respondents, 16.3 per cent working in the service sector were not in possession of any documentation, whilst there was a higher proportion of female migrants working in agriculture and husbandry (16.7%) and wholesale, retail trade and vending (16.4%) that were only in possession of a border pass. Of male respondents, 14.3 per cent of those working in the service sector were not in possession of any documentation, as were 10 per cent working in food and beverage sales, whilst labour work (26.7%) and services (10.7%) constituted sectors in which migrant workers were most often only in possession of a border pass.

Figure 16: Documentation status across sectors of work



According to Figure 17, there were significant differences in the documentation held by migrants across provinces. In all provinces except Bangkok and vicinity and Udon Ratchathani, the majority of migrants had full documentation (Lao People’s Democratic Republic passport and work permit), ranging from 52 per cent in Nong Khai to 100 per cent in Nakhon Ratchasima. There were high rates of full documentation in Khon Kaen (97.1%) and Samut Sakhon (77.9%). However, in Bangkok, the majority of workers (65.0%) had only temporary documentation (for example, temporary stay/work permit or “pink card”) and only 29.2 per cent had full documentation. In Udon Ratchathani, the proportion of fully documented workers was even lower at 19.9 per cent, with a significant proportion of workers also having a border pass (26.4%) and “other” documentation (13.9%), likely to mean informal documentation issued at local/village level. The proportions of undocumented workers were low in all provinces, with the highest in Udon Thani (19.4%). However, it should be noted this does not necessarily reflect the true proportions of undocumented migrants in each province.

Figure 17: Documentation status across provinces

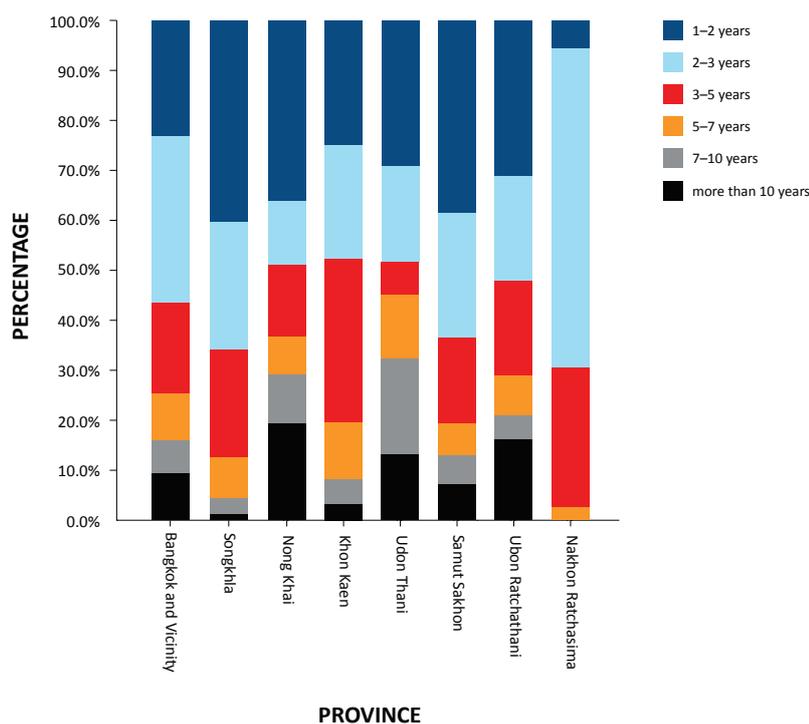


Duration of stay in Thailand

Just under a third of respondents had been staying in Thailand between 1 and 2 years (30.5%); 25.6 per cent had been in Thailand 2–3 years; 21.1 per cent for 3–5 years; 8.2 per cent for 5–7 years; and 5.8 per cent for 7–10 years. 8.8 per cent had been in Thailand longer than 10 years.

Overall, migrants in border provinces reported having stayed in Thailand the longest period. 19 per cent of migrants in Nong Khai reported having stayed in Thailand over 10 years, and 36.7 per cent over 5 years. In Udon Thani, 45.2 per cent reported staying over 5 years. Overall however, most migrants reported having stayed in Thailand less than 5 years (see Figure 18).

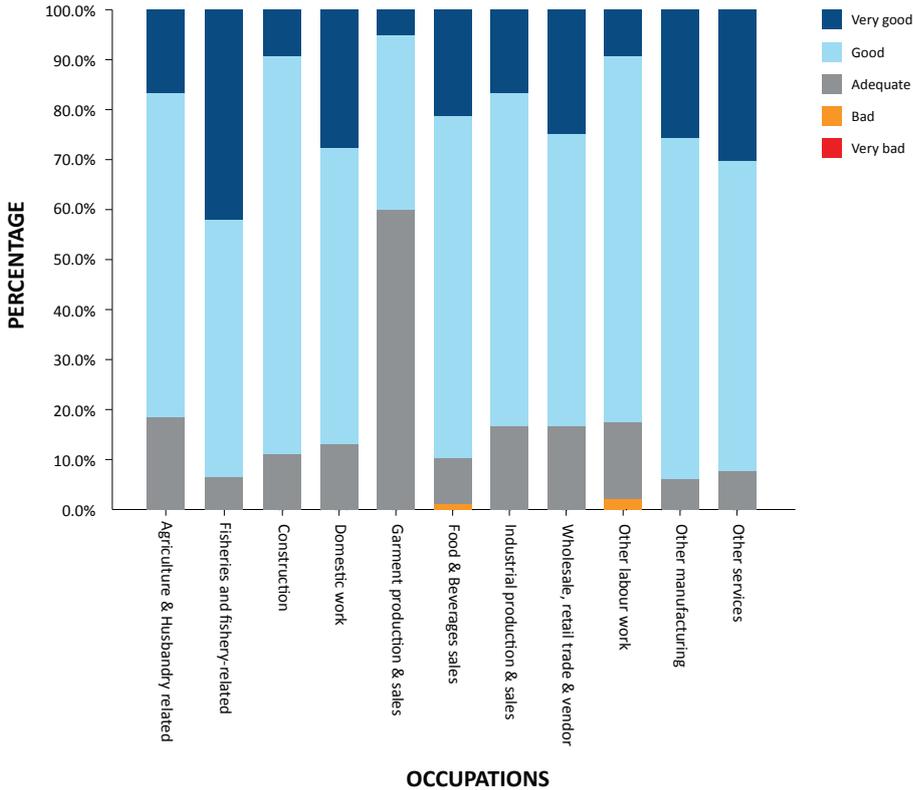
Figure 18: Duration of stay in Thailand by province



Working conditions

Two thirds of the respondents rated their working conditions in Thailand as good (66.8%); 22.8 per cent rated them very good; 9.9 per cent rated them adequate; while only 0.5 per cent rated them bad. Sectors with higher proportions of migrants rating their working conditions as very good included fisheries and related work (41.9%) and garment production and sales (40%). Conversely, sectors in which higher proportions of migrant workers only rated their working conditions as adequate included agriculture and husbandry-related work (18.2%); industrial production and sales (16.7%); and wholesale, retail trade and vending (16.7%). However, the majority of migrants across all sectors rated their working conditions as “good”, which is an encouraging finding further emphasizing that, despite the challenges associated with migration, the majority of Laotian migrants have positive experiences in Thailand (Figure 19). With regard to means of migration, the highest proportion of those rating their working conditions as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ was seen amongst migrants who had entered through the MOU, with 97.4 per cent of migrants who had migrated through this channel rating their working conditions as ‘good’ as ‘very good’, as compared to 88.9 per cent of those who had migrated with friends and relatives, 85.5 per cent of those who had migrated on their own, and 81.2 per cent of those who migrated with the help of brokers.

Figure 19: Working conditions by sector



Satisfaction with jobs and living conditions

One third of the respondents or 34.2 per cent reported being very satisfied with their jobs in Thailand; while the majority (59.8%) reported being satisfied; and 5.2 per cent rated their jobs as acceptable. Only 0.7 per cent were unsatisfied with their jobs. 21.6 per cent of migrants rated their living conditions as very good; 68.0 per cent as good; 10.0 per cent as adequate; and only 0.3 per cent as bad. Again, migrants who had entered Thailand through the MOU were most likely to report being satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs (98.9% of those who entered through this channel) and living conditions (95.5%). These findings indicate that despite the challenges associated with migrating through the MOU, it does appear to be associated with improved levels of satisfaction among Laotian migrants in Thailand. Looking at differences across sector, the picture was similar to working conditions, with the largest proportion of migrants reporting “very good” living conditions being in fisheries and related work and garment production and sales.

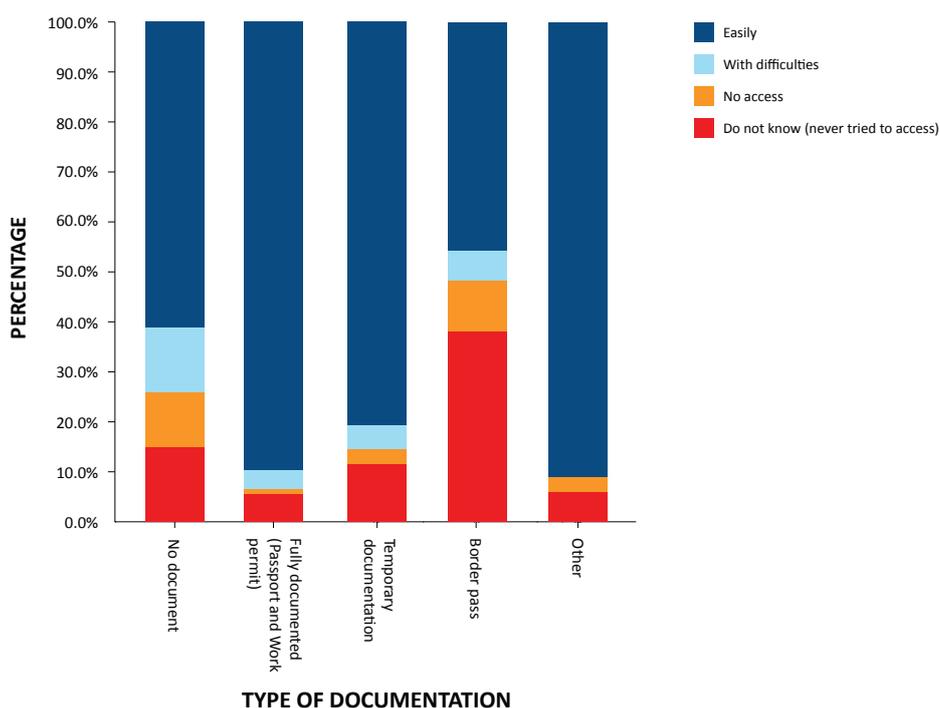
Welfare and access to social services

Over one third or 38.5 per cent of the respondents reported being provided with accommodation, mostly by employers. Interestingly, the largest proportion of workers provided with accommodation was seen in the food and beverage sales sector (65.6%) followed by domestic work (59.6%). Between 35 and 40 per cent of workers in the manufacturing, services and wholesale, retail trade and vendor sectors were provided with accommodation. The lowest proportion of those provided with accommodation was in construction (5.6%). A small proportion (4.6%) was provided with food. The rest reported paying these costs by themselves.

Health care

Fully documented migrants, who form a majority in this survey, reported being most able to access social services. 90.3 per cent of fully documented migrants could “easily” access health-care services, as compared to 81.3 per cent of those with temporary documentation, 61.8 per cent of those with no documentation, and 46.4 per cent of those with border passes (Figure 20).

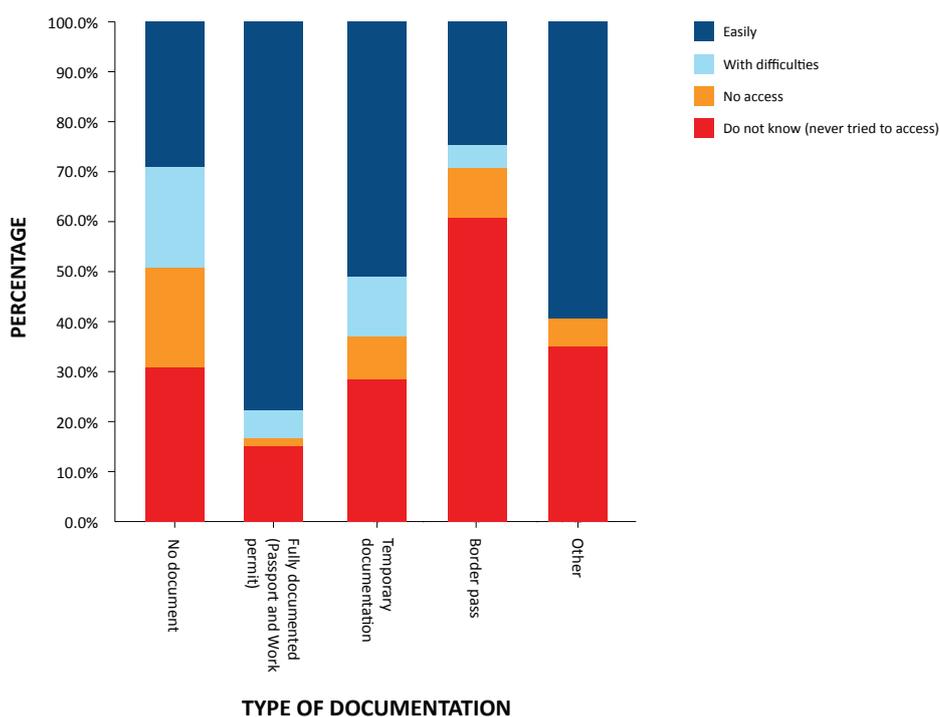
Figure 20: Access to healthcare among migrants with different status



Banking

Approximately two thirds of the respondents (65.2%) could access the banking system. 7.4 per cent could access the banking system but with some difficulties; 4.7 per cent did not have any access; while 22.4 per cent did not know about the banking services or had never tried to access. Differences in ease of access for migrants with different documentation status was more apparent than for health services, with 78 per cent of fully documented migrants accessing banking services “easily” as compared to 51.5 per cent of those with temporary documentation, 29.1 per cent of those with no documentation, and 24.6 per cent of those with border passes. However, large proportions of migrants in the latter categories had never tried to access, as shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Access to banking services among migrants with different status



Education

Among those who had children, clear challenges were encountered in enrolling their children in school, with less than half of those with children (41.9%) reporting that their children were enrolled in school, while the remainder reported that their children did not study. Of those who were studying, the vast majority reported they were studying in Thai schools rather than learning centres run by NGOs. Interestingly, the proportion of those with children studying was considerably higher among those with temporary documentation (50.9%) than those with full documentation (37.1%).

Contact with families in Lao People's Democratic Republic

Most respondents contacted their families back in Lao People's Democratic Republic on a regular basis – 17.8 per cent on a daily basis, 42.6 per cent on a weekly basis, and 26.7 per cent on a monthly basis, while 6.6 per cent contacted their families every year. A small number (6.3%) did not contact anyone in Lao People's Democratic Republic because their families were in Thailand, or they did not have any relatives in Lao People's Democratic Republic. By far the most common means of contacting their families in Lao People's Democratic Republic was via telephone, which was used by 90.5 per cent of all respondents.

18.6 per cent said internet was their primary means to communicate with families in Lao People's Democratic Republic; 10 per cent paid visits to their families in Lao People's Democratic Republic; and 6 per cent exchanged news with their families in Lao People's Democratic Republic through friends and relatives. Unsurprisingly, those migrants with children in Lao People's Democratic Republic were more likely to contact their families back home on a regular basis than those migrants with children living in Thailand (25.6% contacted their family on a daily basis and 59.1% on a weekly basis respectively, as compared to 7.8% and 29.1% of migrants whose children lived in Thailand).

The respondents generally learned about the situations and changes in Lao People's Democratic Republic through their acquaintances and networks. 41.4 per cent received information from friends and relatives living in Lao People's Democratic Republic; 7.4 per cent used communications technology and also learned from public media; 28.2 per cent used the internet; 25.6 per cent watched Thai television channels; 22.8 per cent watched Laotian television channels; and 8.1 per cent listened to Laotian radio channels. 23.2 per cent of the respondents reported not receiving any news about Lao People's Democratic Republic.

In addition, the majority of the respondents paid regular visits to their families in Lao People's Democratic Republic. 35.5 per cent visited their families once a year; 17.9 per cent visited 2–3 times a year; 7.6 per cent did so every 2–3 years; 7.5 per cent paid a visit every month; 0.5 per cent made a visit every week; and 3.0 per cent went back to their family houses in Lao People's Democratic Republic every day. 28.0 per cent had not yet gone back to visit their families due to various reasons as follows: 36.0 per cent of them had just arrived in Thailand; 33.8 per cent wanted to save money; 8.3 per cent found it difficult to travel; 6.4 per cent had no relatives back in Lao People's Democratic Republic; 4.8 per cent had all family members living in Thailand; while the remainder had multiple reasons. These findings emphasize the close linkages that Laotian migrants in Thailand maintain with their families and home communities in Lao People's Democratic Republic, which have important implications for the potential impact of migration on poverty reduction.

Chapter 2 – Income and employment

The respondents received three types of income: 1) Daily wage (receiving payment daily or weekly); 2) Monthly salary (receiving payment monthly or bimonthly); 3) Payment per piece/item.

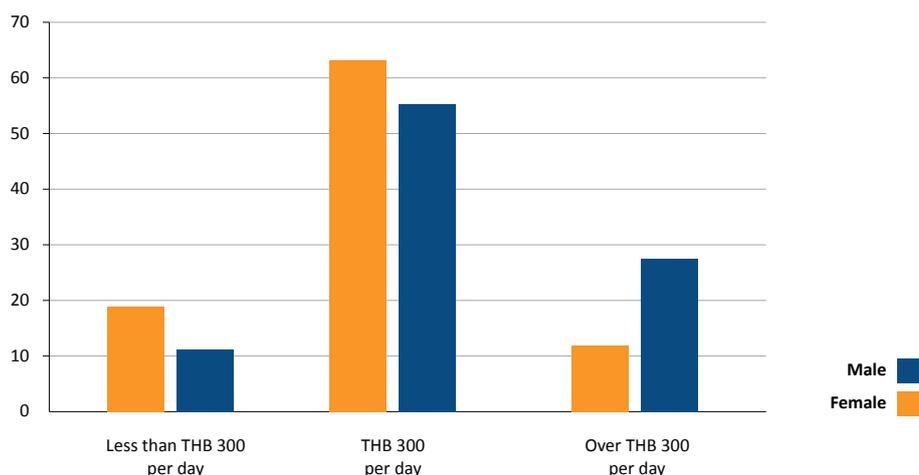
For those who received a daily wage, 17.8 per cent reported receiving less than THB 300 per day. 61.8 per cent received THB 300 per day and 20.4 per cent earned more than THB 300 daily. The lowest daily wage received was THB 150 and the highest wage was THB 1,000.

For those who received a monthly salary, 35.1 per cent received less than THB 7,500 per month (approximately equivalent to daily minimum wage of THB 300 per day, 6 days per week). 16.3 per cent received THB 7,500 per month and 48.6 per cent received from THB 7,500 to 30,000 per month. The monthly salaries ranged from THB 3,000 to 30,000 per month.

In total, 28.3 per cent of the respondents, who either received a daily wage or a monthly salary, earned approximately less than THB 300 per day; 34.2 per cent earned THB 300 per day and 37.5 per cent earned more than THB 300 per day. However, it should be noted that of those earning less than minimum wage, a larger proportion reported being provided with accommodation (60.3%) than those earning minimum wage (54.0%) or over minimum wage (31.5%), indicating that at least in some cases, lower wages are compensated by provision of welfare benefits such as accommodation. If counting only those migrants who were not provided with accommodation, the proportion of those receiving less than THB 7,500 per month decreased to 25.4 per cent, whereas the percentage earning more than THB 7,500 per month increased to 60.8 per cent. For those earning daily wages however, the proportions were similar regardless of whether accommodation was provided.

Overall, male migrants reported receiving higher wages than female migrants. 13.2 per cent of male migrants compared to 21.1 per cent of female migrant received less than THB 300 per day. The number of migrants receiving minimum wage represented 57.1 per cent of male workers and 65.1 per cent of female workers whereas those earning more than the daily minimum wage comprised 29.6 per cent male and 14.8 per cent female (Figure 22). The average daily wage was THB 330 for male migrants, and THB 305 for female migrants, although this difference was not statistically significant. Interestingly however, when considering only those migrants who did not receive accommodation from employers, this difference became statistically significant with average daily wages of THB 309 for females and THB 341 for males.

Figure 22: Average daily wages by gender



In terms of monthly wages, female migrant workers reported receiving an average of THB 9,408, whereas male migrant workers reported receiving an average of THB 9,882, although the difference again was not statistically significant.

34.3 per cent reported having deductions from their salary, most commonly to pay for accommodation, electricity and transportation. Deductions were most commonly seen in the fisheries and manufacturing sectors, where 83.3 and 89.8 per cent of respondents respectively reported salary deductions. Very small proportions of workers

reported salary deductions in agriculture, domestic work, food and beverage sales, and services, while no workers in the construction sector reported salary deductions.

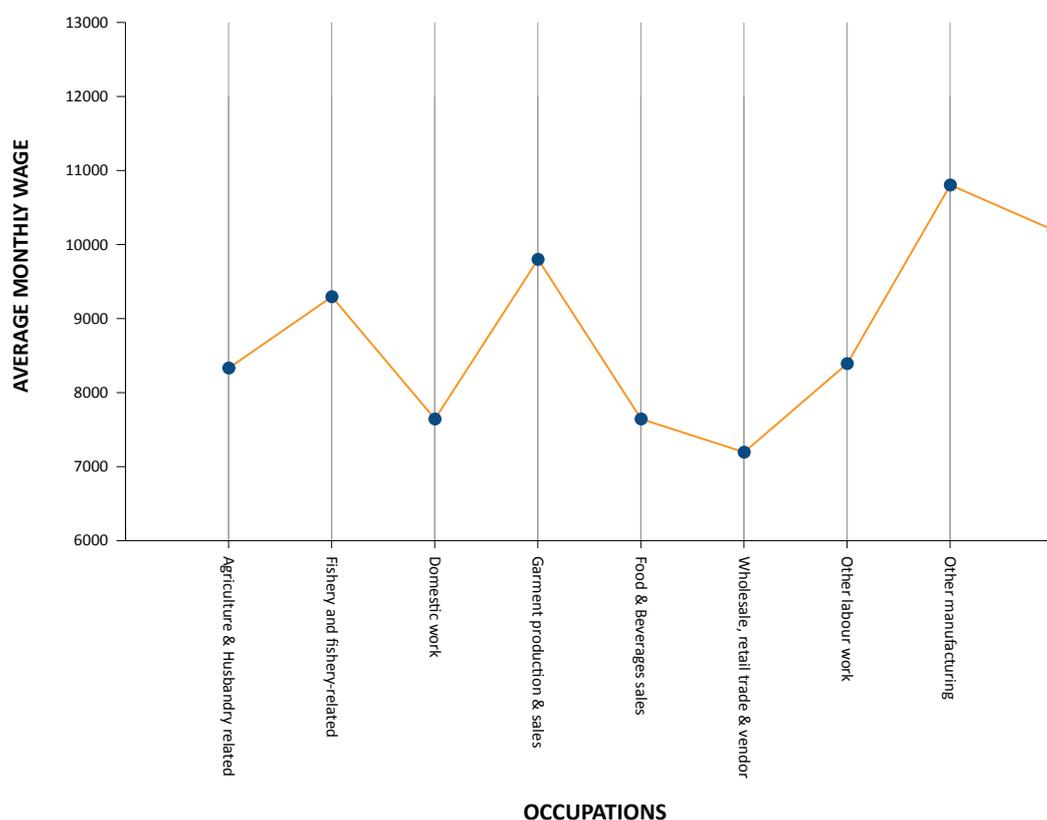
Table 2 shows there were large differences in the average wages received across provinces, ranging from THB 5,150 per month in Ubon Ratchathani to THB 11,513 per month in Songkhla and THB 11,575 per month in Khon Kaen.

Table 2: Average wages per province

Province	Average Wage (monthly)
Bangkok and Vicinity	9,413
Songkhla	11,513
Nong Khai	8,351
Khon Kaen	11,575
Udon Thani	7,166
Samut Sakhon	8,557
Ubon Ratchathani	5,150
Nakhon Ratchasima	9,238
Overall average	9,607

Figure 23 shows the average monthly wages varied across sectors for migrants receiving wages on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, ranging from THB 7,171 per month for migrants in the wholesale, retail trade and vendor sector, to THB 10,843 in the manufacturing sector. For workers earning daily wages, workers across different sectors reported fairly consistent wages around THB 300 per day, ranging from THB 282 per day in “other services” to THB 344 per day in “wholesale, retail trade and vendor”. The daily income rates by province showed similar variations, ranging from THB 279 per day in Udon Thani, to THB 338 per day in Songkhla.

Figure 23: Average monthly wages by sector



Overall, there were 21.1 per cent of female migrants receiving a daily wage of less than THB 300; 65.1 per cent earned THB 300 per day whereas 13.8 per cent earned more than THB 300 per day. Among female migrants, there were differences in daily wages received by province, with a greater proportion of female workers in Bangkok (33.3%) receiving wages of higher than THB 300 per day. A greater proportion of female migrants in Udon Thani (50%) and Ubon Ratchathani (63.6%) reported receiving less than minimum wage, whereas in all other provinces the majority of migrants received THB 300 per day. The pattern among male migrants was somewhat different. Overall, 13.2 per cent of male migrants earned less than THB 300 per day; 57.1 per cent received the minimum wage of THB 300 and 29.6 per cent gained more than THB 300 per day. Interestingly, the largest proportion of male migrants receiving over THB 300 per day was in Ubon Ratchathani (40.3%), followed by Songkhla (34.2%), Bangkok (28.6%), and Samut Sakhon (28.0%). The largest proportion of male migrant workers receiving less than minimum wage was in Udon Thani (40%) and Nong Khai (29.6%).

Female migrants in numerous sectors reported receiving less than the daily minimum wage as shown in Figure 24, including most notably general labour (37.2%), and construction (33.3%), while the highest proportion of female migrants earning over minimum wage was in wholesale, retail trade and vendor work (35%). For male migrants, the picture is again considerably different, with 69 per cent of male migrants in the construction sector earning over minimum wage, and 40.5 per cent in general labour work. The highest proportion of male migrant workers receiving less than minimum wage was in the service sector (37.5%), while in other sectors, the majority of male migrants received the minimum wage of THB 300 per day as shown in Figure 25.

More than half or 66.6 per cent of the respondents received their income via bank transfer whereas 33 per cent received their wage payments via bank cheque.

84.1 per cent reported that their current income in Thailand was enough to cover their expenses. 6.1 per cent said their income did not cover their expenses and 8.8 per cent reflected that they sometimes struggle with their current income.

Figure 24: Daily wages by sector for female migrants

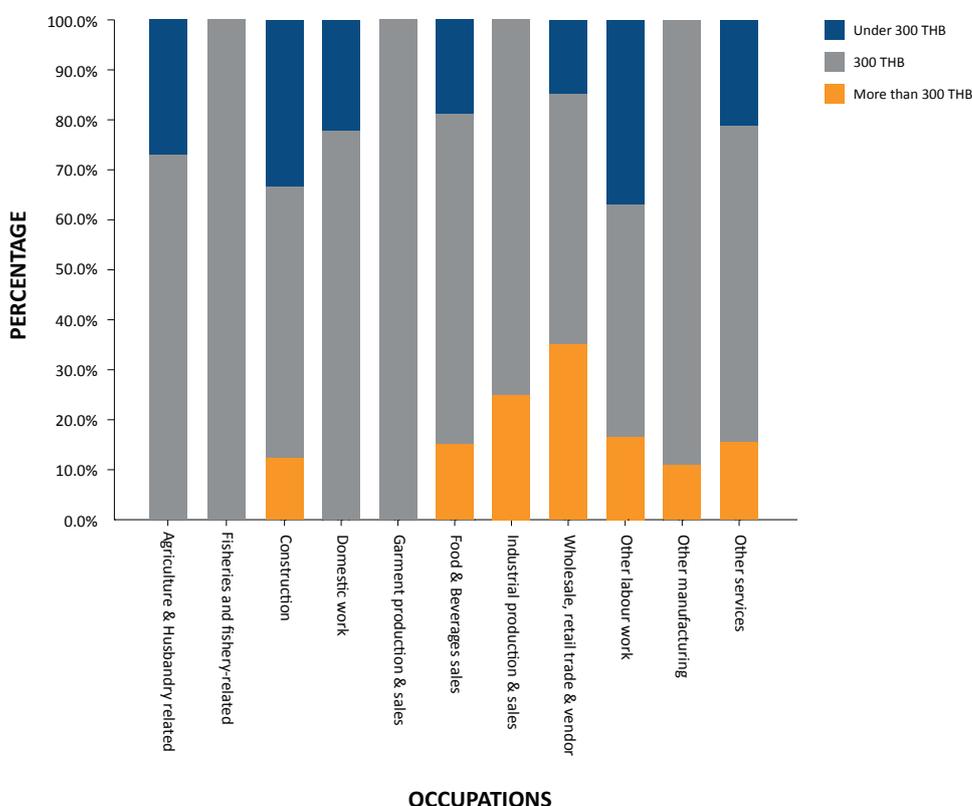
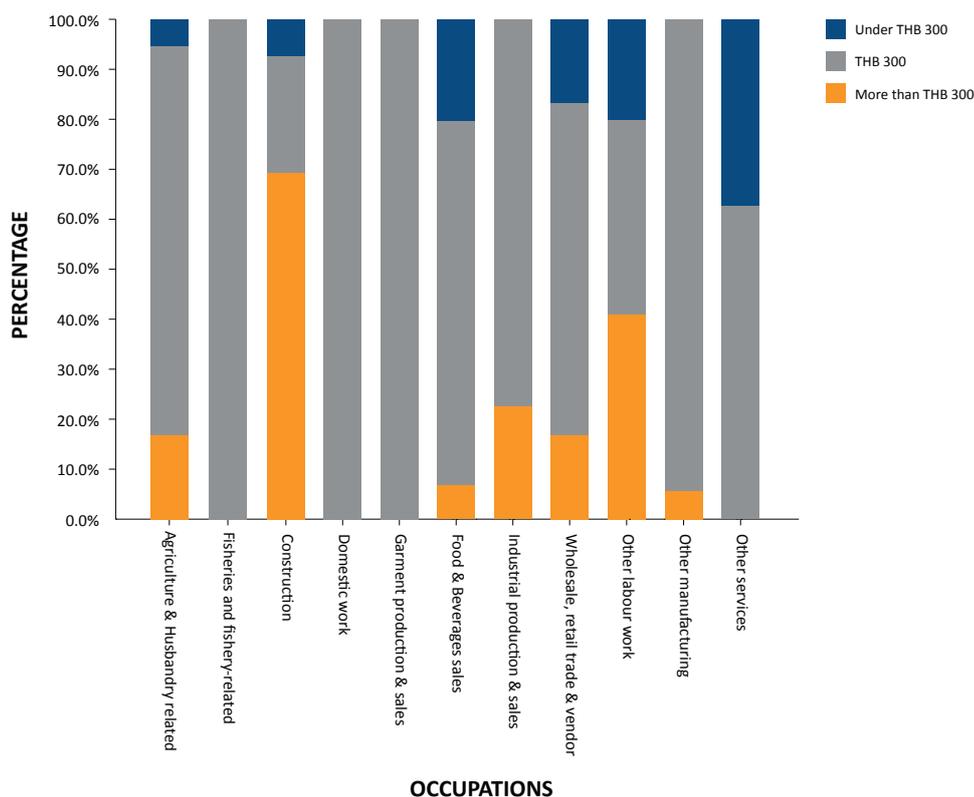


Figure 25: Daily wages by sector for male migrants



In regard to ethnicity, daily wages were slightly higher among “Laos” migrants, with 21.6 per cent reporting receiving wages higher than the minimum wage of THB 300 per day, as opposed to 15.4 per cent of Laos Terng and 8.3 per cent of Laos Soong. A greater proportion of Laos Soong (25.0%) received less than minimum wage than Laos or Laos Terng (17.7% and 17.3% respectively). For migrants receiving a monthly wage, the pattern was slightly different, with Laos Terng reporting the highest wages (51.4% over THB 7,500 per month, compared to 48.4% of Laos and 40.0% of Laos Soong). The highest proportion of migrants receiving under THB 7,500 per month was seen among the “Laos” ethnic group.

When examining the wage levels of migrants across different documentation status, there was a clear correlation between level of documentation and wage level, with those migrants with more documentation more likely to have higher wages. For those migrants earning a daily wage, there was a higher proportion of undocumented migrants earning less than THB 300 per day (47.1%) compared to those with full documentation (15.9%) and temporary documentation (12.3%). Interestingly, those with temporary documentation were the most likely to earn a daily wage of over THB 300 per day (21.2%), compared to 16.8 per cent of those fully documented and 11.8 per cent of undocumented migrants (see Figure 26).

The pattern was similar for those migrants earning monthly wages as shown in Figure 27. 61.1 per cent of fully documented migrants earned over THB 7,500 per month, as compared to 21.6 per cent of those with temporary documentation and 28.9 per cent of those with no documents. There was a particularly high percentage of those in undocumented status (60.5%) earning less than THB 7,500 per month and the figure was also high (53.7%) for those with temporary documentation. 23.5 per cent of those with full documentation earned less than THB 7,500 per month, which although lower than the other groups still illustrates that nearly one quarter of those with full documentation were earning less than minimum wage.

Figure 26: Daily wage levels by documentation status

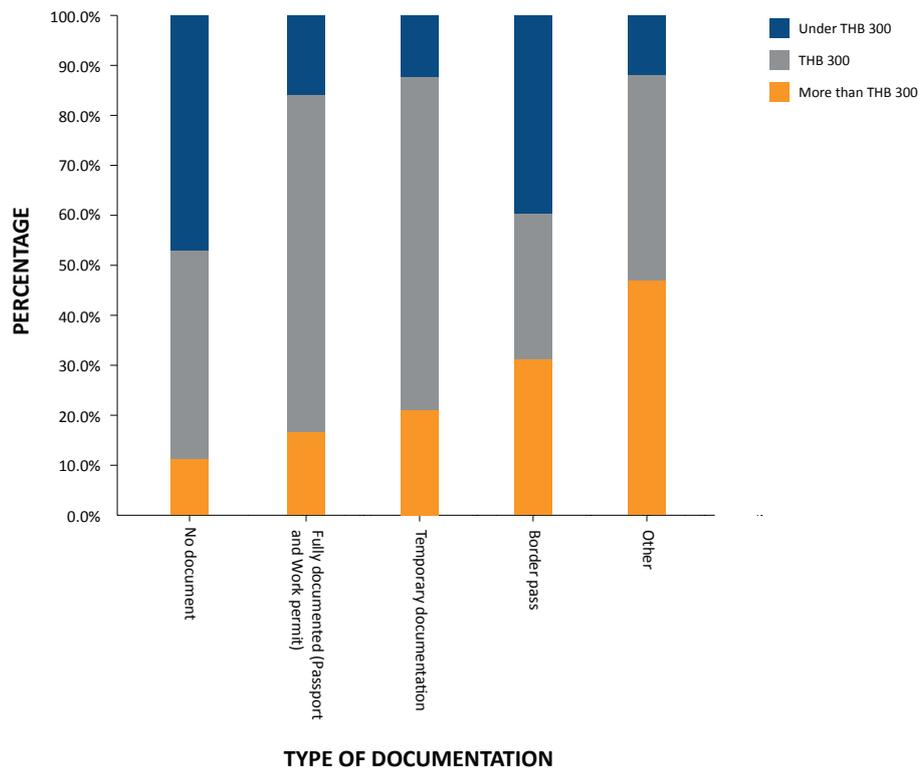
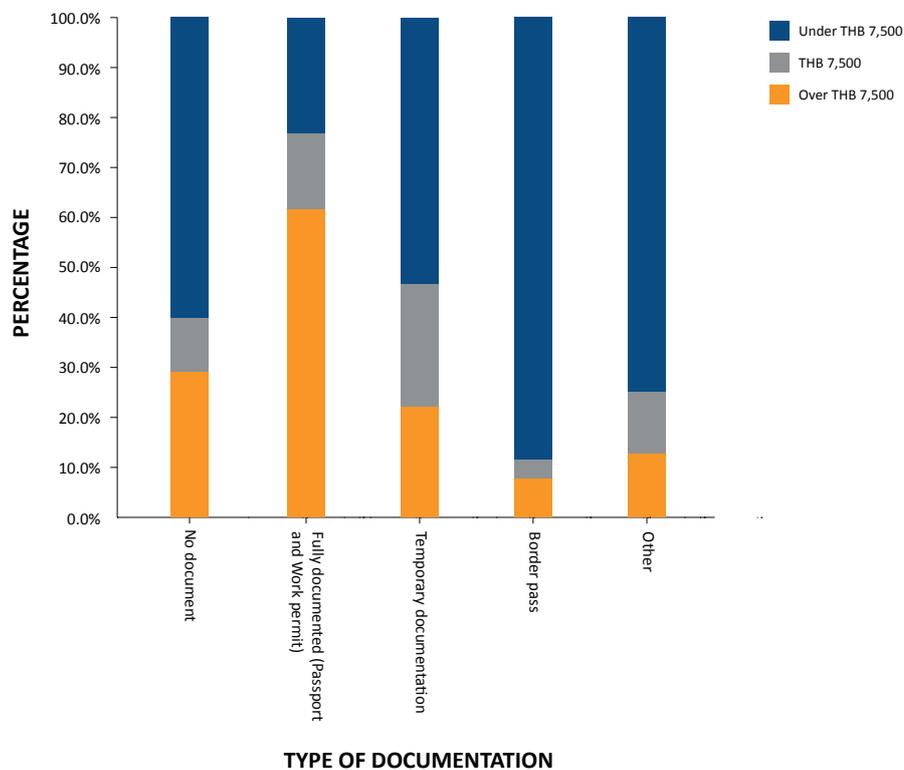


Figure 27: Monthly wage levels by documentation status



Frequency of changing jobs

The vast majority of migrants interviewed (79.1%) had never changed jobs. 16.4 per cent had changed once or twice, while a combined total of only 4.5 per cent had changed jobs three times or more. There were minimal differences in daily wage levels among migrants who had changed jobs different numbers of times, with the exception of those migrants who had changed jobs more than 10 times (only 3 persons in the current sample), who reported higher wages than those changing jobs fewer times. Overall however, there is little evidence that the number of times a migrant changes jobs is associated with higher wages among migrants earning a daily wage.

Among migrants receiving monthly salaries, the proportions of migrants receiving wages higher than the minimum wage increased with the number of times migrants had changed jobs (46.7% of those who had never changed jobs received over 7,500 per month, increasing to 50.0% for those having changed jobs 1–2 times, 77.3% for those having changed jobs 3–4 times, and 80% for those having changed jobs 5–10 times). However, it should also be noted that this could also be due to other factors associated with staying in Thailand a longer time, such as increased skill levels and familiarity with Thai language and culture.

Chapter 3 – Remittances, utilization and impacts upon communities of origin

Remittance amount

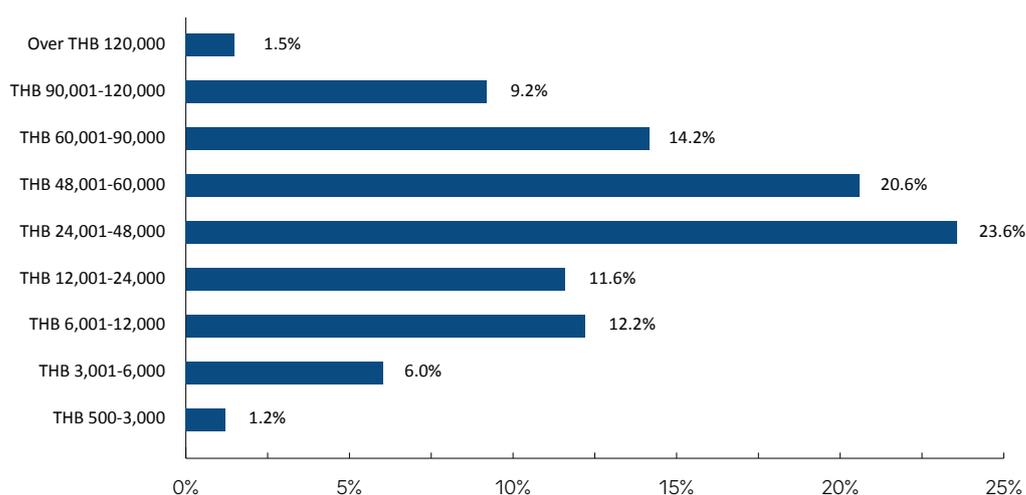
Most respondents remitted money to their families regularly. 44.9 per cent remitted money every month; 20.5 per cent remitted every 2–3 months; 6.0 per cent remitted 1–2 times per year; 3.4 per cent sent remittances every week; 10.6 per cent barely remitted; 2.6 per cent remitted on special occasions and 11.9 per cent had never remitted money. The amount of remittances ranged from THB 500 to over THB 120,000 per year.

Among those who remitted, 15.3 per cent sent goods rather than money. Of those who remitted money, 1.2 per cent remitted THB 500–3,000 per year; 6.0 per cent remitted between THB 3,001–6,000; 12.2 per cent remitted between THB 6,001–12,000; 11.6 per cent remitted between THB 12,001–24,000; 23.6 per cent remitted between THB 24,001–48,000; 20.6 per cent remitted between THB 48,001–60,000; 14.2 per cent remitted between THB 60,001–90,000; 9.2 per cent remitted between THB 90,001–120,000 and 1.5 per cent remitted over THB 120,000 per year, as shown in Figure 28.

The overall average of remittances sent to Lao People’s Democratic Republic was THB 39,980 per migrant per year (totaling THB 48.4 million among the selected sample). If aggregating this figure by all fully regular Laotian migrants in Thailand (76,167 migrants as of February 2016), the figure comes to THB 3.04 billion per year (approximately USD 87 million). If counting the additional 213,689 Laotian migrants who registered with the Thai authorities in 2014 and according to a recent Cabinet Resolution in Thailand are eligible to extend their stay in Thailand for two more years, the estimated total amount of remittances flowing from Thailand to Lao People’s Democratic Republic would be THB 11.59 billion per year (USD 331 million).¹ It should be noted that this is considerably higher than the remittance amounts shown by previous studies highlighted in the introduction to this study.

Interestingly, of those migrants who had already returned to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the proportion of migrants who had remitted and the amount of the remittances was lower. 66.2 per cent indicated that they had remitted while in Thailand, and the average amount remitted was THB 26,740 per year, considerably lower than that reported by migrants in Thailand, indicating that higher remittances may be associated with the prospect of staying in Thailand for a longer time.

Figure 28: Remittances sent per year

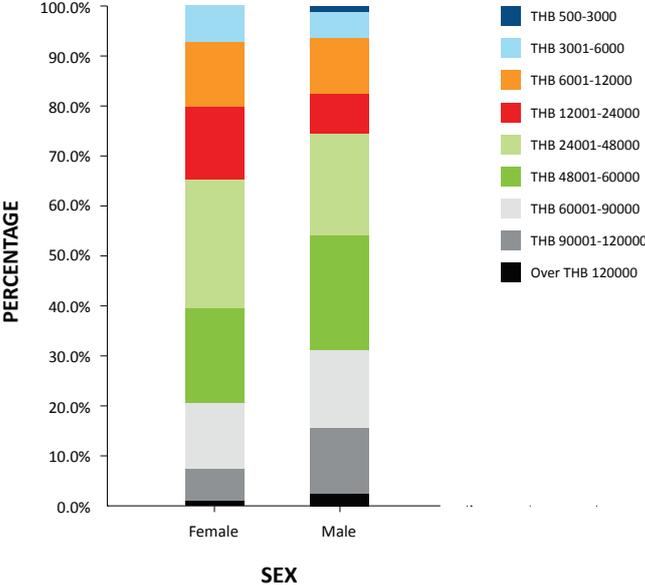


¹ This estimate is calculated based on the average remittance amount in this study (THB 39,980 per year) multiplied by the estimated total of regular Laotian migrant workers in Thailand (213,689 migrants who registered in 2014 and are eligible for re-registration in 2016; 31,795 migrants who are working in Thailand having entered under the MOU, and 44,372 migrants who are working in Thailand having completed the previous nationality verification process (as of February 2016)). If considering irregular Laotian migrant workers in addition, the annual remittance flow from Thailand to Lao People’s Democratic Republic is likely considerably higher.

The average levels of remittances sent to Lao People’s Democratic Republic was high among both male and female migrants, with the average among males THB 46,068 per year, and among females THB 35,883 per year, with a clear statistical significance between the two genders. This is likely explained by the fact that more males than females had families and children in Lao People’s Democratic Republic to support, although is also interesting in that it conflicts with findings from previous research showing that female migrants are more likely to send higher remittances than male migrants.

As can be seen in Figure 29 below, a greater proportion of males remitted higher amounts; for example, 13.0 per cent of males remitted between THB 90,001–120,000 per year as opposed to 6.5 per cent of female migrants; 15.9 per cent remitted between 60,000–90,000 as opposed to 13.1 per cent of females, and 22.7 per cent of males remitted between 48,000–60,000 as opposed to 19.1 per cent of females. Unsurprisingly, remittances were more likely to be sent in higher amounts by those migrants of working age, with 72.9 per cent of those who remitted over THB 60,000 per year falling within the age range 18–30.

Figure 29: Remittances sent by male and female migrants

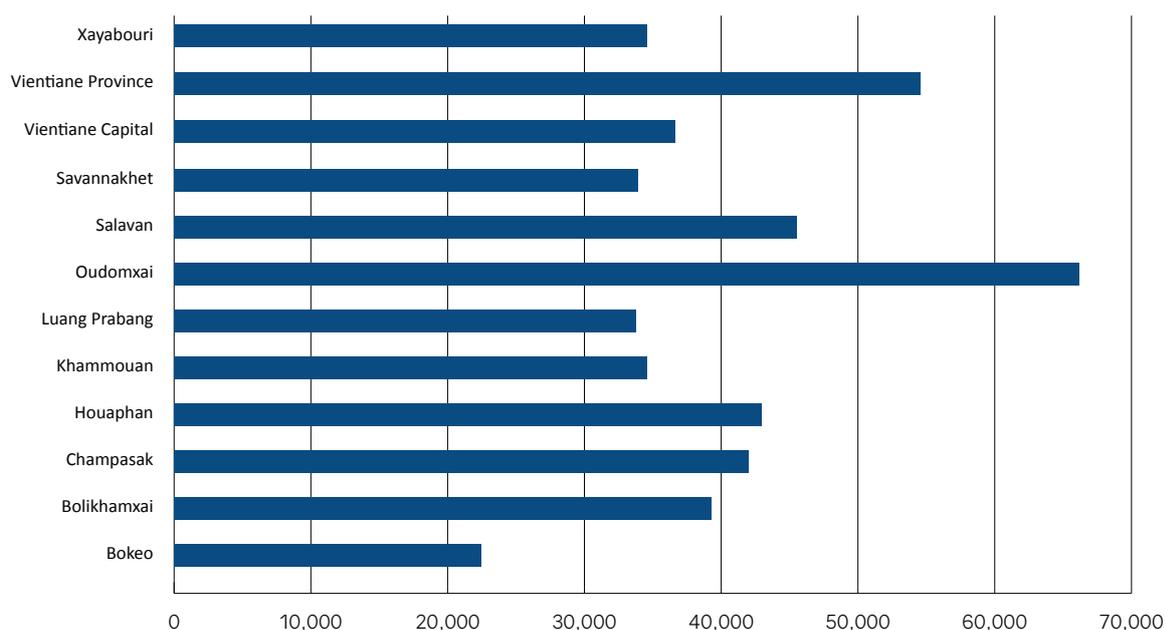


The frequency of sending remittances was very similar among male and female migrants. A slightly higher proportion of female migrants reported never sending remittances (13.2% versus 10.1%), but of those who did remit, slightly more female migrants reported remitting on a monthly basis than males (46.6% versus 42.4%). Overall however, the frequency of sending remittances was very similar among male and female migrants.

Migrants from the ethnic group “Laos” reported remitting slightly more than migrants of “Laos Terng” and “Laos Soong”, with 46.9 per cent remitting over THB 48,000 per year (compared to 32.0% of Laos Terng and 40.0% of Laos Soong), although overall there were not significant differences in remittance patterns across different ethnicities.

With regard to the amount of remittances sent to each province of origin in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the pattern varied considerably across provinces as shown in Figure 30. The highest average amount of remittances was sent by migrants originating from Oudomxai province, although it should be noted that the sample of migrants from Oudomxai was only small (10 persons). Out of those provinces from which large numbers of migrants originated, migrants from Vientiane Province sent the highest average amount of remittances (THB 55,056 per year), followed by Salavan (THB 46,031) and Champasak (THB 42,344). The province with the highest proportion of migrants remitting over THB 60,000 per year on average (36.2%) was Salavan, with 30.6 per cent of migrants from Salavan remitting 60,001–90,000 THB per year.

Figure 30: Average amount of remittances sent by migrants from each province of origin



In addition to regular remittances, 32.8 per cent of the respondents said that they had been asked from their families at times to send more money. 2.6 per cent had been frequently asked to send extra money for unexpected expenses or on special occasions.

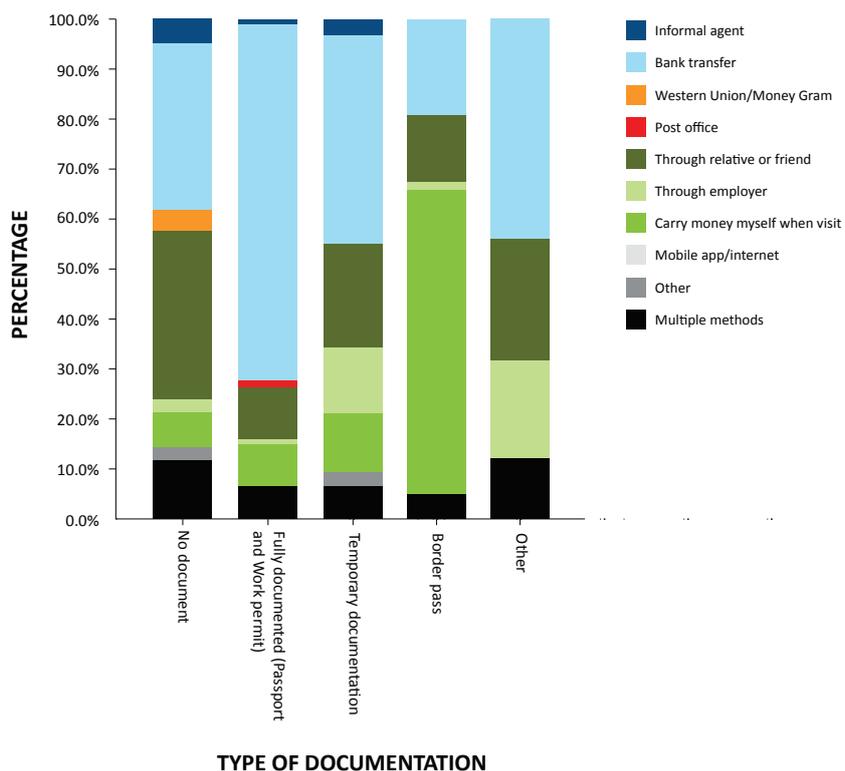
Remittance channels

Of those who remit, over half of the respondents (59.6%) sent remittances via bank transfer. 14.3 per cent remitted through relatives or friends; 11.6 per cent carried remittances by themselves when paying visits to families; 4.7 per cent sent money through employers; while smaller proportions used other methods or multiple channels.

With regard to the reasons for choosing the above remittance channels, 28 per cent of the respondents indicated cheaper fees; 23.7 per cent indicated it was more convenient for receiving money at the destination; 9.8 per cent indicated greater convenience in sending the money; 14.6 per cent did not know other channels; while 1.1 per cent paid attention to security. Only 0.2 per cent considered better currency exchange rates, and 22.4 per cent reported various reasons.

Remittance channels varied considerably based on the type of documentation held by the migrant as shown in Figure 31. Unsurprisingly, migrants with full documentation were more likely to send remittances by bank transfer (72% of fully documented migrants used this channel) whereas those with no documents or temporary documentation were slightly less likely to use bank transfer (33.3% and 41.7% respectively) and reported higher rates of sending remittances through relatives or friends. Unsurprisingly, those migrants with border passes reported most predominantly carrying money back themselves when visiting.

Figure 31: Primary channel for sending remittances by documentation status



Remittance behaviour varied somewhat between migrants across different sectors. Those in garment production and sales, fisheries and related work, and manufacturing were most likely to use bank transfer, whereas workers in agriculture, construction, food and beverage sales and wholesale, retail trade and vendor, other labour work and other services were slightly less likely to use bank transfers (between 36.9% and 54% of migrants in these sectors used bank transfers). Interestingly, 27.7 per cent of workers in the construction sector sent remittances through their employers, considerably higher than other sectors. Remittance channels by province also revealed significant differences, with those workers in non-border provinces more likely to use bank transfer and those in border provinces more likely to use other methods such as remitting through a relative or friend or carrying money oneself when visiting.

The fees to remit money ranged from free to more than 20 per cent. 38.0 per cent of the respondents remitted with no cost. 18.9% were charged less than 3 per cent; 29.7 per cent were charged 5 per cent of the amount sent; 11.4 per cent were charged 10 per cent; 1.6 per cent were charged 15–20 per cent; and 0.6 per cent were charged more than 20 per cent.

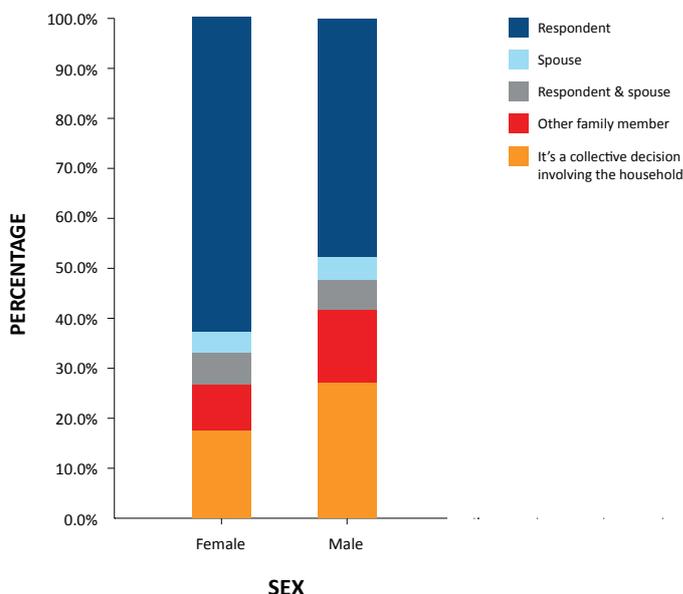
In terms of fees associated with remitting through the various channels, the cheapest method was of course carrying money oneself when returning. By far the most common method of remitting was through bank transfer (used by 59.5% of respondents). 28.5 per cent of those using bank transfer reported a charge of less than 3 per cent, while 33.4 per cent reported a charge of 5 per cent and 16.1 per cent a charge of 10 per cent. Only very few migrants reported a charge of over 10 per cent using bank transfer, while 19.1 per cent reported it was free. Interestingly, migrants remitting through employers reported less charges overall than those remitting through bank transfer. There were only small numbers of migrants remitting through informal agents, western union, and post offices making conclusions difficult to draw.

Limitations and challenges to sending remittances mentioned by the respondents included few mechanisms to receive remittances in their home communities in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (18.7%); remote destinations for receiving money (7.9%); excessive sending fees (5.6%); and few mechanisms to remit from Thailand (2.3%). 3.7 per cent cited various reasons that included excessive fees, remote destinations and limited sending mechanisms.

Interestingly, more female migrants (62.7%) than males (47.8%) reported making the decision to spend the remittances themselves, whereas the decision being made by another family member or as a collective decision involving the household was higher among males than females as shown in Figure 32. This could be linked to marital status, as a higher proportion of males interviewed were married than females (53.2% versus 43%), implying greater

freedom to make remittance decisions oneself among the unmarried female population. Furthermore a slightly higher proportion of males reported having children (68.9%) than females (64.4%) which may also be linked to decisions on spending. This finding can be further explained by the fact that of those who had children, considerably more males than females (73.1% versus 46.4%) reported that all of their children were still in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, whereas considerably more females than males reported that their children all lived together in Thailand (45.5% versus 19.8%). Males also had on average more children than females (1.81 versus 1.66) but this difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 32: Decisions to spend remittances by gender



Impacts of remittances

Remittances were reported to be highly significant for the respondents’ families in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. 44.0 per cent of the respondents indicated that remittances were the main source of income for their families in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; while 47.6 per cent cited that remittances were an important means to improve family living conditions. Only 5.3 per cent said that their families could live without any remittances and 0.4 per cent considered remittances not important at all. Amongst returned migrants in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, remittances were viewed similarly importantly, with 36.0 per cent viewing remittances as the main source of income and a further 57.6 per cent reporting that remittances were an important means to improve family income. 5.7 per cent reported that their family could live without any remittances while 0.7 per cent viewed remittances as not important at all.

In the past 12 months, 43.2 per cent of the respondents reported being the sole migrant in their family remitting money; 38.8 per cent had 1–2 more family members sending remittances; and 4.9 per cent had more than two additional family members sending remittances back home.

Remittance utilization

The most common use of remittances was “family consumption” for both male and female migrants sending remittances across all provinces of origin, with 85.3 per cent of migrants sending remittances doing so primarily for this purpose. The most common secondary reason was education for children (24.5%) and the most common third reason was house repair (17.5%), closely followed by buying other properties (17.1%).

Taking all responses together (analysing the use of remittances regardless of the prioritization), 82 per cent of all respondents reported using remittances for family expenses, 24.9 per cent for children’s education, 21.9 per cent for house repair, 20.3 per cent for family health, 8.5 per cent for paying off debt, 37.3 per cent for savings, and 22.0 per cent for buying land or properties.

While the primary use of remittances was family expenses for most migrants regardless of family situations, when looking at the secondary use of remittances it can be seen that for those with children, the remittances more

commonly went towards education expenses for children (46.6%), whereas for those without children, they reported higher secondary use of remittances on healthcare (22.7%), house repair (14.2%) and savings (17.7%).

In relation to their prospects to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 61.7 per cent of migrants responded that remittances are sent for family benefits, while 36.5 per cent reported remitting with the purpose to return themselves. The remainder reported that their remittance behaviour was unrelated to their intention to return.

Remittances and migration impacts upon communities of origin

Just under one third of respondents (29.6%) said they thought migration had a very positive impact on their home communities, whereas 36.1 per cent thought the impact was positive. 8.6 per cent thought there was little impact while 24.5 per cent thought there was not any positive impact. Amongst returning migrants, the view of migration was slightly less positive; only 7.8 per cent thought that migration had a very positive impact on their home communities, although a further 45.4 per cent thought that the impact was positive. 34.0 per cent thought that there was no impact, while the rest (12.8%) held the view that migration had negative impacts.

The primary reason cited for the positive impact of migration, among 62.9 per cent of respondents, was that their families gained better social status. Only very small proportions of migrants reported negative impacts that resulted from migration, including family separation (0.6%), labour shortages at home (0.6%) and having no family members to work on family businesses (0.2%).

The importance of remittances across different income levels is highlighted for male and female migrants in Figures 33 and 34 below. Generally speaking, a large majority of migrants across all income levels reported remittances as being important or very important. A larger proportion of migrants who remitted less than THB 3,000 per year cited remittances as having little or no importance for their families. However, for migrants remitting THB 3,000 upwards per year, the perceived importance of remittances generally increased with the amount of remittances sent for both male and female migrants.

Figure 33: Importance of remittances to female migrants at different income levels

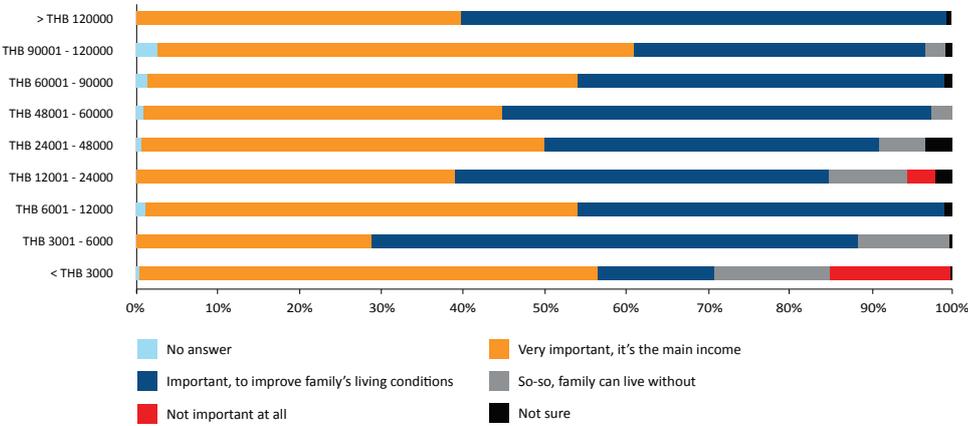
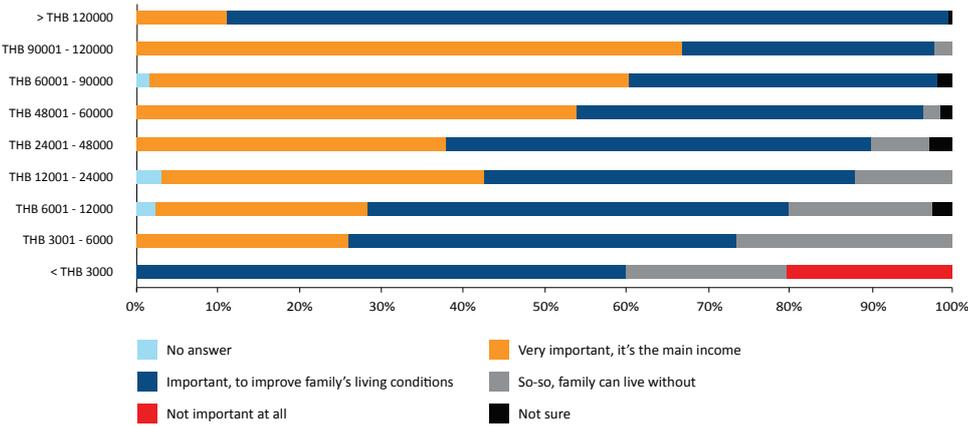


Figure 34: Importance of remittances to male migrants at different income levels



When analysing variances by occupation in the importance of remittances in improving the migrant’s household situation in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the highest importance was placed on remittances by workers in the manufacturing and fisheries or related sectors (55.8% and 51.7% judged remittances as very important and the main income for the household respectively). Domestic workers overall judged remittances as less important (19.5% rated remittances as the main income). However, workers in all occupations (>75%) judged remittances as overall either very important and the main source of income, or important in improving their family’s living conditions in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Importance of remittances to improving household’s situation by sector

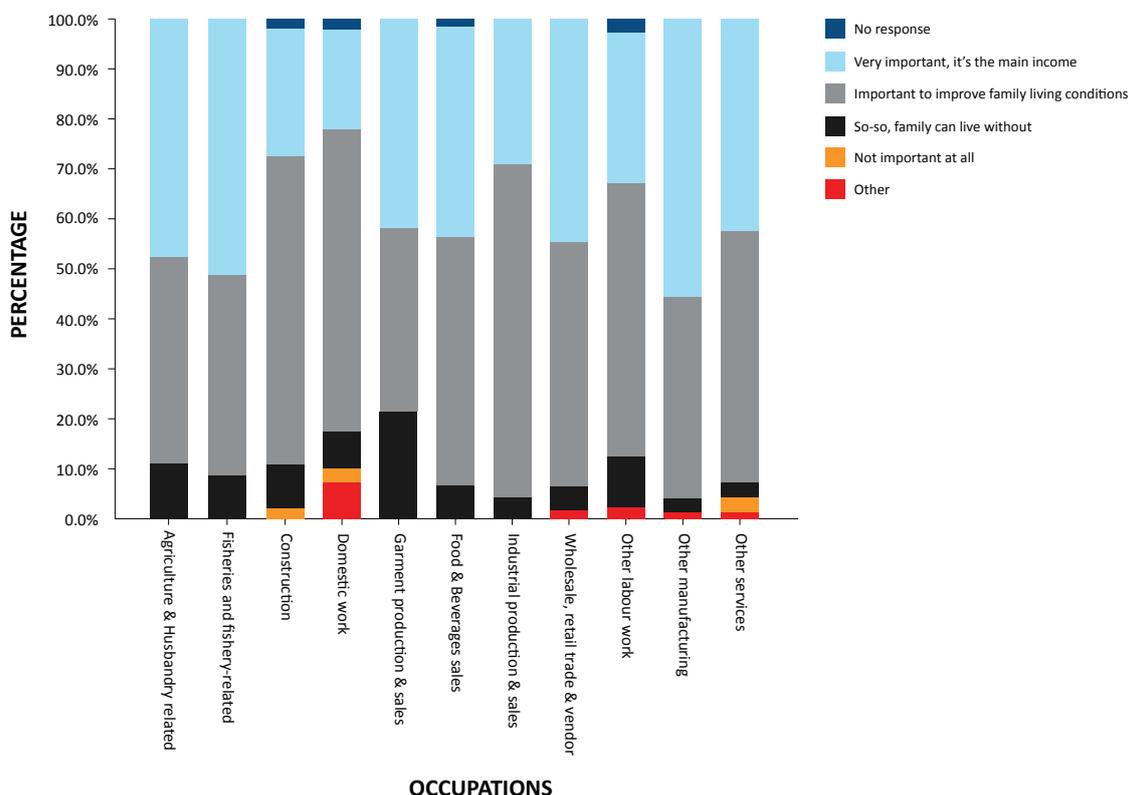
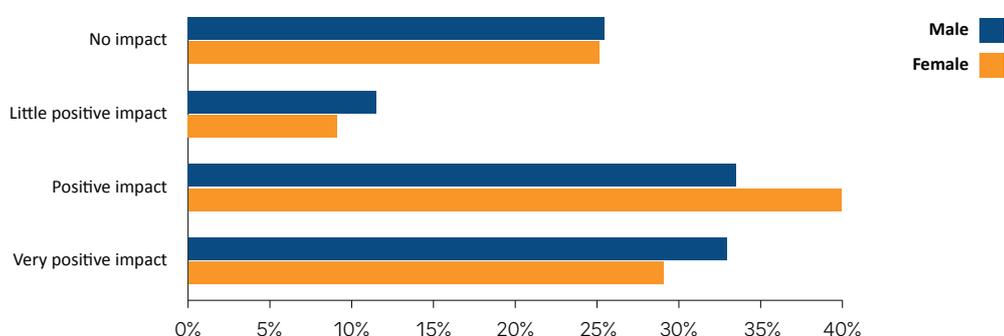


Figure 36 shows there was little difference between male and female migrants in regard to perception of the overall impact of migration upon their home communities, with the majority of migrants of both genders (approximately 65%) viewing migration as having either a “very positive” or “positive” impact.

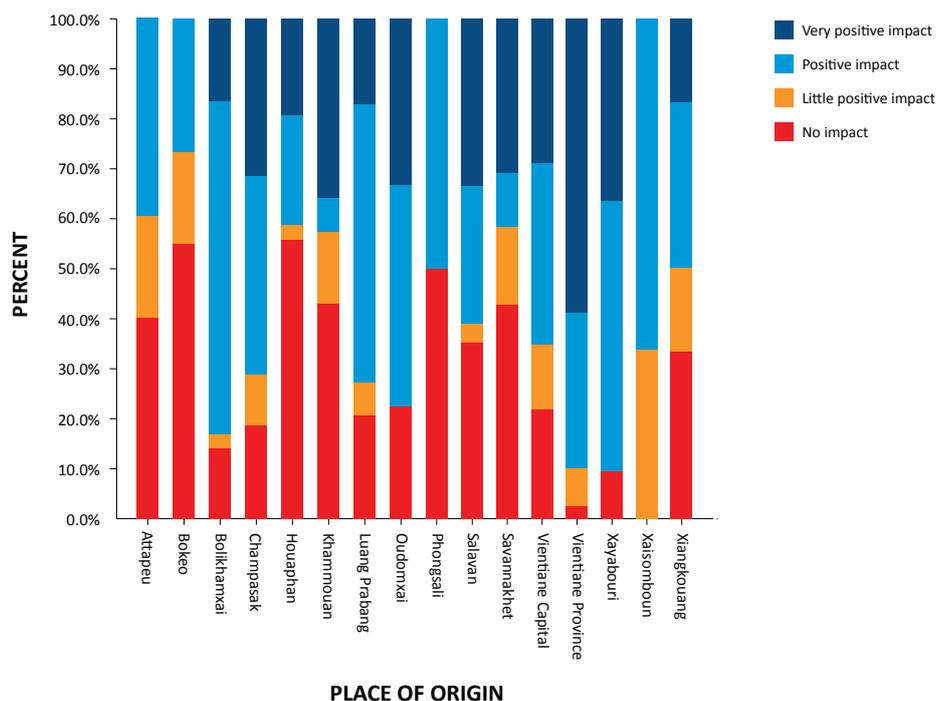
Figure 36: Perception of migration impacts among male and female migrants



With regard to ethnicity, the Laos and Laos Terng generally viewed migration more positively than the Laos Soong, with 65.5 per cent and 67.9 per cent viewing the impacts of migration as either “very positive” or “positive”, compared to 57.1 per cent of Laos Soong. Laos Soong had the highest proportion of migrants (42.9%) who viewed migration as having no impact on their home communities, almost twice as that of the other ethnic groups (24.8% for Laos Terng, and 24.2% for Laos).

When asked whether they felt migration had a positive impact on their home cities/villages, migrants from Vientiane province responded most positively, with 90.2 per cent stating they felt migration had either a “very positive” or a “positive” impact on their home cities/villages. Responses across most other provinces were also relatively positive, with the exceptions of Attapeu, Bokeo, Khammouan, Phongsali, Savannakhet and Xiangkouang where over 50 per cent of respondents felt migration had little or no positive impact on their homes, as shown in Figure 37. However, the numbers of migrants interviewed in Thailand originating from these provinces was very small making concrete conclusions difficult to draw, with the exception of Savannakhet, which comprised 9.7 per cent of the total sample and 58.2 per cent of migrants viewed migration as having little or no positive impact. In other provinces with higher rates of out-migration, the perceived impact of migration on home communities was generally more positive.

Figure 37: Perceived impact of migration among migrants by provinces of origin



Most respondents perceived various changes to their financial situations in relation to migration to Thailand. 36.2 per cent perceived significant improvements; 61.0 per cent reported their financial situations as slightly improved; while only 2.8 per cent said their situations remained the same. Again, however, returning migrants reported slightly less positive situations – 13.1 per cent reported significant improvements in their financial situations due to migration, but the majority (75.9%) reported only slightly improved financial situations. Smaller proportions reported their situation as staying the same (9.5%) or worsening (1.5%).

In relation to consumption habits, 37.1 per cent of the respondents reported that their spending had increased as a result of migration; 35.8 per cent reported their spending as remaining the same; and 27.1 per cent spent less than before.

With regard to savings habits, 69.6 per cent of the respondents reported having more savings. 26.3 per cent reported their levels of savings remained the same, while 2.2 per cent had less savings and 2.0 per cent reported having no savings.

In relation to investment habits, 23.8 per cent said they make more investments due to migration; 33.6 per cent said their levels of investments remained the same; 3.7 per cent made lower levels of investments than before, and 38.9 per cent reported having no investments.

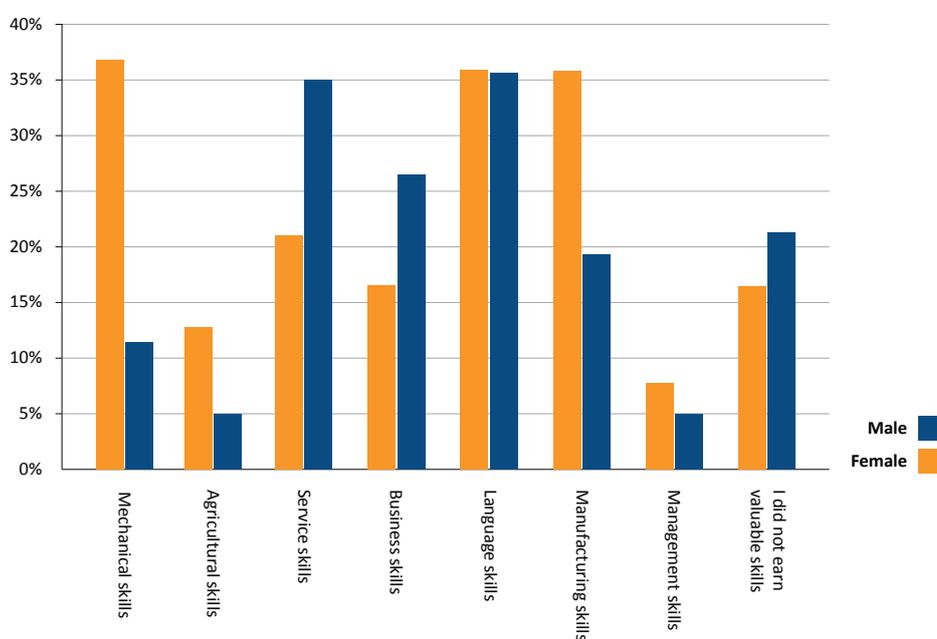
Chapter 4 – Skills gained and skills development opportunities

Skills obtained

81.3 per cent of all respondents reported gaining skills during their migration experience. 35.4 per cent obtained better Thai language skills from working in Thailand; 29.0 per cent acquired service skills; 25.7 per cent obtained manufacturing-related skills; 22.1 per cent gained business skills; 21.2 per cent obtained mechanical skills; 7.6 per cent acquired agricultural skills; and 5.6 per cent gained management skills. 18.7 per cent did not obtain any skills.

The top three skills that female migrants obtained from working in Thailand were language skills, service skills and business operation while male migrants obtained mechanical skills, language and manufacturing skills, as shown in Figure 38. There were also significant proportions of both male and female migrants who reported not obtaining any skills.

Figure 38: Top skills that male and female migrants obtained from working in Thailand

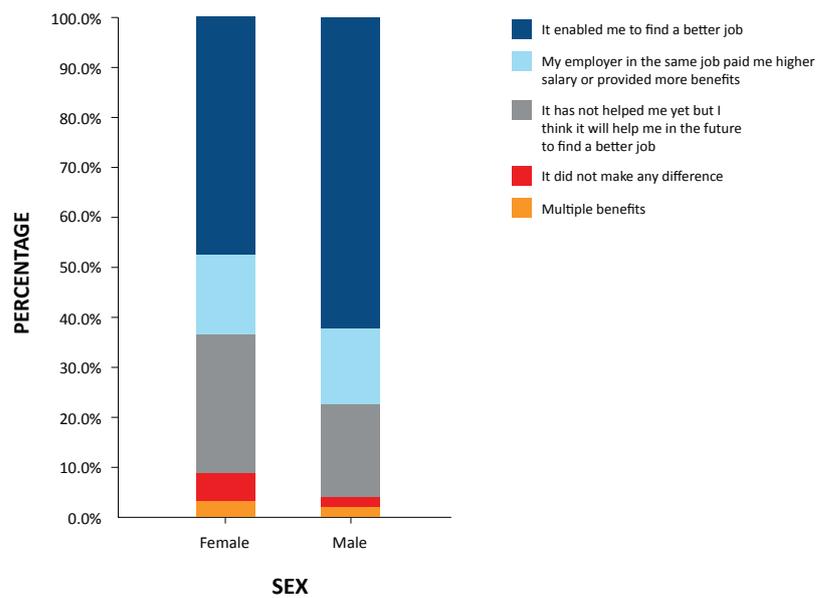


Interestingly however, the largest proportion of returning migrants (50%) reported learning agricultural skills, while the only other significant skill gained reported among returning migrants was mechanical skills (12.8%). 23.6 per cent of returning migrants reported not obtaining any skills while in Thailand.

Overall, of those migrants who reported receiving skills training, respondents in all sectors obtained new skills primarily from their work through on-the-job training (46.2 per cent learned from their employers); while only very small proportions attended private training institutes (0.8%); participated in trainings organized by NGOs (0.2%); or attended vocational schools (0.1%). Slightly over half of the respondents (52.7%) had never received any training. Migrants in the fisheries and construction sectors reported highest rates of on-the-job training.

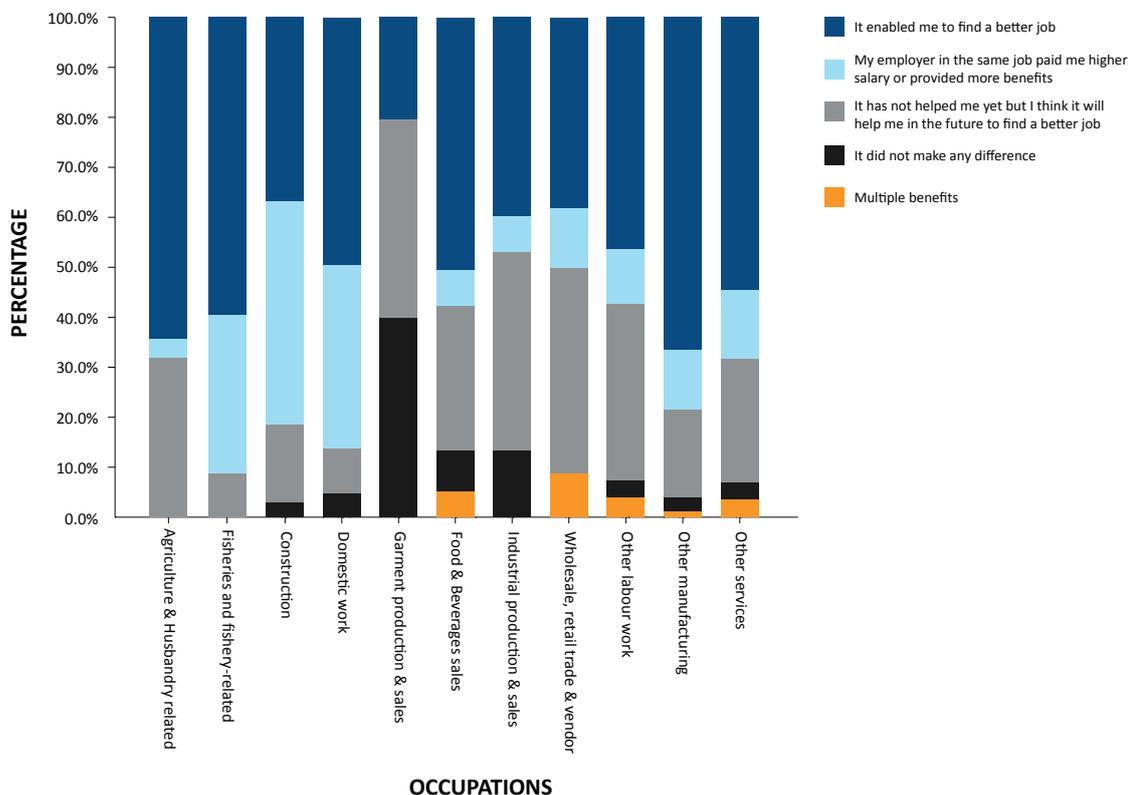
According to Figure 39, males reported to a greater extent than females (62.6% versus 47.5%) that the skills they gained in Thailand enabled them to find a better job. Approximately the same proportion of males and females reported that the skills gained led to higher salaries or more benefits in the same job (14.8% and 16.3%), while a greater proportion of females responded that skills training had not yet had an impact but they hoped it would help them in the future (27.6%) than males (18.9%). Overall therefore, male migrants seemed to benefit more than female workers from skills training.

Figure 39: Skills gained and improved employment opportunities by gender



In terms of sector, the highest proportion of workers in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors (66.5% and 64.3%) reported that the skills gained helped them to find a better job as shown in Figure 40. Encouragingly, between 37 per cent and 60 per cent of workers across other sectors also reported that the skills they had gained enabled them to find a better job, with the exception of garment production and sales where only 20 per cent of respondents agreed with this statement. 31.9 per cent of workers in the fisheries sector, 44.7 per cent in the construction sector, and 36.4 per cent of domestic workers reported that the skills they gained led to higher salaries or greater benefits in the same job.

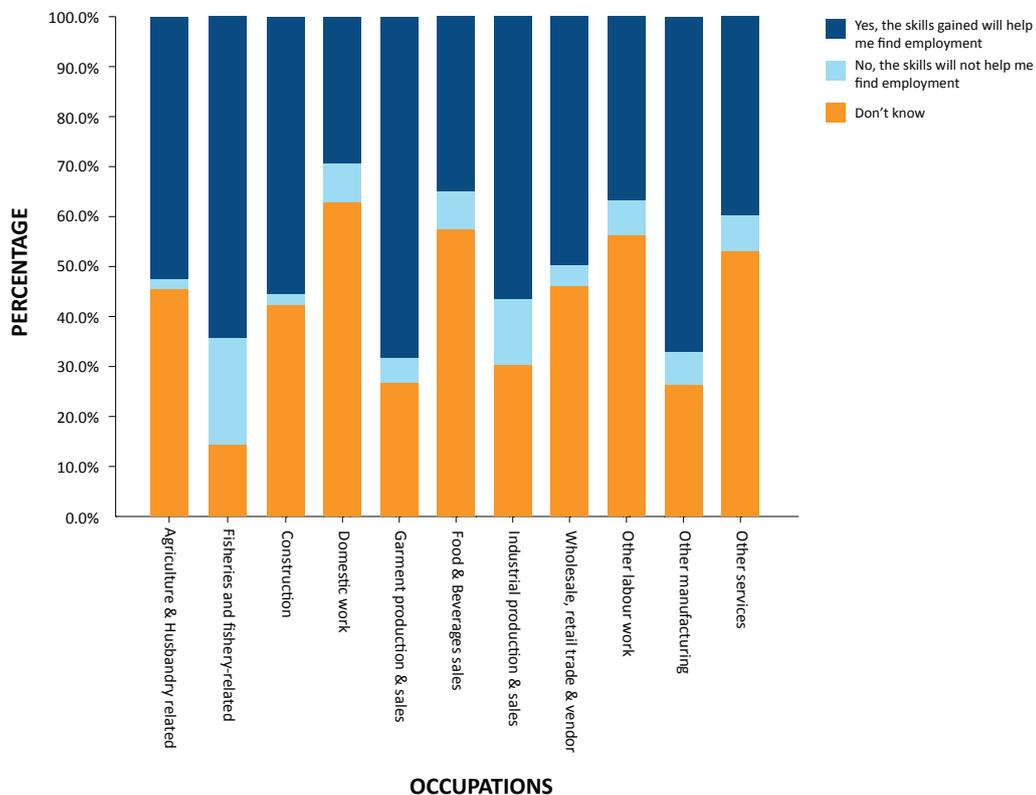
Figure 40: Skills gained and improved employment opportunities by sector



Almost half (49.4%) of the respondents believed that the skills they have obtained from working in Thailand will be beneficial to their work in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. 6.5 per cent did not think such skills would be useful upon return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic whereas 42.8 per cent did not know whether they will benefit from the skills they have learned in Thailand upon return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The proportion of respondents who believed the skills they gained in Thailand would be beneficial to their work in Lao People’s Democratic Republic increased to 56.1 per cent among returning migrants, while 16.3 per cent thought the skills gained would not be useful and 27.6 per cent were unsure.

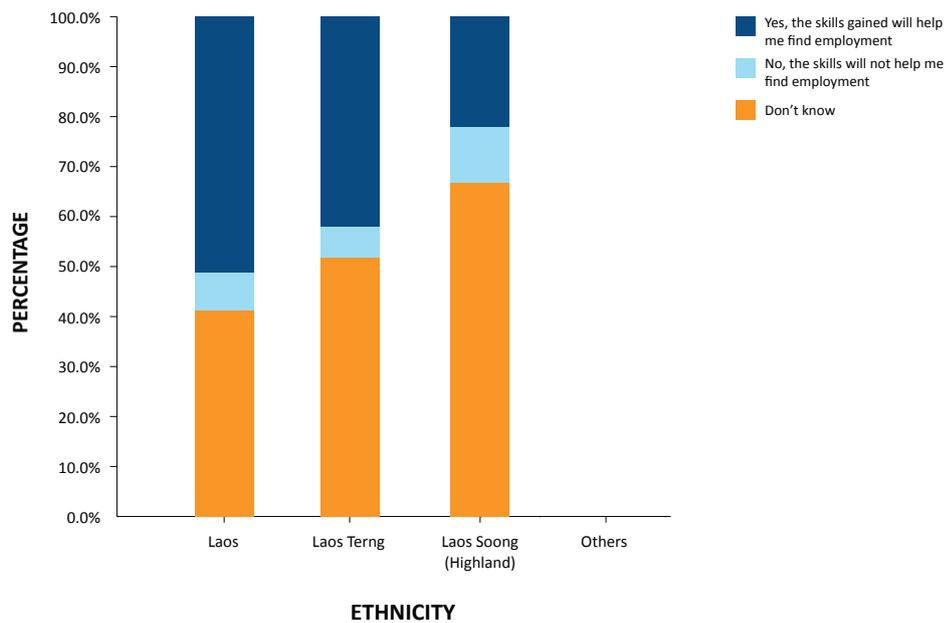
According to Figure 41, migrants in the garment production and sales and manufacturing sectors thought that it was most likely that the skills they gained in Thailand would help them find a job upon their return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, with 68.4 per cent and 67.1 per cent of the opinion that the skills they had gained in Thailand would help them find a job in Lao People’s Democratic Republic respectively. This was followed, somewhat surprisingly given the limited relevance of the sector to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, by workers in the fisheries sector and related work, with 64.5 per cent of the opinion that the skills gained would help them find a job upon return. Domestic workers expressed the greatest doubt about whether the skills they had gained in Thailand would help them find a job back home, with only 29.9 per cent of the opinion that they would and 62.5 per cent unsure.

Figure 41: Perceived impact of skills training on employment in Lao People’s Democratic Republic by sector



In terms of ethnicity, the “Laos” migrants were more positive that the skills gained in Thailand would help them find a job back home, with 51.4 per cent believing this was the case, compared to 42.4 per cent of Laos Terng and 22.2 per cent of Laos Soong. Laos Soong were most uncertain that the skills gained would improve their employment prospects in Laos People’s Democratic Republic, with 66.7 per cent being unsure of the effect, as shown in Figure 42 below.

Figure 42: Perceived impact of skills training on employment in Lao People's Democratic Republic by ethnicity



Experiences

In addition to skills, the respondents also gained a range of experiences including working in multicultural environments (21.7%), working under pressure (17.4%), self-confidence (17.2%), familiarity with modern technologies (9.1%), and familiarity with manufacturing or industrial systems (10.2%).

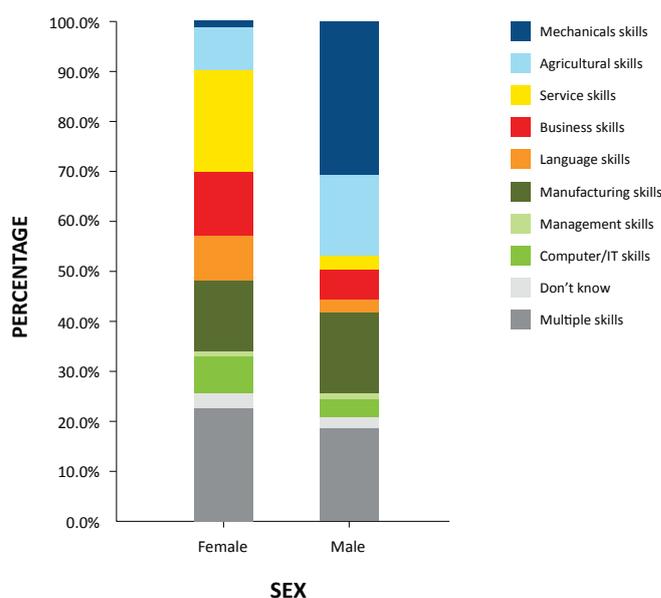
Interest in skills training

Less than half of the respondents (42.1%) expressed an interest in participating in skills trainings, while 57.9 per cent showed no interest. There was a higher proportion of males reporting interest in skills training (48.5%) than females (37.7%), with clear statistical significance.

With regard to types of skills training, the six top single types of skills training preferred by migrants were manufacturing (6.5%), mechanical skills (6.3%), service skills (5.1%), business skills (4%), language skills (2.6%), and computer and IT skills (2.4%). Some respondents were also interested in multi-skills trainings, such as mechanical and manufacturing skills (1.1%), mechanical and agricultural skills (0.8%), mechanical and English language skills (0.3%), agricultural and business skills (0.5%), and so on.

There were also some gender differences as shown in Figure 43. For those who did express interest in gaining new skills, the largest proportion of male migrants showed interest in learning mechanical skills (30.9%), manufacturing skills (16.1%), and agricultural skills (16.1%) whereas females showed the most interest in learning service skills (20.1%), manufacturing skills (14.7%) and business skills (12.5%). Both genders showed high levels of interest in learning multiple skills including various combinations of the above-mentioned skills.

Figure 43: Most appealing skills by gender



Migrants’ interests in skills trainings also varied in relation to their previous or current work. Interest in skills training in Thailand varied by sector of work, with those in general labour work (55.8%), manufacturing (54.9%), fisheries and related work (46.8%) and industrial production and sales (45.8%) most interested in skills training. Proportions of migrant workers interested in skills training was lower across other sectors with the lowest being “wholesale, retail trade and vendor” (24.4%).

When looking at the skills most interesting/appealing for migrant workers across different sectors, there was a moderate correlation between the type of work the migrant was engaged in and the type of skill they felt would be most interesting/appealing. For example, the largest proportion of respondents in the agricultural sector wanted to learn more agricultural skills (36.4%), the highest proportion in construction wanted to learn mechanical skills (31.6%), and the largest proportion in the service sector wanted to learn service skills (31.0%), albeit this was still less than half of the workers in these sectors in each case. Among domestic workers (35.7%) and migrants in the garment production and sales sector (50.0%), language skills were the most appealing. Migrants in the fisheries sector most commonly wanted to learn manufacturing skills (41.4%).

The respondents cited various benefits they felt they would gain from skills trainings, which included enabling them to immediately find new jobs (25.5%), finding better jobs in the future (11.2%) and getting higher payment for the same job (7.4%). Only 1.9 per cent did not expect the trainings to make any difference.

Of those who did not wish to participate in skills trainings, the majority (62.1%) did not have enough time. 27.8 per cent reported simply not being interested; 3.6 per cent could not afford the costs; 3.4 per cent were not aware of any training courses; 1.5 per cent said their employers did not permit them to attend trainings; and 1.4 per cent had other reasons.

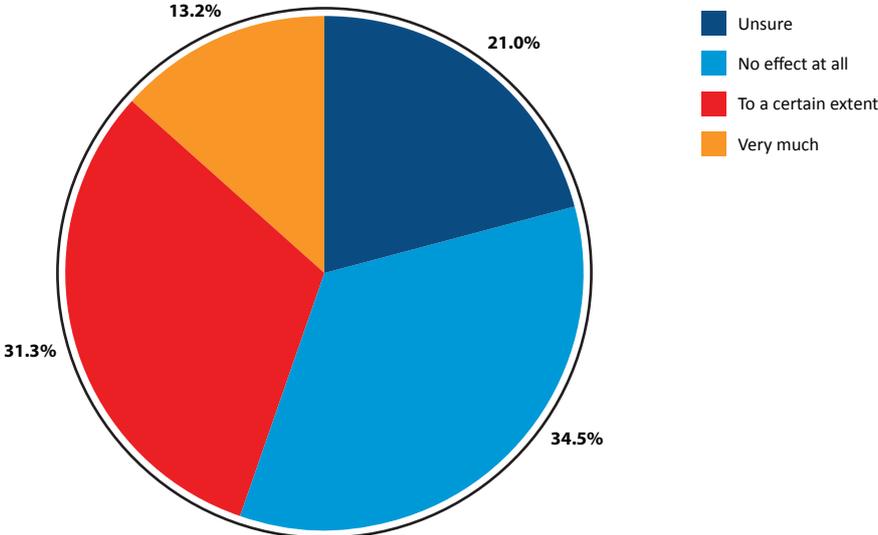
Of those migrants who reported not being interested in skills training, both genders reported the primary reason as not having enough time (57.3% for females and 68% for males). However, a significantly higher proportion of females (31.1%) reported not being interested in training than males (21.9%), indicating a clear need for skills development programming for migrant workers to incorporate a gender-based approach and take specific steps to engage women migrant workers in training programmes.

Chapter 5 – Future migration prospects

Overall, approximately half of the respondents (50.4%) reported considering returning to Lao People’s Democratic Republic permanently whereas the other half (49.5%) did not. The proportion of those considering return was slightly higher among males (53.6%) than females (48.2%), again likely explained by the fact that male migrant workers were more likely to have children in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. In regard to ethnicity, a slightly higher proportion of “Laos” migrants reported considering return (51.2%) than Laos Terng (44.7%) or Laos Soong (44.4%). Among those migrants who had already returned to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 74.0 per cent reported that they would consider re-migrating to Thailand.

With regard to the increase in the minimum wage rate in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 24.2 per cent of the respondents reported being aware of this policy very well, while 40.8 per cent had little awareness, and 35 per cent did not know about the change at all. Among those who were aware of the increase in the minimum wage, 13.2 per cent said this would affect their decision to return very much; 31.3 per cent said their return aspirations were affected to a certain extent; 34.5 per cent reported that they were not affected by the changes, whereas 21.0 per cent were unsure as shown in Figure 44.

Figure 44: Effect of Increase in Minimum Wage in Lao People’s Democratic Republic on Decisions to Return



Amongst the returning migrants, a far larger proportion of migrants reported that the minimum wage did not have any effect on their return decision (56.8%). However, it should be noted that some of these migrants may have made the decision to return before the minimum wage increase was introduced. 16.2 per cent and 18.2 per cent reported that the minimum wage increase affected their decision “to some extent” and “very much” respectively, whilst 8.8 per cent were not aware of the minimum wage increase despite having already returned.

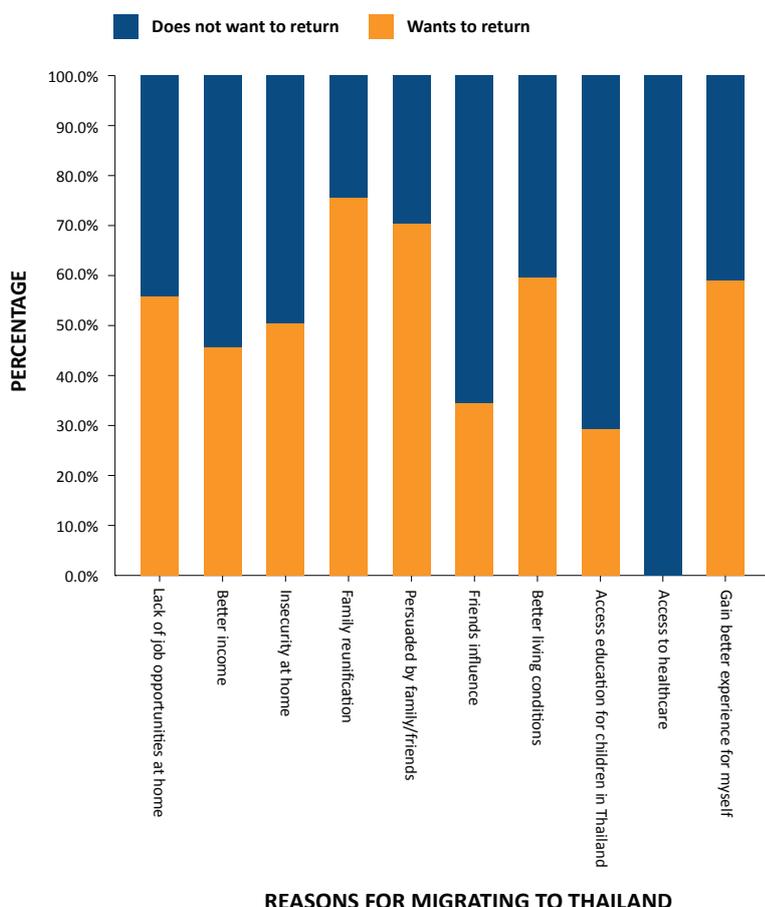
Reasons for return

Among those who wanted to return, the primary reason for this was wanting to live with family and friends (66.0%), followed by having enough savings (21.1%), and having stayed long enough in Thailand (8.7%). Much smaller proportion of migrants cited employment opportunities in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (0.7%); improved infrastructure and services (0.3%); greater security and safety (1.0%); and inability to save money as expected (1.5%) as primary reasons for wanting to return. However, when considering secondary reasons for wanting to return, there were higher proportions of migrants citing having stayed long enough in Thailand (20.7%) and having enough savings (37.5%). 8.7 per cent and 25.3 per cent of migrants cited improved employment opportunities in Lao People’s Democratic Republic as second and third reasons for wanting to return respectively. There were some gender differences, with a higher proportion of female migrants reporting that they were considering return primarily to live with family and friends (69.3%) as compared to males (61.9%), and a higher proportion of male migrants considering return because they had enough savings (23.8% versus 19.1%).

Of those who had already returned, the picture was similar, with 80.4 per cent of those having returned attributing this decision to wanting to live with family and friends. However, only 2.1 per cent attributed this decision to having enough savings. 10.0 per cent attributed their decision to problems encountered staying in Thailand (for example, dissatisfaction with working conditions).

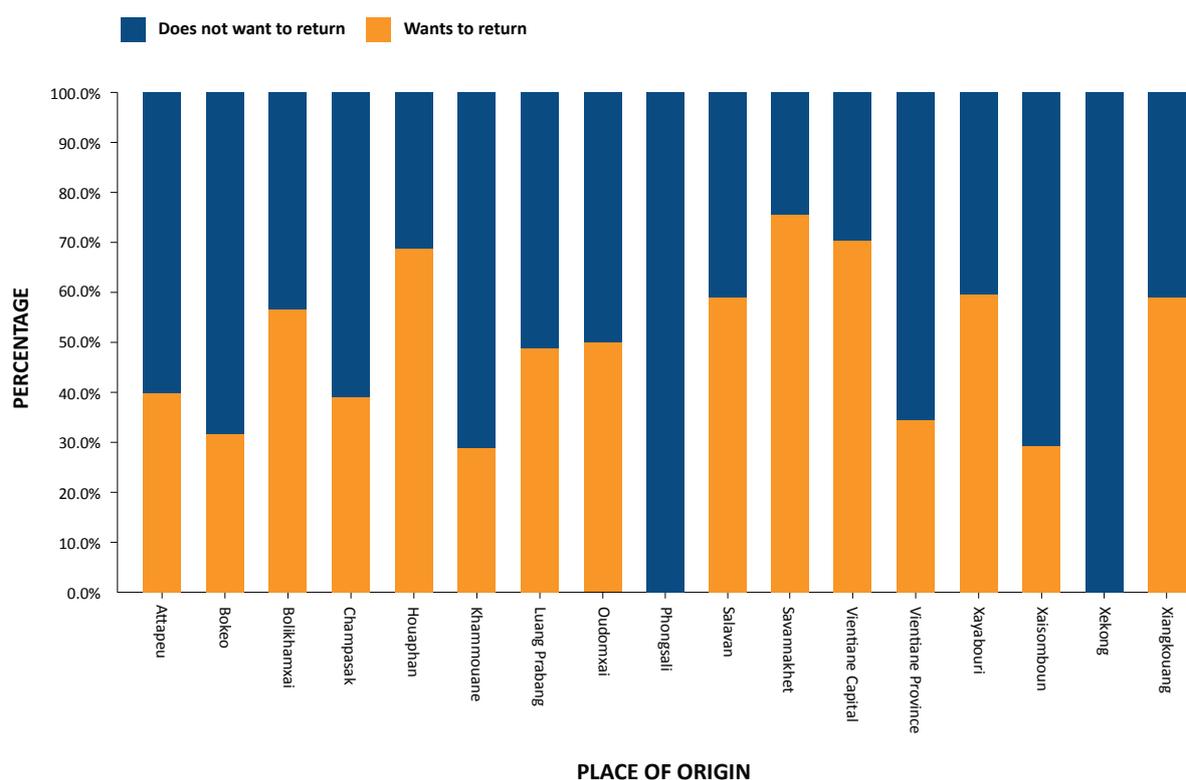
In comparing plans to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic depending upon the different reasons for migrating to Thailand in the first place, there were some differences; most notably, a greater proportion of those who migrated for “better income” (55.5%) reported considering returning to Lao People’s Democratic Republic permanently. Those who migrated because of lack of job opportunities at home (44%) were less likely to consider returning to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, while those who migrated because they were persuaded by family and friends were least likely to consider returning to Lao People’s Democratic Republic (30%), presumably because their family and friends also migrated to Thailand with them (see Figure 45 below).

Figure 45: Willingness to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic by primary reason for migrating to Thailand



Of those provinces with the highest rates of out-migration, the highest proportion of migrants wished to return to Champasak (61.0%), Salavan (57.8%) and Savannakhet (56.5%), while only 31.7 per cent of migrants from Vientiane Capital wished to return. Otherwise, there were significant variations in the willingness to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic among the different provinces of origin, as shown in Figure 46. However, it should be noted that other provinces of origin had very few respondents, making conclusions difficult to draw.

Figure 46: Willingness to return by province of origin



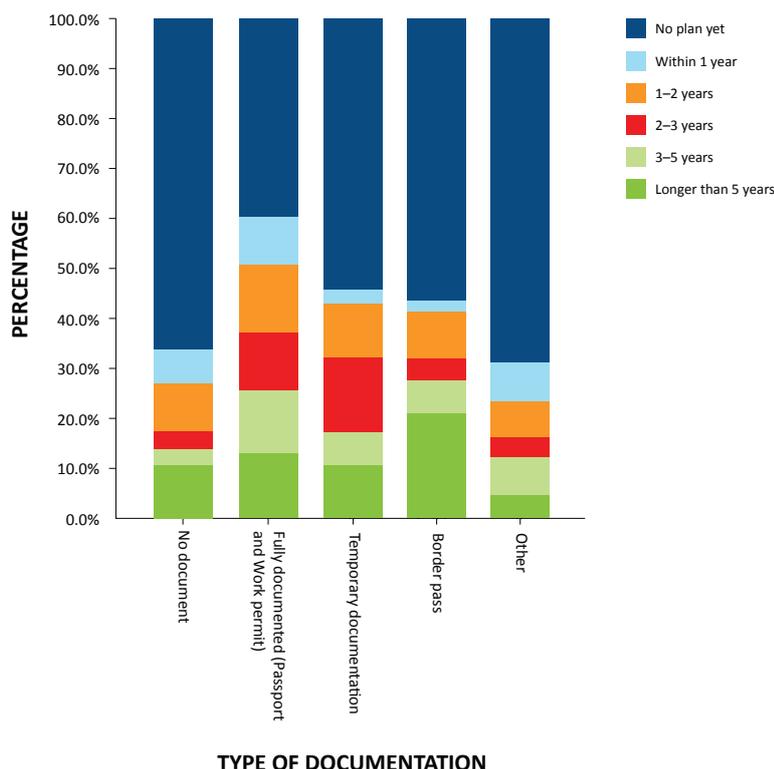
There was no correlation revealed between intention to return and remittances. Migrants who sent remittances above THB 30,000 per year were slightly more likely to consider returning to Lao People’s Democratic Republic than those who sent less, but the difference was not large or statistically significant, nor did this apply to higher remittance levels.

Timeframe for return

Among those who planned to return, 47.1 per cent had not yet planned when to return. 7.0 per cent planned to return within 1 year; 12.6 per cent within 1–2 years; 11.1 per cent within 2–3 years; 10.1 per cent within 3–5 years; and 11.9 per cent planned to return after 5 years.

Generally, there were similar patterns in timeframes for return among male and female migrants. However, those migrants with full documentation were more likely to have a concrete timeframe in mind for return (60.1% as opposed to 39.9% who had no plan), whereas migrants with no documents were far more likely to have no definite timeframe in mind for return (66.7%, Figure 47). Looking at the difference across sectors, those migrants in labour work (71.9%), wholesale, retail trade and vendor work (68.8%), and domestic work (64.0%) were least likely to have a clear timeframe in mind for return. The majority of migrants in manufacturing (77.3%), construction (71.4%), and fishery related sectors (67.3%), had a clear timeframe as to when to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, with those in manufacturing most likely to return within one year (although the majority in all sectors (who expressed a timeframe for return) planned to stay for longer than one year). Among the predominant migrant-sending provinces, about half of those from Champasak (48.6%) and Vientiane capital (53.6%) had a specific timeframe as to when to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic. 76.9 per cent of migrants who came from Luang Prabang also had specific plans as to when to return home.

Figure 47: Timeframe for return among migrants of different documentation status



Almost half of the respondent (43.9%) believed that they will be able to find jobs easily in Lao People’s Democratic Republic according to the following reasons: 31.9 per cent were confident about the skills they had obtained in Thailand; 28.9 per cent felt they had good networks; 16.3% thought there were many jobs available in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; and 12.9 per cent said they have gained more experiences and resources, while the remainder cited multiple reasons.

Those who did not believe they would find jobs easily in Lao People’s Democratic Republic provided the following reasons; 61.0 per cent thought there were not many jobs available in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; 20.3 per cent felt they did not have good enough networks; 6.6 per cent said they did not have the required skills; another 6.6 per cent said they did not have enough work experience; and the remainder cited multiple reasons.

Preparation for return

In terms of preparation for return, 68.2 per cent of the respondents who were planning to go back to Lao People’s Democratic Republic had been saving up money; 15.4 per cent had plans for residences; 9.4 per cent were seeking employment in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; 5.6 per cent had made travel plans; 1.2 per cent did not know what to prepare, whereas 29.1 per cent had not prepared anything.

Types of work in Lao People’s Democratic Republic

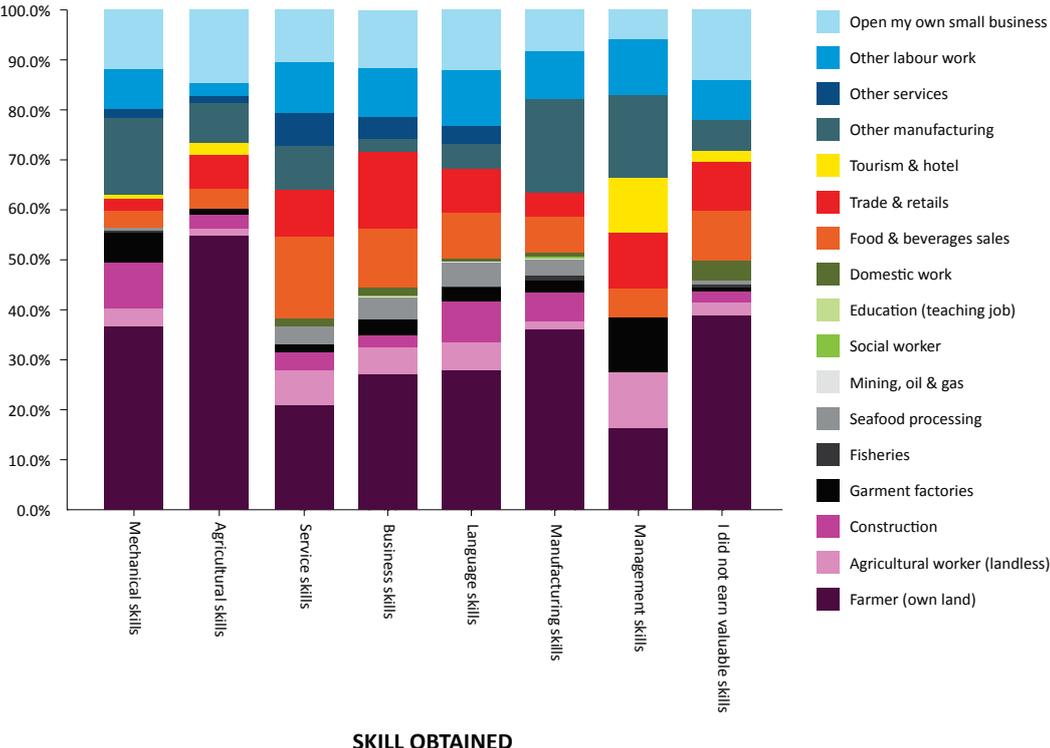
Among the respondents who planned to return, the largest proportion of workers (44.0%) expected to become farmers on their own lands; 14.7 per cent wanted to have their own businesses; 11.3 per cent would like to work in food and beverage sales; 11.0 per cent would like to be employed as general labour; 10.7 per cent would work in the manufacturing sector; 10.5 per cent in retail and trade; 6.8 per cent in the construction sector; and 5.2 per cent in the agricultural sector (no land). Less than 5 per cent intended to work in general services, the seafood-processing industry, garment factories, domestic work, the tourism sector, and the fisheries sector. 7.3 per cent would take any available employment opportunities.

Amongst migrants who had already returned, an even higher proportion (64.1%) said they would be farmers on their own land in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The next highest proportions were those intending to work in general labour work (12.8%), “other” work (14.1%) and in the agricultural sector (with no land) (8.8%). Only very small proportions intended to work in other sectors (the next highest was construction at 4.7%), while only 1.4 per cent intended to start their own business.

The preference/expectation to work in the agricultural sector post-return was especially true for those who already worked in agriculture and husbandry in Thailand but also true for those who had gained other skills than agriculture. There were 44.7 per cent of migrants who worked in construction planning to continue the career in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and around a quarter (25.6%) of migrants who worked in wholesale, retail trade and vending planned to find a job in the same sector back in Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

When looking at the relationship between types of skills gained in Thailand and expected type of work in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, for every type of skill obtained a small portion of migrants wished to open a small business back in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (5.6% to 14%), but the most common target sector was still the agricultural sector, ranging from 27.8 per cent of those who gained management skills to 57.9 per cent of those who gained agricultural skills (Figure 48).

Figure 48: Expected work in Lao People’s Democratic Republic and skills gained in Thailand



Expected income levels upon return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Upon return to work in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the majority (60.5%) of respondents would accept the same income level as they were receiving in Thailand, while 16.6 per cent would accept incomes at the level of subsistence in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Only 6.6 per cent expected to receive a higher income than in Thailand. 8.4 per cent would accept no less than two thirds of their present income in Thailand, while 8 per cent would be satisfied with half of their present income.

Interestingly, amongst returning migrants, approximately half (49.2%) of migrants stated that their minimum acceptable salary in Lao People’s Democratic Republic was “enough to survive”, while 26.3 per cent said that not less than 50 per cent of their income in Thailand would be the minimum acceptable rate. Only 7.5 per cent and 3.0 per cent reported that they would only accept the same as Thailand or more than in Thailand respectively, which overall seem to indicate lower expectations amongst returning migrants regarding salary prospects in Lao People’s Democratic Republic than among migrants still in Thailand.

Unsurprisingly, a greater proportion (16.5%) of those migrants earning less than minimum wage (THB 300 per day) than those earning minimum wage or above expressed that their minimum acceptable wage in Lao People’s Democratic Republic should be higher than what they receive in Thailand. However, even within this group, 51.9 per cent expressed that their minimum acceptable wage upon return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic was the same as they currently earn in Thailand. Of those migrants earning more than minimum wage (THB >300 per day), a greater proportion (27%) expressed “enough to survive” as their minimum acceptable wage in Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

Across all occupations, the largest proportion of migrants expected their income in Lao People’s Democratic Republic to be equivalent to their levels of income in Thailand, with the largest proportion of migrants expressing their expected minimum income in Lao People’s Democratic Republic to be the same as Thailand being in the manufacturing sector (76.2%). There were no significant differences in expectations in minimum salaries between genders.

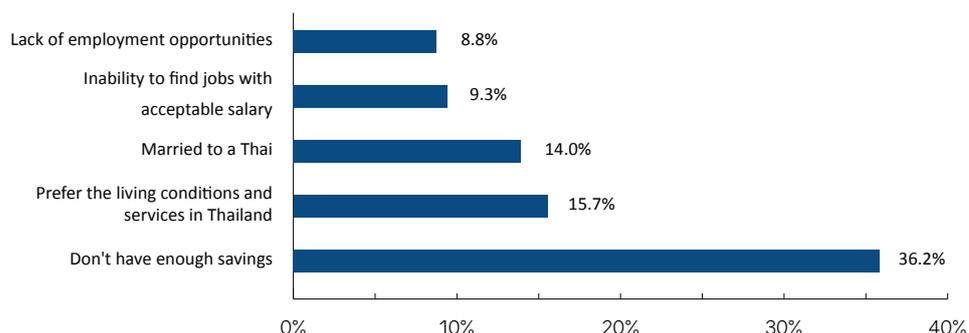
Expected destinations upon return

The vast majority of migrants who were planning to return (90.5%) would like to return to their hometowns. Much smaller proportions would return to where families or friends are residing (5.6%); to big cities in Lao People’s Democratic Republic (1.8%); and to where jobs are available (1.3%), while 0.7 per cent did not know yet.

Reasons not to return

For respondents who did not plan to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, their primary reasons were as follows: 36.2 per cent did not have enough savings; 8.8 per cent felt there were not enough employment opportunities in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; 9.3 per cent felt they could not find jobs with acceptable salaries; 15.7 per cent preferred the living conditions and services in Thailand; 14.0 per cent were married to Thais; 6.1 per cent had no relatives left in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; and 4.4 per cent wanted to raise their children in Thailand. Only very small proportions (<1%) of migrants cited other reasons such as losing their land in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; dissatisfaction with the poor infrastructure in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; fear they may not be able to reintegrate into communities; difficulty for their families/children to adjust to life in Lao People’s Democratic Republic; uncertainty about security in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, or inability to find jobs suitable to their present skills (Figure 49).

Figure 49: Top five reasons not to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic



Chapter 6 – Conclusions and recommendations

Discussion and conclusions

Policy framework

At the time of this research, Thailand's policy framework permitted migrant workers to work as "unskilled" workers in the labour, domestic work and fisheries sectors. In practice however, Laotian migrant workers were reported to be working in various sectors including semi-skilled work. Therefore, a first question is whether Thailand should revise its policy framework to allow migrant workers (from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar) to work in a more varied range of sectors and at higher skill levels in Thailand. The qualitative research showed that opinions of government officers varied between supporting the existing policy to expanding the permitted sectors and skill levels in which migrants are allowed to work. Labour officials of the Royal Thai Government interviewed for this study generally supported continuation of the existing policy, that is, limiting the working sectors in which migrant workers are permitted to work to labour, fisheries and domestic work. Government officers in the security sector were similarly not supportive of this suggestion while also recommending that the policy to regularize migrants should be more strictly enforced because the number of unregistered migrants remained high. On the other hand, Government officials from the Ministry of Public Health suggested the expansion of working sectors for migrants. They cited that the existing policy had negative impacts on Laotian migrants working in the karaoke and entertainment sectors, which are not included in the working sectors permitted by existing legislation of Thailand. Workers in these sectors therefore remain irregular, unable to register and at risk of exploitation, health issues and other protection concerns.

The proportion of Laotian migrants in this study who had entered Thailand through the MOU was relatively low at under one quarter of all Laotian migrants in Thailand, suggesting that the current policy framework and associated mechanisms are not working effectively enough to meet the demand for migrant workers in the economy of Thailand, as the vast majority are choosing to migrate irregularly. These findings suggest that there continues to be a need for an efficient and cost-effective process to allow irregular migrant workers in Thailand to be able to regularize their status, while the MOU needs to be made much more streamlined and cost-effective in order for it to be made more appealing both for employers and for migrants. However, the qualitative research also revealed that for many employers, the registration of migrants was not a matter of concern, and some employers preferred to hire unregistered Laotian migrants because they could pay cheaper wages, while others cited that registered migrants tend to leave their jobs more easily. Hiring unregistered Laotian migrants was a normal practice among many, but not all, employers, and registration was often considered unnecessary. Several employers complained that registration as confined to a restricted time period did not match the reality and discouraged employers from registering their workers. It was recommended that the registration period should therefore be extended to cover the full year in order to encourage more registration. Civil society representatives cited the expense of the process as a problem for individual migrants who migrated by themselves and, as employers did not want to advance money for them, they often remained unregistered. For future registration and regularization processes to be successful, it is therefore essential that employers have sufficient incentives to participate (or disincentives not to participate) for these processes to be successful in regularizing the status of large numbers of migrant workers in Thailand.

Recruitment and employment

The study revealed considerable differences in the way Laotian migrant workers are recruited to work in Thailand, an insight backed up by the findings of the qualitative research. Employers reported that the recruitment process varied from formal recruitment through the MOU, to informal recruitment, individual brokers, and on-site application. Employers in the manufacturing, food processing, and garment sectors hiring large number of migrants mostly recruited Laotian migrants through recruitment agencies, including branches or business partners in Lao People's Democratic Republic, and some employers sent their human resource staff to recruit migrants in Lao People's Democratic Republic. On the other hand, small businesses and individual employers hired Laotian migrants primarily through personal networks (including former migrants, relatives and brokers) or on-site applications. Laotian migrants in Thailand most often stated that they got their jobs through their networks, brokers or self-application. Domestic workers were usually recruited directly by employers, generally relying on their personal networks of relatives and friends.

Employers also complained that the recruitment process through the MOU or recruitment agencies took a long time, sometimes several weeks or months. Using brokers took only a few days or a week, and so was reportedly most popular among employers; however, of the migrants interviewed under this study, a greater proportion had entered

Thailand under the MOU than with the help of brokers. Sometimes employers in need of more workers reported not being willing or able to wait to recruit migrant workers through regular channels due to the time involved, and so preferred to take a short cut by recruiting Laotian workers who were already staying in Thailand. Laotian migrants who came through the MOU or a recruitment agency similarly complained about the time they had to wait before obtaining documents and starting work. The lengthy procedure involved in formal recruitment may drive migrants to choose informal channels to enter the labour market in Thailand. Self-application is simple and many Laotian migrants reported being successful in gaining a job with their first application, although some employers would put them on trial before accepting them. For those who did use the services of brokers, another main challenge migrant workers reported facing is the excessive fees charged.

In addition to the complex and time-consuming procedures involved in hiring migrant workers through the regular channels, retaining the migrant workers was reported as the main challenge among employers. In working sectors with high numbers of migrants of various nationalities, conflict between different nationalities was also reported as common.

In most cases, the working agreement between Laotian migrants and their employers was verbal. Written contracts were made only by a few employers in the manufacturing sector and for migrants coming through the MOU. In the case of domestic workers, respondents almost unanimously reported that the nature of employment was informal, and that no contracts were provided, exposing workers to potential vulnerable situations that may involve withdrawal of passports and at worst, situations of abuse or exploitation.

Employers reported that domestic labour shortages, cultural similarity and ease of communication were the main reasons for recruiting Laotian migrants. To many employers, Laotian migrants were considered more polite, obedient and honest. A number of employers interviewed also praised Laotian migrants' willingness to work and their tolerance for hard work.

In the selection of migrant workers, employers in different businesses reported various preferences. With regard to age, younger Laotian migrants were preferred in food and beverage sales and the karaoke/entertainment sector, which required only those aged 18–25 years. In other sectors age preferences were more general, with migrants aged 20–40 years primarily selected because they were considered to be more ready for hard work and more diligent, in comparison to younger workers. Educational background was generally not considered important to most employers in all sectors; rather, the ability and willingness to work was the main consideration. Some employers considered primary education level as sufficient, while some considered knowledge of Thai language or basic Thai literacy as highly beneficial because it would enable migrants to better communicate and understand the instructions being given to them. Employers generally did not require any certified skills for migrant workers because they considered hiring Laotian workers primarily for low-skilled work.

The findings on recruitment and employment point largely to the importance of personal and social networks in securing employment opportunities for Laotian migrant workers in Thailand, with nearly half of the migrants under this study migrating with friends and relatives, and only 13 per cent migrating with the assistance of brokers. This trend and the reliance on personal and social networks to facilitate migration is likely stronger than for other nationalities of migrants migrating to Thailand, given the cultural and linguistic similarities between Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic. Secondly, the findings also point to the inefficiencies of the current MOU system in matching the needs of employers with the wishes of the migrants to work in Thailand. Approximately 22 per cent of migrants interviewed under this study entered Thailand through the MOU, despite the relatively lower number of Laotian migrants in comparison to Cambodian and Myanmar migrants. The qualitative research findings further back up the notion that the MOU is an overly cumbersome, time-consuming and unappealing recruitment channel for both employers and migrants, emphasizing the need to streamline and simplify the procedure to ensure a greater number of migrants can access the regular labour migration channel. Interestingly, the sector with the highest proportion of migrants entering through the MOU (manufacturing) was also the sector with the highest average monthly wages, and one offering comparatively better prospects for migrant workers.

Pre-migration situations

The research shows that the majority of migrants had very low levels of education prior to migration and did not have any income. Of those who were working, approximately half were engaged in agriculture. These findings were particularly magnified when evaluated through a gender lens, with larger proportions of female migrants having had no education and no income prior to migration. This has important implications both for development efforts in Lao People's Democratic Republic – in regard to promoting access to education and creating jobs and livelihoods for young people, particularly women – and in terms of preparing the potential migrant workforce for migration to Thailand (or elsewhere) and facilitating safe migration.

Situations of Laotian migrants in Thailand

The overall situation of Laotian migrants in Thailand related primarily to their economic situation, as the majority of Laotian migrants migrated to Thailand for economic reasons, and nearly 99 per cent of those interviewed in this study were working. Approximately 90 per cent of migrants highlighted high levels of satisfaction with their living and working conditions, further emphasizing that, despite the challenges associated with migration, the majority of Laotian migrants have positive experiences in Thailand. This finding should further reinforce positive understandings of migration, from the perspective of both host and origin communities/countries. The proportion of migrants reporting high levels of satisfaction was highest amongst migrants who had entered through the MOU, indicating that despite the challenges associated with migration through this channel, it is associated with a greater likelihood of satisfaction with living and working conditions in Thailand. Access to health care was also encouragingly high, with the majority of migrants who had been staying in Thailand for extended periods of time reporting “easy” access to health care. Access to financial services was slightly less straightforward and as such is something that should be focused on as an area for improvement. In considering access to services generally, the level of documentation was a clear contributing factor to ease of access, further emphasizing the importance of providing opportunities for migrant workers to register and acquire documentation while in Thailand, as well as in advance for those migrating through the MOU.

While the majority of migrants surveyed earned minimum wage or above, there was still over a quarter of migrants who reported receiving less than the minimum wage; however, it should be noted that over half of these migrants indicated that they received some other form of welfare from their employers, primarily accommodation. The proportion receiving less than minimum wage was considerably higher among undocumented migrants, indicating again the importance of documentation in ensuring migrants are able to enjoy their rights. On the other hand, it should also be noted that there were still significant proportions of fully documented migrants who reported receiving less than the daily minimum wage, which could have the effect of discouraging migrants from regularizing their status if they do not associate fully documented status (and the costs associated with this) with greater benefits or higher wages. A further disconcerting finding regarding wages was the gender disparities – with male migrant workers earning, on average, higher wages than females. This finding, together with the highly gendered-nature of some sectors of work, emphasizes the need to take a gender-centric approach when considering appropriate interventions to support and assist migrant workers in Thailand and ensure their access to rights and services, particularly on a sector-specific basis. Overall, the highest wages were seen in the manufacturing sector, which also had high levels of documentation. The manufacturing sector could therefore be seen as a comparatively better sector to work in for “low-skilled” migrant workers.

There were also some more concerning findings, however. For example, more than one third of the respondents said their passports were kept by their employers. Such a practice is against the law and hinders workers’ access to services as applying for services, including social security and banking, requires an official identity/travel document. Retaining workers’ documents gives employers unnecessary control in deciding what services migrant workers should receive, as well as depriving workers of their right to travel at will and leaving them unfairly vulnerable to arrest.

Remittances

The remittances sent by Laotian migrants in Thailand were substantial – averaging THB 39,980 per migrant over the previous twelve months prior to this study, and if aggregated by the estimated total regular Laotian migrant population in Thailand, would total USD 331 million per year, considerably higher than previous estimates of remittances flowing from Thailand to Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The importance of remittances to migrants’ households in Lao People’s Democratic Republic is further emphasized by the finding that the vast majority of migrants viewed remittances as “important” or “very important” for their families. These findings highlight the significant potential of remittances to contribute to development and poverty reduction in communities of origin. In considering further the specific impact of remittances, the finding that the primary use of remittances in this study was overwhelmingly “family expenses” implies that remittances are likely to have a significant poverty reduction effect at the family/household level, although their impact beyond this, for example on broader economic growth, is far less clear, mirroring findings from previous research on remittances and development. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that even the use of remittances on “family expenses” would have a knock-on effect at the village and community levels. Despite the fact that remittances are private flows of money, usually from one family member to another, it is nonetheless important to recognize their potential impact on poverty reduction and socioeconomic development beyond the level of the household alone, and further community-level programming could be considered to promote or incentivize migrants and their families to put remittances towards initiatives that would contribute to the wider socioeconomic development of their communities.

However, the findings also reveal significant challenges in ensuring remittances can be sent and received cheaply and effectively. Approximately half of the respondents sending remittances by bank transfer reported fees of five per cent or above, while respondents also identified a range of factors hindering their ability to send and receive remittances effectively, most especially few mechanisms to receive remittances in Lao People's Democratic Republic, particularly in rural areas, and also challenges in accessing financial services while in Thailand. These findings suggest that, in terms of maximizing the flows of remittances from migrants in Thailand to their families back home, efforts to reduce fees associated with sending the remittances in Thailand and enhance access to financial services, together with efforts to enhance the ability of migrant families in rural areas to access associated financial services and receive these remittances, may be most useful.

Interestingly, more female migrants than males reported making the decision to spend the remittances themselves, whereas the decision being made by another family member or as a collective decision involving the household was higher among males than females. This finding, together with the findings showing that males were more likely to be married and to migrate leaving children behind in Lao People's Democratic Republic compared to females, indicate that migration can represent a somewhat different strategy for male and female migrants. Specifically, for male migrants there is a higher tendency to migrate alone as an income-generating strategy to support families back home, whereas for female migrants there is a higher tendency to migrate as a family, taking the children with them, or for those without families, to migrate as an individual strategy to increase one's own economic well-being. This is further explained by the finding that a higher proportion of females reported having no income prior to their migration experience.

When looking at the overall impact of migration upon communities of origin, the perspective of respondents was still positive, but less overwhelmingly so than when considering remittances alone. Overall, the majority of respondents viewed migration as having a positive or very positive impact upon their home communities, but there were also significant proportions across various provinces of origin (over 50% in some cases) who viewed migration as having no impact or even a negative impact. These findings emphasize the need to look beyond remittances alone in evaluating the impact of migration on poverty reduction and development. Given that the migrants were providing their perspective to this question while still in Thailand, it is likely that while economically migration was considered a beneficial strategy for families and households, it is important to consider family and societal impacts, as well as the broader economic impact at the community or country level, which can include both positive (for example, flows of remittances) and negative (for example, brain drain/waste) dimensions.

Skills

Over 80 per cent of migrants reported gaining valuable skills during their time in Thailand, a finding which is highly significant for considering the potential impact of returning migrant workers on poverty reduction and socioeconomic development in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Although migrant workers in Thailand work in "low-skilled" occupations, clearly they still acquire important and significant technical and soft skills during their migration experience. "On-the-job training" was reported as by far the most common type of training among migrants and employers, which was generally delivered across numerous sectors by employers or experienced workers. The benefit of on-the-job training is that it allows the migrant to earn whilst they are being trained, which is an important consideration if it is noted that the primary reason cited by migrants for not wanting skills training was the lack of time.

Aside from language skills, which was the most widely reported skill acquired during migration, male migrants most commonly reported gaining mechanical and manufacturing skills while female migrants most commonly reported acquiring business and service skills. Key to ensuring the maximum impact on poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic is ensuring that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to support returning migrant workers to utilize and build upon these skills productively. For example, mechanisms to support the recognition of skills gained during the migration experience would stand returning migrant workers in good stead for acquiring improved, higher-paying jobs within these sectors upon their return, whilst entrepreneurial support for those who wish to start their own businesses in these fields would also be significant in maximizing the impact of the skills gained by Laotian migrant workers during migration.

The highest proportion of workers in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors reported that the skills gained helped them to find a better job, although significant proportions of workers across nearly all sectors also reported that the skills they had gained enabled them to find a better job or acquire better wages or working conditions in the same job. The qualitative research revealed benefits of skills development going beyond higher wages or better jobs, to encompass greater self-confidence, stronger knowledge and greater productivity in doing their jobs, and increased ability to start their own business. These findings emphasize the value of skills training, both prior to their departure but also during migration, for example through "in-service" training while in Thailand.

Viewing the acquisition of skills through a gendered lens again revealed a more complex picture, with a significantly smaller proportion of females than males reporting that the skills gained were useful for them in acquiring better jobs, wages, or working conditions. While it is possible that this finding may be partly explained by the types of jobs females were most predominantly employed in (for example, domestic work) this finding is nonetheless concerning, as it further highlights the differential access to decent employment and training opportunities amongst male and female migrants, similarly to the differential wage rates paid to male and female migrant workers. Therefore, it is critical that skills development programming for migrant workers incorporates a clear strategy for outreach and engagement of the female migrant worker population, including monitoring the impacts of skills training on male and female migrant workers. Furthermore, the research showed that the most common skills that female migrants obtained from working in Thailand (language skills, service skills and business operation) were very different from the skills that male migrants obtained (mechanical skills, language and manufacturing skills). Similarly, with regard to future skills training, male migrants showed the most interest in learning mechanical skills, manufacturing skills, and agricultural skills whereas females showed the most interest in learning service skills, manufacturing skills and business skills, again emphasizing the importance of incorporating a strong gender lens into development of programming aiming to foster appropriate and relevant skills development opportunities for migrants, and female migrants in particular. These findings also point to the manufacturing sector as a sector in which skills training may be particularly beneficial given the high levels of interest in the sector; the high proportion of migrant workers in the sector who reported that the skills gained helped them find a better job or who expressed the belief that these skills would help them find a better job upon their return; as well as the comparatively higher wages in the sector.

However, it is also important that skills development programming does not neglect sectors in which migrants may lack opportunities and/or protection, even if the numbers and potential benefits may be smaller. For example, amongst domestic workers, migrants believed that having enhanced domestic-work related skills including cleaning and care provision would give them improved chances of receiving better wages. Similarly, migrants expressed interest in a range of future skills training, both similar and different to their current jobs, including various techniques in agriculture, buying and selling agricultural products, trading, packaging, beauty salon and spa, and cooking food and sweets. Representatives of civil society organizations interviewed through the qualitative research also suggested that for skills trainings to have an impact on poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic, financial literacy and investment planning should be incorporated, in order to promote productive use of financial and human capital that returning migrants bring to their home communities.

In terms of promoting further skills development opportunities for migrant workers, just under half of the migrants were interested in skills training, with those who were not interested primarily citing insufficient time as the main reason. Unsurprisingly, Laotian migrants generally considered skills training most useful if it could possibly help them to increase their income or improve their working conditions, related primarily to their current jobs. Therefore, the findings suggest that successful skills development programming for migrant workers should include (at a minimum) engagement with current or prospective employers to facilitate the participation of migrant workers with a view to equipping them with skills to enable them to meet the demands of current or potential jobs, and outreach with migrants themselves to help them understand the benefits of increasing their skill levels.

Only very few Laotian migrants had attended vocational training prior to migrating, but of those who had, they generally considered this training beneficial in preparing them to find work and start a job in Thailand. For those who were interested in enhancing their skill levels, the qualitative research revealed that migrants generally did not see skills certificates as essential. While employers expressed strong support for the idea that migrants go through skills training before coming to work in Thailand, they similarly considered skills certificates as generally not necessary, but the majority argued that if certificates are to be useful, they must be issued by institutes recognized by the Government of Thailand. There were however, some sector-specific differences. For example, employers in the hospitality/service sector were generally more supportive of skills training for migrant workers and placed greater value on the possession of certificates. Some employers across several sectors (including hospitality and manufacturing) also expressed support for the idea to hire workers trained in institutes located in Lao People's Democratic Republic although again it was deemed important that these should be training institutes recognized by the Thai authorities. Support among government officials for skills training of migrant workers was more modest, with most Government officials interviewed for this study showing moderate support for pre-departure training (but much more limited support for in-service training), and viewing topics such Thai labour law and relevant regulations, migrants' rights, emergency assistance, and health care and prevention as most important, rather than technical skills.

There were varying attitudes amongst employers towards the provision of skills training for migrant workers in Thailand. Employers willing to support skills training held this position primarily as they aimed to enhance the productivity of the workforce and therefore benefit their business (these were employers primarily in the

manufacturing and hospitality/service sectors; and primarily medium-sized enterprises); employers who were neither for nor against skills training for migrant workers were primarily concerned about the effect on migrants' workloads and working hours; while employers who did not support skills training cited time constraints, skills training not being necessary, and being afraid that migrants would leave their jobs or acquire new or better skills. The view among government officials was similarly mixed, with some supporting the idea of promoting skills development opportunities for migrants in Thailand while others were reluctant – viewing training as likely to increase competition with local workers.

Against this backdrop of findings it can be concluded that there are various opportunities as well as challenges in terms of enhancing access to skills development opportunities for migrant workers. From the perspective of the workers, the findings are encouraging and point towards numerous potential beneficial outcomes of skills training, including potentially better jobs and higher wages in Thailand, or upon return to Lao People's Democratic Republic. However, institutional constraints, particularly in regard to the reluctance of the Government of Thailand and employers to support skills training for migrant workers and facilitate certification, suggest that pre-departure and post-return skills training, rather than in-service training in Thailand, may be most feasible and simple to implement in the short-to-medium term. Skills training being implemented on an "in-service" basis for migrant workers in Thailand should proceed on a pilot and step-by-step basis, working with supportive employers and local governmental and non-governmental agencies, with clear and effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place to assess the impact and success rate in the medium and longer term.

Return prospects

The most significant finding with regard to return prospects is that approximately half of the respondents reported that they consider returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic permanently whereas the other half did not, and of those who planned to return, the majority had no clear timeframe in mind. This is a significant finding because the Royal Thai Government's policies on migrant workers are based strongly on the premise that migrant workers will be in the country only on a temporary basis to fill the demand for labour in the Thai economy. The regulatory and legal framework of Thailand does not permit longer-term stays of foreign workers, although the recent approval of the Cabinet in February 2016 – allowing migrant workers to stay in Thailand for up to a total of eight years – suggests that the Government of Thailand is becoming more open and flexible in this regard. Nonetheless, within the current policy framework, the only way for those Laotian migrant workers who do not wish to return home to stay in Thailand would likely be by slipping into irregular status. If the Government of Thailand is to seriously progress efforts to reduce the numbers of irregular migrant workers in the country, it is important that this reality is recognized.

On the other hand, the research also revealed that among those who were aware of the increase in the minimum wage in Lao People's Democratic Republic, nearly half (approximately 45%) said this would affect their decision to return very much or to a certain extent. Given the recent introduction of the minimum wage policy in Lao People's Democratic Republic together with the fact that it still remains considerably lower than in Thailand, this finding is very significant as it indicates that there is considerable potential for the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to attract back large proportions of its migrant workers if the right policies are in place to ensure access to jobs, livelihoods, decent wages, and a reasonable standard of living.

Of the migrants who expressed their wish to return, their aspirations were fairly modest and generally indicated a preference to go back home to a relatively simple life in their home village/town rather than to move to more prosperous areas of the country, continue gaining skills, progressing in their area of work, or become entrepreneurs. For example, two thirds of respondents who wanted to return wanted to do so to live with family and friends and the vast majority wanted to return to their home towns/villages, while the majority of respondents were not looking to earn more money in Lao People's Democratic Republic than in Thailand. The most common target sector of employment for returning migrants was the agricultural sector, in which a surprisingly high proportion of migrants aimed to work upon return despite the multitude of skills many of them had acquired while working in Thailand.

These findings are positive in the sense that they indicate a strong sense of identity, roots and connection with home communities amongst Laotian migrants in Thailand, but on the other hand suggest that migrants are either not motivated to use the skills and financial capital they have gained during their migration experience, do not see the benefits, or simply that the economic sphere in Lao People's Democratic Republic is not conducive at present to the skills gained. This notion is further supported by the finding that over half of respondents did not think they would find a job easily in Lao People's Democratic Republic, implying that economic factors – although highly significant in the initial migration decision – were not likely to be considered in the same light in regard to return migration. As such, although the poverty reduction effects at the household level associated with return migration are likely still substantial, the wider and longer-term potential positive impacts of return migration are perhaps less likely to be

realized without appropriate support mechanisms to, for example, support and encourage productive use of financial capital, such as investments or entrepreneurial activity, and ensure that returning migrants can further utilize, build on and channel the valuable skills they have gained during the migration experience.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic

- The Governments of Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand should continue dialogue to implement a streamlined, efficient and cost-effective regular migration channel under the MOU, in order to promote more orderly, regular and safe migration of Laotian migrants to Thailand. In particular, this dialogue should consider ways in which the time and costs required for migrants to go through the regular channel can be reduced by eliminating or minimizing the number of steps involved, drawing on international good practices from similar bilateral labour migration arrangements. Enhancing the effectiveness of the MOU channel would benefit both Governments by ensuring that a greater proportion of migrants are documented and accountable for, better protected, and more productive in the workplace.
- The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic could consider promoting out-migration for work in specific sectors, for example, the manufacturing sector – given the comparatively higher wages in this sector, the significant skills migrants gain from working in the sector, and the potential relevance of the sector for further economic development in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The Government could then work together with its partners to ensure the potential migrant workforce are prepared and trained for working in the manufacturing sector, which could give Laotian workers a comparative advantage over other nationalities in competing for the better remunerated and more secure jobs in Thailand, also given the similarity between Thai and Laotian languages. However, in considering such a sector-specific strategy, it is also crucial that the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic recognizes the wide range of sectors of work that Laotian workers are engaged in Thailand and provides broad-based support to ensure Laotian migrants are appropriately prepared, informed and trained in advance of their migration, and adequately supported upon their return.
- Given the large discrepancies in wages among Laotian workers across different provinces of Thailand revealed by the study, together with the finding that 15 per cent of migrants did not make sufficient income to cover their basic expenses, it is recommended that migrants are provided with clear information on work and salary prospects in Thailand prior to migrating (and if possible, prior to making the decision to migrate), including potential variances across geographical areas and sectors. This would serve to best equip the Laotian migrant workforce with the knowledge they need to make informed migration decisions (including on province of destination and sector of work) and reduce their potential vulnerability to exploitative practices.
- Given the high developmental potential of remittances, the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic should work together with its partners to encourage cheaper and easier access to financial services and remittances among families and communities in Lao People's Democratic Republic, particularly among rural areas, as well as educating households on how remittances can be used productively. The Government could also consider providing incentives for migrants sending remittances, or returning migrants, to put their financial capital towards business start-ups or other initiatives that would boost the economic and social development of Lao People's Democratic Republic. For example, initiating a pooled remittance fund for business start-ups could also be a constructive initiative towards this end.
- The majority of migrant workers viewed migration as having a positive developmental impact, while it is also clear that employers in Thailand also benefit from hiring migrant workers to meet demand in the labour market. These findings should further reinforce the view that migration is primarily a positive and natural phenomenon with significant potential for developmental impacts in both countries of origin and destination. The Governments of Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic should therefore take concerted steps to promote this understanding among a range of stakeholders (including the general public) and reduce the negative stereotyping and discrimination that is often associated with migration and migrants.

- The Government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic should put in place mechanisms to recognize the skills gained during the migration experience, and where appropriate – to certify these skills upon return, as well as mechanisms for returning migrant workers to be able to further develop and channel these skills productively in order to contribute towards social and economic development of the country. This will serve to counter the issue of underemployment, and may assist in diversifying the economy of Lao People’s Democratic Republic, as these migrants are able to utilize these new skills upon return, which may be lacking in the country.
- Although around half of the respondents in this study stated that they were not yet considering return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, almost half of those who were considering return stated that the increase in the minimum wage in the country would affect their decision on whether to return. The Government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic should therefore take further measures to incentivize migrant workers to return, which could include business start-up grants/support, investment support, job placement services, as well as social reintegration services. These measures should be communicated clearly and widely amongst the local population and migrant communities in Thailand and beyond, and a clear strategy developed for supporting and empowering migrant workers to return and use the skills and knowledge gained through their migration experience to contribute to further economic and social development in Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
- 15 per cent of migrants paid some form of fees to brokers or as bribes as part of the migration experience. While perhaps a lower proportion than expected, it is nonetheless strongly recommended that both the Governments of Thailand and Lao People’s Democratic Republic take coordinated and concerted steps to regulate the involvement of brokers and bribe-paying in the migration experience. This should involve the effective inspection of recruitment agencies operating in both countries together with strictly enforced penalties for those acting in an illegal or unscrupulous manner, as well as the establishment of an adjudication system and associated recourse measures that migrants with grievances are willing and able to use.
- The vast majority of all Laotian migrants in Thailand have very low levels of education, which is likely to leave them vulnerable and open to potential mistreatment or exploitation. Therefore, the Government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic and partners should upscale efforts to educate the migrant workforce before migrating to Thailand, both in terms of safe migration, rights, access to services, recourse measures available, and also in terms of the skills needed to fill the jobs in Thailand. The provision of such information and skills is key to ensuring an informed and appropriately skilled migrant workforce, which will increase their protection and standard of living, as well as their capacity to contribute to development in Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
- Far more female migrants had no income before migrating to Thailand than male migrants; therefore the Government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic and partners should recognize this gendered disadvantage and put in place measures to promote access to livelihoods and jobs among females in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. A productive intervention could be an in-depth study of the key factors underpinning gender inequality within the labour market. This would facilitate the development of evidence-based policies to stimulate sustainable livelihoods for females in the country.

Recommendations to the Government of Thailand

- The Government of Thailand should consider at least two new policies on labour migration management, namely, expanding the sectors and skill levels in which migrant workers can work, and providing greater flexibility in changing of employers. By expanding the sectors and skill levels in which migrant workers can work, Thai employers and the Thai economy generally will be able to access a much wider pool of appropriately skilled and qualified migrant workers, who will continue to fill the demand for labour in the labour market. Such a policy would also bring the regulatory framework more closely in line with reality. Providing greater flexibility in changing employers will not only support efforts to ensure as high a proportion of migrant workers as possible remain in a regular status (rather than slipping into irregular status if changing jobs), but will also encourage a more open “marketplace” of ethical recruitment and employment, whereby unscrupulous or exploitative employers will inevitably find it much more difficult to retain their workers whereas those employers that treat their workers fairly and well will be able to access a more qualified and productive workforce, thereby raising the overall levels of productivity and protection among the migrant worker population in Thailand. While likely to attract resistance from employers, it is important to implement such a policy in tandem with enhancing

the recruitment mechanisms to be more streamlined and cost-effective, as employers who do not need to make large financial outlays to hire migrant workers will face less risk in potentially losing migrant workers to other employers.

- Fully documented migrants enjoyed easier access to services, including healthcare and banking services, and higher wages, further emphasizing the importance of providing passports and work permits to all migrants in Thailand and allowing frequent opportunities for registration and regularization of irregular migrants in Thailand, given that the numbers of migrants going through the MOU continue to represent only a minority of Laotian migrants in Thailand. The Government of Thailand should recognize this reality for all nationalities of migrant workers in Thailand, and continue to offer windows for migrant workers to register in all sectors in which migrant workers are predominantly employed, which will facilitate efforts to ensure a more protected and productive migrant workforce, as well as efforts to monitor, document and understand the situations of migrant workers in Thailand. For future registration and regularization processes to be successful in Thailand, it is essential that employers have sufficient incentives to participate (or disincentives not to participate).
- The Government of Thailand should ensure strict enforcement of labour protection laws and regulations for migrant workers, including the right for them to retain their travel and identity documents at all times, while also promoting awareness raising activities to inform both employers and workers of their rights and ethical practices. This would help ensure that workers do not fall into exploitative situations and situations of human trafficking, for which Thailand is under significant international pressure at the time of the research, while also ensuring migrant workers can access appropriate services that will contribute to a more accountable, transparent and effective migration management system in Thailand.
- The Government of Thailand should take concerted steps to ensure that all employers pay their migrant workers at least the minimum wage and ensure strict sanctions for those who do not do so. This is important not only in terms of ensuring a protected and productive workforce, but also given the significant labour shortages that Thailand faces and will continue to face, in order to ensure an attractive working environment that will continue to appeal to migrant workers as developments in their own countries continue to offer more opportunities for return.
- Female migrant workers on average earned lower wages than males (both daily and monthly), and while this finding may be partially explained by the type of work male and female migrant workers are engaged in, it further emphasizes the need to promote gender equality in Thailand and encourage employers to treat male and female workers equally. The higher concentration of female migrant workers in low-paid sectors and informal employment brings with it reduced labour rights and fewer social benefits. The Government of Thailand should therefore consider promoting employer-based equal opportunity initiatives such as entrepreneurial training and skills development for female migrant workers, as well as personnel policies that incorporate diversity and equal opportunity principles.
- There were significant fees associated with sending remittances through the various channels, including by bank transfer (typically in the range of 3–10%). These fees reduce the amount of remittances reaching families and households in Lao People's Democratic Republic and therefore their potentially positive impact on poverty reduction and socioeconomic development in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Furthermore, significant fees serve to increase the proportion of remittances that are sent through non-regulated channels, which increase risk and reduce the benefits of remittances. Therefore, the Government of Thailand should ensure that the fees charged by banks and other institutions for sending remittances are capped at a reasonable level far below the current practice. Such efforts should be carried out in collaboration with the banking sector, for example, through the Thai Bankers' Association, in order to enhance buy-in and support for maximizing the flow of remittances while minimizing fees. It should be highlighted to banks and other institutions that reducing costs does not necessarily entail squeezing the profits of remittance service providers; lower costs would lead to more frequent transactions by remitters, offering increased volume to the service providers. Similarly, given the challenges significant proportions of migrants faced in accessing financial services, promotion of access to financial services should form a core component of outreach activities and pre-departure (or post-arrival) training programs for migrant workers in Thailand.
- Around half of the Laotian migrant workers interviewed stated that they were not considering returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic, while of those who were considering return, the majority had no timeframe in mind. The Government of Thailand should recognize this reality and ensure that those

migrants who wish to stay and continue contributing to Thailand's economy should be given the opportunity to do so in regular status, for example, through some form of adjusted immigration status or permanent residency. Such a step would recognize the longer-term contributions that migrant workers make to the Thai economy and support the development of an environment to maximize the positive contributions of migrant workers to Thailand, as migrant workers with documents, legal status and access to rights and services are more likely to be in a position to contribute positively and productively to the society and economy of Thailand, particularly the sector in which they work.

Recommendations for development partners

In addition to working together with Government partners to implement the recommendations included above, the following approaches/actions are recommended for actors in the development sphere:

- The largely positive findings on the impact of skills on employment opportunities and conditions suggest a large potential in skills development of Laotian migrant workers contributing to poverty reduction in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The highest proportion of workers in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors reported that the skills gained helped them to find a better job, although significant proportions of workers across nearly all sectors also reported that the skills they had gained enabled them to find a better job or acquire better wages or working conditions in the same job. This finding emphasizes the value of skills training, including on a pre-departure basis and an in-service basis in Thailand. Findings reveal that there is scope to implement skills development programming at all stages of the migration cycle, although institutional constraints, particularly in regard to the reluctance of the Government of Thailand and employers to support skills training for migrant workers and facilitate certification, suggest that pre-departure and post-return skills training, rather than in-service training in Thailand, may be most feasible and simple to implement in the short-to-medium term. Skills training being implemented on an "in-service" basis for migrant workers in Thailand should proceed on a pilot and/or step-by-step basis, working with supportive employers and local governmental and non-governmental agencies, with clear and effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place to assess the impact and success rate in the medium and longer term. The possibility of facilitating Government endorsement and certification for in-service training programmes for migrant workers, for example through the Department of Skills Development of the Ministry of Labour, should also be actively explored in order to increase the appeal and relevance of such training among Thai employers.
- A significantly smaller proportion of females than males reported that the skills gained were useful for them in acquiring better jobs, wages, or working conditions. There was also a higher proportion of female migrant workers not interested in skills training. Therefore, skills development programming for migrant workers in Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic (both pre-departure and in-service) should focus particularly on women migrant workers, including conducting specific outreach among female migrants in Thailand to improve understanding of the potential benefits of enhancing skill levels, and develop a clear monitoring and evaluation mechanism to understand what impact skills training has on male and female migrant workers' employment prospects and conditions, and the reasons for the differences. Furthermore, migrant workers (particularly women) should be engaged in the design of skills development programming, for example through facilitating a feedback loop, whereby beneficiaries can provide targeted feedback on the skills training and contribute to future development and delivery of training programs for further migrant workers.
- Skills development programming should build upon the sectors in which better employment opportunities and conditions are most clearly associated with improved skills (including the agricultural and manufacturing sectors) with the aim of equipping migrant workers to become more able to meet the demand for skills in these sectors. It is important that skills training programmes shown to facilitate enhanced income generation (for example, within the agricultural and manufacturing sectors) are promoted amongst female migrant workers – even amongst those who may not have considered these sectors – in order to ensure that skills training programmes do not exacerbate the already existing gender pay-gap. That said, and as noted above, such programmes should also be gender-sensitive, as the study revealed significant differences in the skills that male and female migrant workers find most interesting and appealing. For example, male migrant workers expressed a high interest in learning mechanical skills, whereas there were higher proportions of female migrant workers interested in learning service and business skills. It is also important that skills development programming does not neglect sectors in which migrants may lack opportunities and/or protection, even if the numbers and potential benefits may be smaller.

- More broadly speaking, work undertaken by international organizations, civil society and other development partners to improve the situations of prospective and actual migrants, and their access to rights, services and livelihoods, should incorporate a clearly defined gender strategy and gender-specific monitoring and evaluation mechanism, in order to understand and address the various challenges male and female migrants face in accessing the full range of rights and services at all stages of the migration cycle. This should include enhanced access to livelihoods, information and skills development opportunities in Lao People's Democratic Republic and enhanced access to social and financial services, protection, recourse mechanisms and skills development opportunities in Thailand, with a particular focus on female migrant workers given the gender disparities across several of these measures revealed by this study.
- Efforts to engage migrant workers in development programming, including access to services, protection and skills development should incorporate a specific strategy for engaging with employers of migrant workers and facilitating their support. For example, the predominant reason for migrants not wanting to participate in skills training was that they did not have enough time due to their current working commitments. Therefore, for skills training to be successful, it is crucial that employers are engaged in the process to allow the opportunity for migrants to engage in this type of initiative, and to see the benefit themselves of having a more skilled and productive migrant workforce. Similarly, the study revealed that employers often do not understand or are poorly informed of the benefits of documenting their migrant workforce and following the appropriate and regular recruitment and employment channels. Engaging with the private sector, including development of clear and appropriate communications materials that promote awareness among employers of the benefits of maintaining a documented, protected, skilled and productive migrant workforce, should form a central pillar of a comprehensive approach towards managing labour migration to Thailand.
- With a view to strengthening linkages between migration and development, efforts to promote access to services for migrant workers, both in Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic, should include a specific focus on enhancing access to education and financial services, given the relatively greater challenges faced by Laotian migrant workers in accessing these services revealed by this study (while not neglecting other key services such as healthcare and recourse mechanisms). Given the fact that many migrant workers come to Thailand with families – and a substantial proportion of these do not intend to return – ensuring their children have access to education will prepare the next generation to contribute productively to their home/host societies and economies, whether in Thailand or Lao People's Democratic Republic. Such efforts should focus on overcoming practical barriers to this access among migrant populations, as the policy in Thailand already grants access to education to all children regardless of nationality and status. Similarly, enhancing access to financial services – including increasing the options to send remittances and reducing associated costs in Thailand and strengthening access to facilities for migrant families in Lao People's Democratic Republic to receive these remittances, particularly in rural areas – is likely to have a significant effect in increasing the amount of remittances reaching families in Lao People's Democratic Republic – and therefore on poverty reduction.
- Development actors should recognize the importance of personal and social networks, for example in securing employment opportunities for Laotian migrant workers in Thailand, which was revealed to be particularly important for Laotian migrants as compared to other nationalities. Therefore, efforts to promote access to decent employment, protection and skills development among migrant workers should incorporate a specific focus on building on and further strengthening the personal and social networks enjoyed by Laotian migrants, including utilizing technology where appropriate to promote access to information, rights and services amongst the Laotian migrant community in Thailand. This could include for example, engaging and including Laotian migrant workers in existing migrant networks – including sector-specific networking mechanisms such as in the domestic work sector – as well as facilitating, wherever possible, inclusion of Laotian migrant workers in existing networking mechanisms for local workers including civil society organizations, other civic groups and unions – particularly given the cultural and linguistic similarities between the two cultures.
- Finally, development actors should consider the full range of complexities that exist in considering linkages between migration, development and poverty reduction. This should go beyond looking at financial or economic impacts alone, such as remittances, to incorporate a wider range of human and social factors, including for example, soft skills, personal attributes, new perspectives, freedoms and experiences – and in doing so, move closer to the concept of “human development” alluded to in the introduction of this report. Similarly, in considering the linkages between migration and poverty

reduction, it is important to consider a wide range of human, social and economic factors, both positive and negative, in order to gain a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the ways in which migration and poverty reduction interlink that goes beyond flows of remittances, acquisition of skills and returning migrants. These could include, for example, effects at the individual level, such as on individual migrants' self-perception, behavior or personalities, impact on families and communities including those left behind by departing migrants, or at the national or societal level, including for example, potential effects of brain drain or brain waste or an over-reliance on remittances as a means of developing rural communities.

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