Risks and rewards: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia

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Benjamin Harkins; Daniel Lindgren; and Tarinee Suravoranon

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Foreword

Labour migration has long been a critical factor behind the economic and social dynamism of the ASEAN region and its people. It is widely acknowledged that migration has contributed to improved livelihoods in countries of origin and filling of key labour shortages in destination countries. However, despite the fact that labour migration has never been higher on the ASEAN agenda, the availability of dependable data that can be used to inform development of policies and programmes remains scarce.

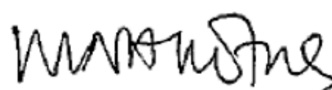
This study on the outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia was jointly conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to help fill the knowledge gap. The findings provide a detailed understanding of the current situation for migrant workers involved in intra-ASEAN migration, which will be used to shape technical assistance interventions. They will also serve as a baseline from which to measure future progress.

The research advocates for a change in approach to migration and development within the ASEAN region. Traditionally, the discourse has emphasized the macro-economic changes that result from labour migration, particularly its contribution to foreign exchange income through remittances. To help facilitate a shift towards a more migrant-centred and holistic understanding of labour migration outcomes, the study developed a Migration Outcomes Index. Focusing on changes in the lives of migrant workers and their families rather than in remittance flows, and balancing the importance of social and economic elements in the calculus of migration experiences, the Migration Outcomes Index enables a broader understanding of how migration contributes to development in ASEAN.

To realize the commitments made to 'leave no one behind' under the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, a more realistic and inclusive understanding of the experiences of women and men migrant workers is essential. This research represents an important step towards a more rigorous evidence base for assessing progress, providing a wealth of relevant data. The ILO and IOM are dedicated to working together with governments and social partners to fully leverage the results in support of sustainable growth and social and economic development for all within the ASEAN region.

Ms Tomoko Nishimoto

Assistant Director-General and Regional Director,
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific



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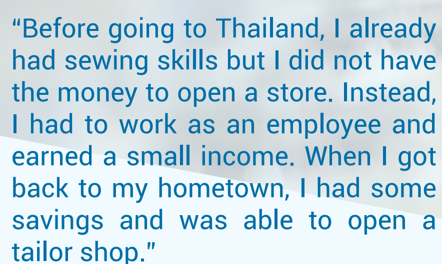
Abbreviations and acronyms

AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AGR	agricultural work
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
COI	certificate of identity
CON	construction work
DOM	domestic work
ESOMAR	European Society for Opinion and Market Research
FIS	fisheries work
HOS	hospitality and food services
ID	identification document
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRIS	International Recruitment Integrity System
IRR	irregular migrant worker
KHM	Cambodia
KHR	Cambodian riel
LAK	Laotian kip
LAO	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MAN	manufacturing work
MMK	Myanmar kyat
MMR	Myanmar
MOI	Migration Outcomes Index
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MRC	migrant worker resource centre
MYR	Malaysian ringgit
MYS	Malaysia
NGO	non-governmental organization
PROMISE	Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement project
REG	regular migrant worker
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
THA	Thailand
THB	Thailand baht
TOR	terms of reference
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
VND	Viet Nam dong



"Before going to Thailand, I already had sewing skills but I did not have the money to open a store. Instead, I had to work as an employee and earned a small income. When I got back to my hometown, I had some savings and was able to open a tailor shop."

Female migrant worker from Viet Nam

Executive summary

Introduction

During the last two decades, labour migration has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth and development in both countries of origin and destination within ASEAN. It is estimated that there are currently 20.2 million migrants originating from ASEAN countries, among whom nearly 6.9 million have migrated to other countries within the region. Though much of intra-ASEAN migration is irregular and not fully captured by official data, the statistics available clearly show the number of migrants moving to other ASEAN countries has risen dramatically, increasing more than fivefold since 1990 (UNDESA, 2016).

Acknowledging the potential for intra-regional migration to contribute to the economic growth and development of the bloc, a freer flow of skilled labour is a key feature of the newly established ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). However, most of the workers involved in intra-ASEAN labour migration are employed in low-skilled, labour-intensive jobs in agriculture, fisheries, domestic work, manufacturing, construction, hospitality, and food services. The policy gap does not fairly reflect the importance of low-skilled migration within ASEAN countries, as the prosperity of whole regions and economic sectors are heavily dependent on the output and earnings of these workers.

Due to the high costs, long duration, and considerable complexity of navigating the existing bilateral channels for migration, many intra-ASEAN migrants are precariously employed in an irregular status. Regardless of the legal documents they hold, migrants employed in low-skilled work often face exploitation and abuse because of inadequate protection of labour rights during recruitment and employment.

Women face additional challenges in accessing safe and legal migration opportunities, with the type of work typically available to them often paying less and affording fewer legal protections due to lack of formalization. This reflects an undervaluing of occupations that are traditionally viewed as women's work, such as employment as a domestic worker, as well as discriminatory practices in sectors that employ both women and men. In addition, protectionist policies in some countries restrict the movement of women by age, sector, destination, or other circumstances perceived as dangerous or contrary to traditional social values. Because establishing these barriers to regular migration does

not remove the factors that push women to seek work abroad, many women have no choice but to migrate through irregular channels into the informal economy (ILO, 2017a).

Even though labour migration has never featured more prominently within ASEAN than it does today, there remains a dearth of reliable data that can be applied for the development of evidence-based policy and programming. While assumptions are often made about the end result of migration in ASEAN and how best to ensure a safe and rewarding experience for migrant workers, the collection and analysis of empirical data has been very limited. Due to the temporary and irregular nature of much of the migration occurring within the region, the realities faced by migrant workers are often hidden from view. This study helps to fill the knowledge gap on the socio-economic outcomes of migration into low-skilled work within ASEAN.

Research approach

From July–August 2016, a total of 1,808 return migrant workers were surveyed in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, and Viet Nam. In addition, 96 qualitative interviews were conducted with return migrant workers and stakeholders, evenly distributed across the four countries. However, the results should not be interpreted as statistically representative at national or regional levels.

The survey was conducted jointly by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme and the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) 'Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement project' (PROMISE), working in partnership with the management consulting firm Rapid Asia. Because of their substantial thematic, geographic and temporal overlap, TRIANGLE in ASEAN and PROMISE expect to work closely together to maximize results. In order to evaluate their impact, a zero-measurement was needed before initiation of the projects. The study will also be used to shape the design of interventions by identifying key gaps in policies and practices to be addressed.

The research was designed to examine migration from a regional perspective, providing comparable data between countries of origin, countries of destination, and migration corridors in South-East Asia. The study also assists with determining priority target groups by analysing differences by gender, ethnicity, sector of work, and legal status, acknowledging the importance of these factors in shaping the experiences of migrant workers.

A methodology for assessing the social and economic outcomes of migration on individual migrant workers and their households was also developed during the research, comparing their situations before migrating and after return. Through application of the Migration Outcomes Index (MOI), the study interrogates assumptions that are often made about what factors contribute to better outcomes for migrant workers, such as using regular channels, holding legal documentation, and possessing relevant skills.

The report findings are structured by presenting the outcomes of migration first and then tracing them back through the stages of the migration process to gain a more detailed understanding of the factors that shaped migration experiences. These stages are divided into four major segments for purposes of analysis: (1) pre-migration preparations; (2) the migration process; (3) employment abroad; and (4) return and reintegration.

Research findings

Migration outcomes

Financial remittances are undoubtedly a significant outcome of labour migration among the four countries of origin studied. However, the heavy emphasis placed on the macroeconomic importance of remittances within migration and development discourse can come at the expense of a more balanced and migrant-focused understanding of labour migration outcomes.

To assist with redressing the asymmetry of the metrics used, a key analytical tool developed for the study is the Migration Outcomes Index (MOI). The MOI provides a shortcut to assessing migration outcomes by generating a single number score, combining four financial indicators and four social indicators to measure changes from before migration to after. MOI scores are calculated at the individual respondent level and indexed on a range of 0–100 to provide an accessible benchmark against which to measure progress.

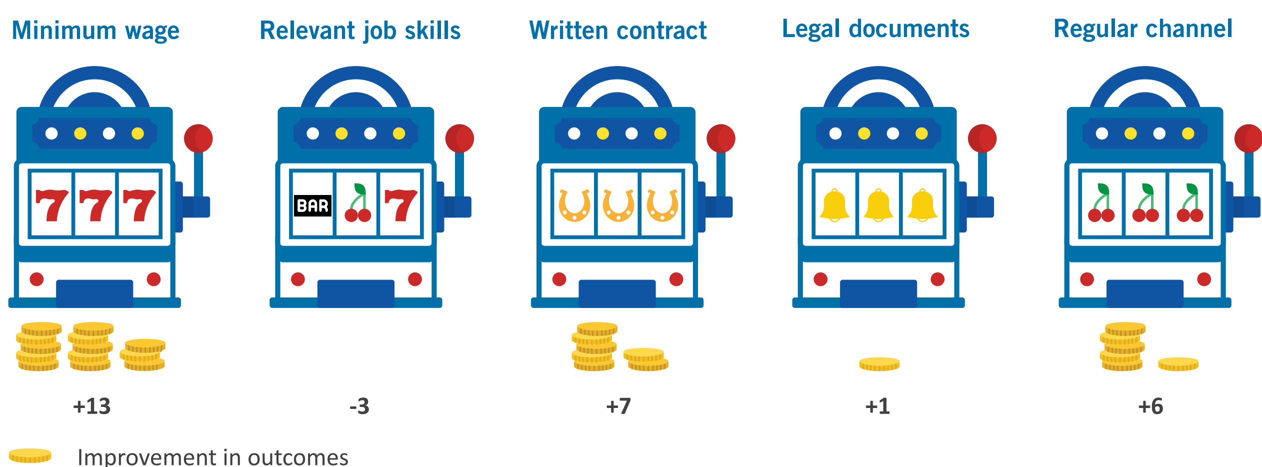
The aggregate MOI score regionally was 58, which can be used as a point of reference in examining the differences among other regional groupings. The most significant differences were found to have a sectoral basis, as migrants employed in agriculture (index score of 52) and construction (54) had noticeably worse outcomes. Migrants working in Malaysia (index score of 66) had better results than those employed in Thailand (56), with longer stays and marginally higher wages possible causes. Smaller distinctions in migration outcomes between men (MOI score of 60) and women (57) were also present, with the former faring slightly better.

Migrant workers from Viet Nam had notably better outcomes (index score of 73) than migrant workers from Cambodia (47), Myanmar (54), and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (59). This was supported by the qualitative findings of the study, which suggested that Vietnamese migrants have better outcomes due to incrementally higher skill-levels. It should also be considered that Vietnamese migrants on average had spent a much longer period of time working abroad (four years) than Cambodian migrants (one year), which is likely a contributing factor.

An item analysis was conducted to gain a better understanding of how positive or negative outcomes for each of the eight MOI indicators affected the overall index results. The analysis sought to identify key preventative factors (which subtracted significantly from the overall index score if negative) and key progressive factors (which added considerably to the aggregate score if the result was positive). The two most consistently significant preventative factors were being employed and not having any debts. The key progressive factor that emerged as the most significant in every country was upskilling. Migrants who reported an increase in the skill level of their employment from before migration to after – suggesting that they had acquired applicable skills while abroad – had decidedly better overall outcomes.

A driver analysis was applied to assess the effect of external factors on MOI scores, testing some of the commonly held assumptions about which practices and conditions contribute to better or worse outcomes for migrant workers (figure 1). The most consistently important factor in improving outcomes for migrant workers across the four study countries was receiving the statutory minimum wage during their employment. As many migrant workers are employed in informal sectors of work that are not covered by the minimum wage laws in Thailand and Malaysia, or are otherwise not paid a legal wage due to non-compliance by employers, receiving the statutory minimum is a critical issue. No clear association was found between the conditions of regular migration (using a regular channel, having a written contract, or obtaining legal documents) and better outcomes, with large variations existing among the study countries.

Figure 1. Effect of external factors on migration outcomes



Pre-migration preparations

Reliable information about how to migrate safely is generally unavailable to migrant workers, with only one in six (17 per cent) receiving information to support informed decision-making before going abroad. Likewise, just 14 per cent of migrant workers surveyed attended pre-departure orientation to prepare them for migration and employment in destination countries. In most cases, migrants are highly dependent on friends and family or brokers for advice about migration, as they are more trusted even if not official sources of information.

On-the-job training in destination countries is currently a more strategic modality for delivering skills trainings to migrants than during pre-departure, reaching over five times as many workers as training delivered before migration (50 per cent vs 9 per cent). Given the substantial time and money required for skill training prior to departure, and no clear guarantee of obtaining a better job afterwards, the indications are that upskilling is better provided through direct arrangements with employers in destination countries. This approach to skills training supports greater participation by migrant workers and the shift towards an employer-pays recruitment model, as well as skills training that is a close match with employer needs.

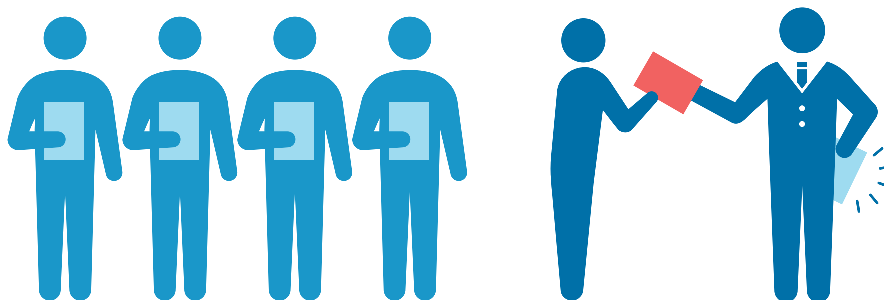
Migration process

The majority of migrant workers across the four countries of origin used irregular channels (74 per cent), which were quicker (by an average of 71 days) and cheaper (by an average of US$616) than regular channels, but more frequently led to problems. Although this finding suggests that migrants have the opportunity to weigh the costs and benefits of all of the options and decide to take greater risks in exchange for ease and affordability, the reality is more complex. With limited access to information, training, and regular migration channels as well as scarce resources – all of which are even more restricted for women – migrant workers must make use of the migration channels available to them. For many, it becomes a matter of "choosing" the least worst option.

The average cost of migrating for work within the region is generally not excessive (US$430/1.6 months of wages) but there is major disparity in the expense among different migration corridors. Vietnamese migrants heading to Malaysia for employment paid US$1,166/4 months of wages, and Myanmar migrants paid US$1,034/3.6 months of wages. In comparison, Lao migrants journeying to Thailand paid just US$171/0.6 months of wages, and Cambodian migrants only paid US$211/0.8 months. High migration costs require many migrants to take out loans, and the long period needed to pay off this debt can force migrants to remain in exploitative employment situations and detract from their returns on migration.

Signing a written employment contract before migrating does not reduce the likelihood of contract substitution more than having a verbal agreement (21 per cent vs 15 per cent), as shown in figure 2. Though it can be assumed that this is partly due to the terms of employment likely being more extensive when agreed upon in a formal written contract, the lack of assurance they provide is still alarming. In some countries, such as Myanmar, written agreements offered substantially less of a guarantee of obtaining the working conditions promised than verbal agreements (43 per cent vs 17 per cent). As with several of the other aspects of regular migration examined, written employment contracts currently fail to deliver on their promise of fair working conditions.

Figure 2. Contract substitution among migrant workers signing a written employment contract

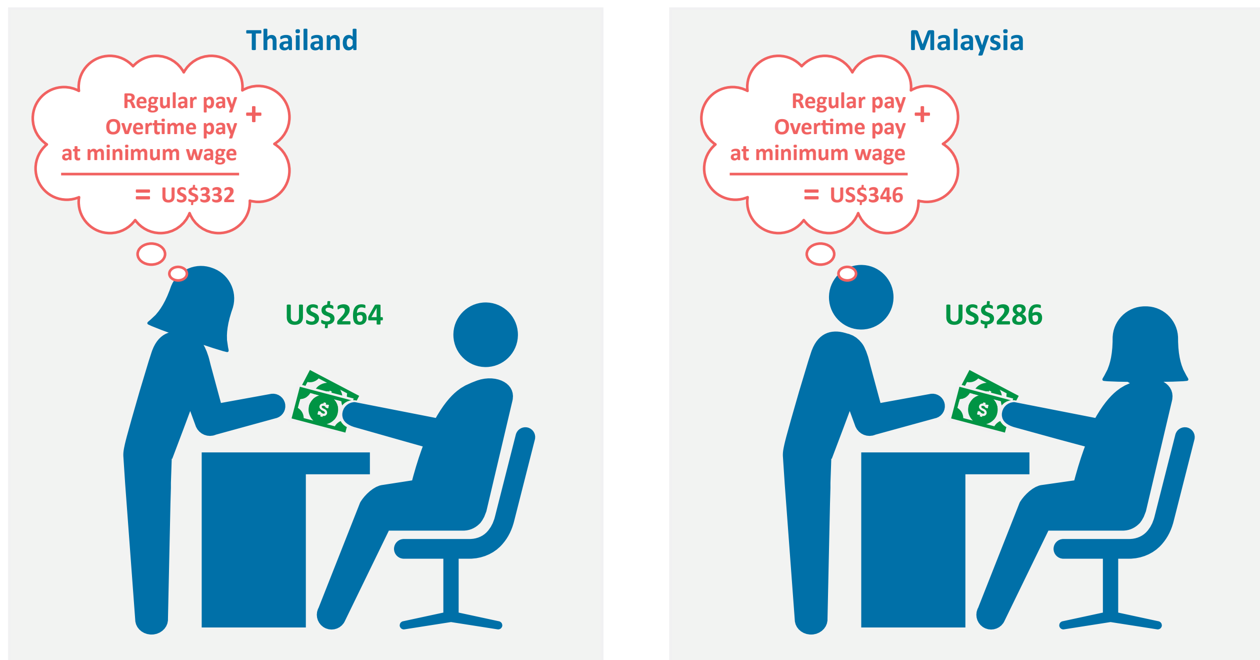


Employment and working conditions

Few migrant workers were matched with jobs for which they said they had relevant skills (12 per cent). Greater job matching was found in agricultural work (36 per cent), domestic work (21 per cent), and hospitality and food services (10 per cent), all of which employ more women than men. The implication of this finding is that greater mobility of women would be beneficial in filling labour shortages with qualified workers and that some significant opportunities are being missed due to protectionist attitudes. For example, 42 per cent of Lao migrants had relevant skills for domestic work, but the legality of migrating into the sector remains ambiguous.

Conditions in destination workplaces are highly demanding and the wages provided are not commensurate. The average migrant works long hours (10 hours/day), nearly every day (6.4 days/week) for pay that is below the minimum wage in Thailand (US$264) and Malaysia (US$286) if overtime is considered. It can be conservatively estimated that migrant workers are underpaid by an average of US$68 in Thailand and US$60 in Malaysia every month, which suggests that wage theft is a very common practice (figure 3).

Figure 3. Average monthly wages for migrants in Thailand and Malaysia in comparison to the legal minimum



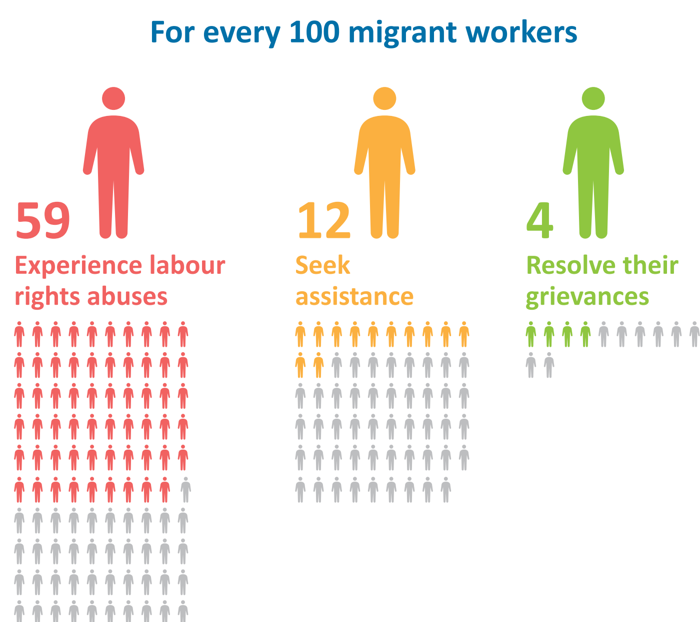
A major wage gap exists (14 per cent) between women migrants and men migrants (figure 4). The gap was largest in domestic work (73 per cent), construction (24 per cent), and agriculture (18 per cent) but was negligible for employment in manufacturing and hospitality and food services. Employment in different types of domestic work is highly segregated by gender in South-East Asia, with those jobs viewed as women's work usually receiving lower remuneration. Variances were also apparent along national lines, with women from Myanmar earning 36 per cent less than Myanmar men, and women from Cambodia earning 21 per cent less than Cambodian men. The differences were much smaller for Lao and Vietnamese women, who earned 9 per cent less than men from those countries, suggesting intersectionality in discriminatory wage setting practices.

Figure 4. Wage gap between men and women migrant workers

Enrolment in any type of social protection scheme was low among migrant workers (28 per cent overall), and even lower for women (25 per cent). Many of the eligibility requirements for social protection benefits either explicitly exclude or create significant obstacles for migrants to claim their rights, such as documentation requirements, minimum qualifying periods, and sectoral exclusions. When compounded by problems with poor compliance among employers, a large proportion of migrants are left without access to social protection. The gap is more significant among women migrants, as much of the work they do within the region are considered informal sector jobs, which are commonly disqualified from coverage (e.g. agricultural work and domestic work).

During their employment, most migrant workers experienced some form of labour rights violation (59 per cent) and had very limited access to legal remedies (figure 5). In Thailand, these were most commonly wage related abuses, including the withholding of payment and receiving wages below the legal minimum; while in Malaysia, coercive employment practices such as retention of legal documents and excessive overtime were more prevalent. Only around a fifth of migrant workers sought assistance for such abuses (21 per cent). In most cases, those seeking help reached out to friends or family rather than formal assistance, and only 7 per cent were able to resolve their grievances satisfactorily. The vulnerability of migrant workers to abuse is intensified by the lack of fair, efficient, and accessible means to resolve complaints, reinforcing their status as a group of workers to which a different set of rules apply.

Figure 5. Labour rights abuses and access to justice for migrant workers



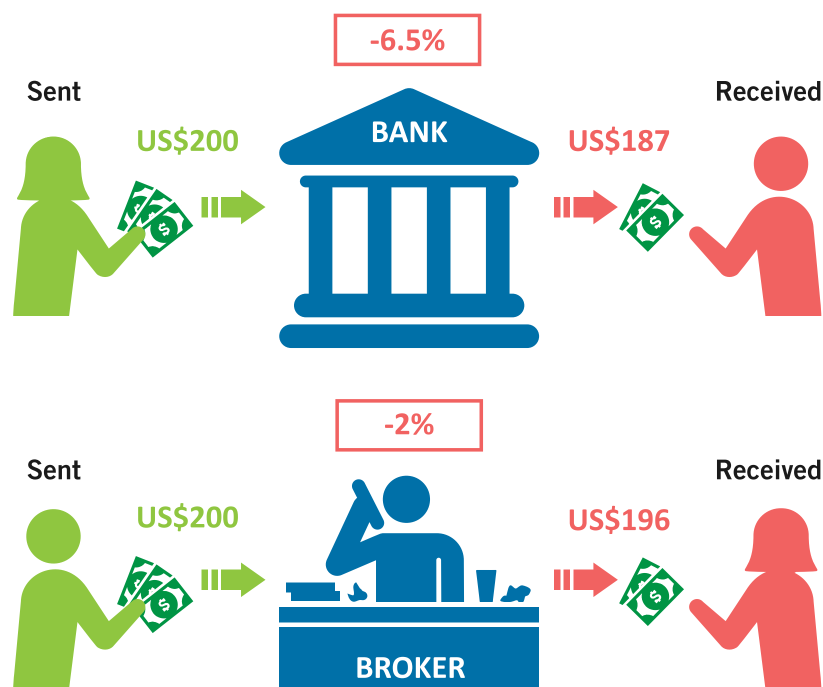
Opportunities for mobility within destination country labour markets are limited for migrant workers, with only about one in five migrants (21 per cent) changing their sector of work while abroad. The proportion was slightly higher for men (24 per cent) compared to women (18 per cent), and also varied by destination country, where it was higher for Thailand (24 per cent) than Malaysia (10 per cent). Because work permits are strictly tied to a specific employer in both destination countries, they allow little flexibility to migrant workers in seeking other jobs, and irregular migrants cannot freely conduct job searches.

Thailand has become a more financially attractive labour market for migrants in recent years, with lower migration costs (US$251 vs US$1,082) and remittance fees (2.2 per cent vs 5.1 per cent), as well as roughly similar wages to Malaysia (US$264 vs US$286). With substantial labour shortages in both countries, competition for the labour provided by migrant workers is likely to increase in the coming years. Strengthened labour protections, higher wages and reduced fees and expenses may be necessary to continue to attract migrant workers to come to Malaysia.

Remittances and financial inclusion

Nearly all migrants remitted funds back to their countries of origin (93 per cent), with the average remittance amount being US$177 per month. The amount of money sent home was greater for men (US$187) than for women (US$166), but this was due to the gender-based wage gap, as both men and women remitted roughly two thirds of their income. The average cost of sending remittances was 3 per cent of the total amount but varied substantially depending on the availability and usage of formal or informal remittance channels. Migrants sending remittances formally through banks paid 6.5 per cent in fees, while those using the informal hundi or broker systems paid just 2 per cent (figure 6).

Figure 6. Cost of sending US$200 through formal and informal remittance service providers.



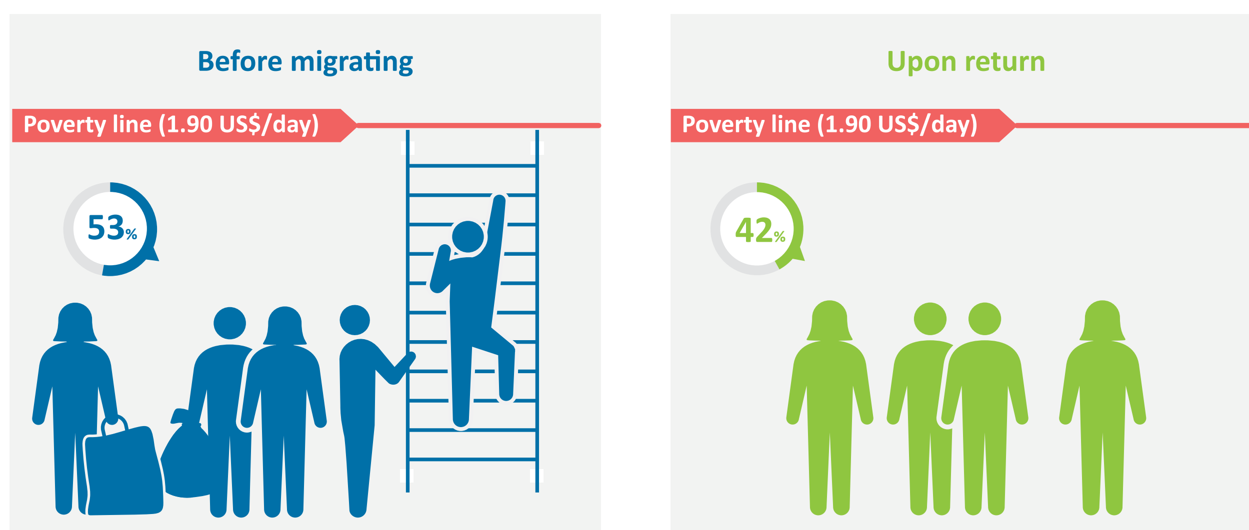
Financial inclusion of migrants is very low, with a small minority of migrant workers opening bank accounts in their countries of origin (11 per cent) or destination (22 per cent). Viet Nam was the lone exception in this regard, with 28 per cent of the Vietnamese migrants having a bank account at home and 42 per cent while abroad, which is largely due to a more formalized remittance market. The barriers that migrants face in using formal banking services continue to pose an obstacle to greater inclusion, as the documentation required often excludes irregular migrants, isolated workplaces and restricted movement make access challenging, and migrants have reported feeling unwelcome as customers in many destination country banks (UNCDF, 2017).

Return and reintegration

Upon return to their countries of origin, a substantial portion of the migrants struggled to find employment (44 per cent), and few were able to access services to assist them with re-joining their communities (8 per cent). Although many brought back new skills from their time abroad (68 per cent), only a small share were able to apply them upon returning home (16 per cent). The challenges faced and lack of support available for return migrants to successfully reintegrate can limit their ability to contribute to the long-term social and economic development of their home countries.

Migration can have a significant impact on poverty reduction within the region, reducing those living below the poverty line by double digits (11 per cent) from before to after migration (figure 7). The results were particularly striking in Viet Nam and Myanmar, where poverty was reduced by 17 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. While it should be noted that both countries have also experienced rapid economic growth during the time period researched, the results suggest that labour migration has significant potential to contribute to poverty alleviation in countries of origin.

Figure 7. Labour migration as a ladder out of poverty



The majority of migrants were employed in agriculture before migration (52 per cent) and working abroad proved more effective in facilitating industrialization of the work force in some countries than in others. Viet Nam was by far the most successful in this regard, with a total of 27 per cent of migrants shifting out of agriculture into manufacturing and other sectors upon return. Lao (9 per cent) and Myanmar migrant workers (13 per cent) also transitioned away from agricultural work but suffered higher rates of unemployment after returning home. The share of Cambodian migrants employed in agriculture actually increased by 2 per cent after returning home.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that although the socio-economic benefits of labour migration have not been maximized within the ASEAN region, positive outcomes can be achieved when migrant workers are provided with opportunities to enhance their job skills, avoid debt, receive the minimum wage, and find gainful employment upon return. To support greater realization of positive results, a shift in approach to migration is required within development policies. The goal needs to be reframed as an increased number of migrant workers who have a holistically beneficial labour migration experience, rather than over-emphasizing the importance of an expanded national remittance account.

The chances of having a positive result are currently unevenly distributed, as the profile of migrant workers was found to be an important determinant of their socio-economic returns on migration. Nationality, sector of work, and destination country were the most significant demographic factors in shaping migration outcomes, though it

was clear that gender is also very meaningful, particularly where policy is more restrictive towards the migration of women.

A critical question that the research sought to answer was whether regular migration currently leads to more beneficial outcomes for migrant workers, as it is a commonly accepted practice to encourage “safe and regular migration” as a protection strategy against exploitation and abuse. The findings did not demonstrate that regular migration was essential to better outcomes, and the impact appears to be heavily dependent upon how effectively policies are implemented for specific migration corridors. It should be carefully considered whether interventions to support behaviour change of migrant workers are justified until policies are enacted and enforced that make regular migration a more clearly beneficial choice.

Labour rights protection in destination countries was the most consistently important factor in facilitating more positive outcomes for migrant workers, particularly in the form of receiving the minimum wage. This suggests that formalizing the working conditions of migrant workers who are commonly excluded from statutory minimum wage requirements (such as domestic workers, agricultural workers, entertainment workers, and fishers) is a critical step to ensuring they benefit from their migration experiences.

Lack of assurance of labour protections contributes to a situation where migration within ASEAN is often a considerable gamble for migrant workers and their family members. Migrants currently have limited ability to control whether they have a positive or negative migration experience, regardless of the decisions they make. To a great extent, improving the odds of a positive outcome requires changes to policy and practice by duty bearers – governments, employers, and recruitment agencies – rather than to the behaviour of migrant workers.

“I have three little brothers. They can't work as they are too young, so to provide for my family I decided to seek employment in Malaysia.”

Female migrant worker from Myanmar

1. Introduction

1.1 Labour migration within South-East Asia

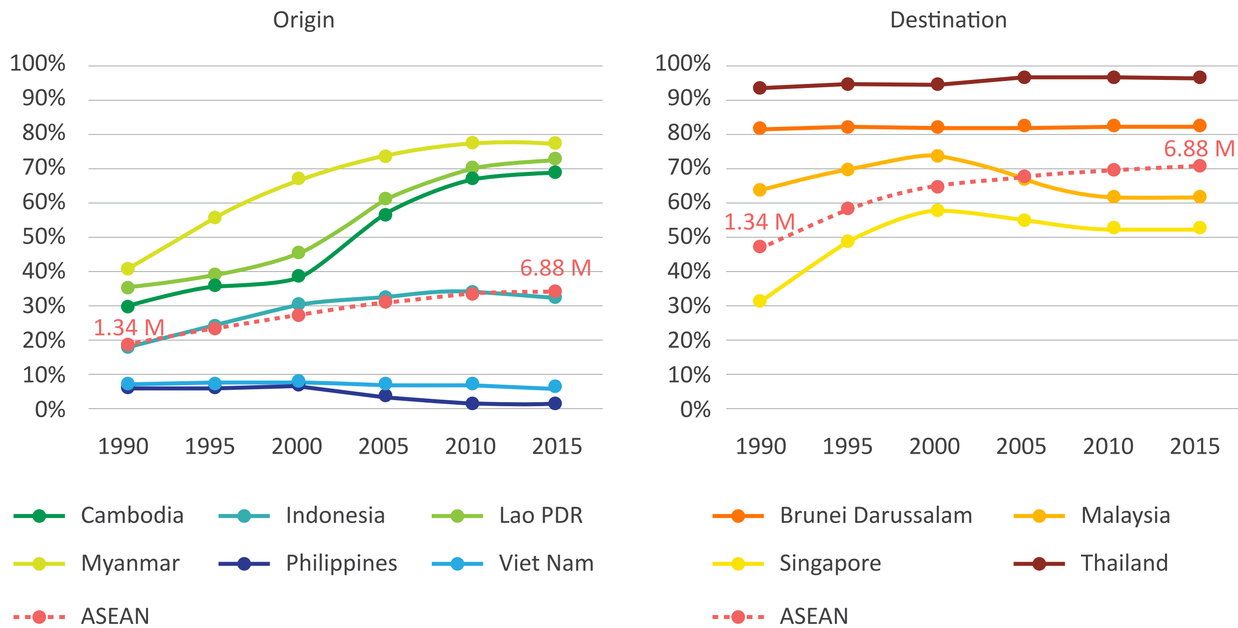
The ten Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) form a dynamic and rapidly emerging region, with 629 million residents and a combined gross domestic product of US$2.4 trillion as of 2015. Labour force expansion and productivity improvements have driven annual economic growth of 5.2 per cent from 2007 to 2015, consistently outperforming the global average over the same period (ASEAN, 2016a).

However, economic prosperity has not been evenly distributed throughout the region and poverty remains an enduring challenge. Despite major progress in poverty alleviation during the last few decades, approximately one in seven ASEAN residents were still living on less than US$2 per day as of 2015 (ASEAN, 2016b). In particular, women, ethnic minority groups, and rural communities have not benefitted to the same extent from the region’s macroeconomic gains (UNDP and ASEAN, 2015).

During the last two decades, labour migration has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth and development in both countries of origin and destination within ASEAN. International labour migration in the region is triggered by two main factors: (1) disparities between countries in terms of economic and social development; and (2) demographic differences among the populations of ASEAN nations, with a young and expanding labour force in many countries of origin and ageing populations and declining birth rates in destination countries affecting the supply and demand of labour. Since both factors are structural rather than cyclical in nature, labour migration is not likely to diminish in the medium term and can be expected to continue to expand (ILO and ADB, 2014).

There are now estimated to be 20.2 million migrants originating from ASEAN countries, among whom nearly 6.9 million have migrated to other countries within the region. Though much of intra-ASEAN migration is irregular and not fully captured by official data, the statistics available clearly show the number of migrants moving to other ASEAN countries has risen dramatically, increasing more than fivefold since 1990 (UNDESA, 2016) (figure 8).

Figure 8. Share of intra-ASEAN migrants for countries of origin and destination (1990–2015) (%)



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016)

Acknowledging the potential for intra-regional migration to contribute to the economic growth and development of the bloc, a freer flow of skilled labour is a key feature of the newly established ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). ASEAN has begun expanding labour mobility under the AEC by establishing Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) for seven highly-skilled occupations and one sector.[1] However, most of the workers involved in intra-ASEAN labour migration are employed in low-skilled, labour-intensive jobs in agriculture, fisheries, domestic work, manufacturing, construction, hospitality, and food services.

Although estimated to constitute as much as 87 per cent of intra-regional labour migration flows (Orbeta, 2013), ASEAN has yet to establish policies on mobility of workers into low-skilled jobs. Conversely, the eight professional occupations covered by the ASEAN MRAs collectively represent only 0.3 per cent to 1.4 per cent of total employment in Member States (ILO and ADB, 2014). The policy gap does not fairly reflect the importance of low-skilled migration within ASEAN countries, as the prosperity of whole regions and economic sectors are heavily dependent on the output and earnings of these workers.

Due to the high costs, long duration, and considerable complexity of navigating the existing bilateral channels for migration, many intra-ASEAN migrants are precariously employed in an irregular status. Regardless of their legal status or the documents they hold, migrants employed in low-skilled work often face exploitation and abuse because of inadequate protection of labour rights during recruitment and employment.

Women face additional challenges in accessing safe and legal migration opportunities, with the type of work typically available to them often paying less and affording fewer legal protections due to lack of formalization. This reflects an undervaluing of occupations that are traditionally viewed as women's work, such as employment as a domestic worker, as well as discriminatory practices in sectors that employ both women and men. In addition, protectionist policies in some countries restrict the movement of women by age, sector, destination or other circumstances perceived as dangerous or contrary to traditional social values. Because establishing these barriers to regular migration does not remove the factors that push women to seek work abroad, many women have no choice but to migrate through irregular channels into the informal economy (ILO, 2017a).

[1] Engineering services, nursing services, architectural services, surveying qualifications, dental practitioners, medical practitioners, accountancy services, and tourism professionals.

While assumptions are often made about the end result of migration in ASEAN and how best to ensure a safe and rewarding experience for migrant workers, the rigorous collection and analysis of empirical data has been very limited. This study aims to help fill the knowledge gap on the socio-economic outcomes of migration into low-skilled work within the region.

1.2 Background on the ILO TRIANGLE in ASEAN and IOM PROMISE programmes

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme (2015–25) delivers technical assistance and support with the overall goal of maximising the contribution of labour migration to equitable, inclusive and stable growth and development in the ASEAN region. The programme is active in six countries – Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam – and engages with ASEAN bodies, working in close cooperation with governments and social partners to achieve three inter-linking objectives: (1) strengthening protection of the rights of migrant workers; (2) enabling migrant workers to contribute to and benefit from social and economic development; and (3) establishing labour mobility systems that are gender-responsive and increase the efficiency of labour markets.

Concurrently, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is carrying out the Poverty Reduction through Skills Development for Safe and Regular Migration in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand (PROMISE) project (2015–21).[2] PROMISE will strengthen the linkages between labour migration to Thailand and poverty reduction in the region, with a particular focus on engaging employers and training institutions in skills development, strengthening mechanisms for ethical recruitment and worker protection, and improving migrant workers' access to decent employment opportunities. The PROMISE project seeks to equip migrant workers with the skills to fill mismatches between the supply and demand sides within national labour markets, between countries, and in sectors with high development potential, enabling migrant workers to move up the employment ladder into occupations with better wages and working conditions.

Because of their substantial thematic, geographic, and temporal overlap, TRIANGLE in ASEAN and PROMISE expect to work closely together to ensure greater impact. To initiate this collaboration, the two projects agreed to conduct a joint baseline survey. The ILO and IOM co-funded the study and worked in close cooperation with the research team. Through the identification of shared areas for future work, a foundation for further collaboration and coordination between the projects has been established.

In order to document the impact of the interventions, a zero-measurement needed to be established during year one of the two ten-year projects. The baseline study applies standardized data collection tools and a standardized research approach to ensure close comparability of data between countries. The plan is to replicate the approach during mid-term and end-line surveys in project years five and ten to assess longitudinal changes to which the projects have contributed.

The baseline study will be also be used to shape the design of interventions during TRIANGLE in ASEAN and PROMISE. By determining the current situation for migrants in terms of protection of rights, contribution to development, and labour mobility, the project will identify key gaps in policies and practices to be addressed. In addition, the findings will assist with targeting and tailoring of activities by obtaining an understanding of the differences among sub-groups, including by nationality, gender, legal status, sector of work, and other demographic criteria.

[2] The PROMISE inception phase in 2015-2017 also covered Viet Nam.

2. Research approach

Labour migration has never featured more prominently within South-East Asia than it does today. Even so, there remains a dearth of reliable data that can be applied for the development of evidence-based policy and programming. Due to the temporary and irregular nature of much of the migration occurring within the region, the realities faced by migrant workers are often hidden from view. Without data to counter prejudice and inform decision-making on labour migration governance, policy-making can easily fall sway to demagoguery and scapegoating of migrants.

This research helps to mitigate this risk, contributing to our understanding of labour migration within the region in a number of ways. It examines migration from a regional perspective, providing comparable data between countries of origin, countries of destination, and migration corridors in South-East Asia. The study also assists with setting priorities for action by analysing differences by gender, sector of work, and legal status, acknowledging the importance of these factors in shaping the experiences of migrant workers within the region.

In addition, the study developed a methodology for assessing the social and economic outcomes of migration on individual migrant workers and their households by comparing their situations before migrating and after return. In doing so, the study interrogates assumptions that are often made about what contributes to better outcomes for migrant workers, such as using regular channels, holding legal documentation, and possessing relevant skills.

The research also piloted adaptations of the methodologies for measuring progress towards achieving some of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among migrant populations. In this regard, it is important that the international community recognize that specialized methods are necessary to accurately capture the experiences of migrant workers, particularly among marginalized sub-groups such as irregular migrants and those employed in the informal sector.

Furthermore, the study provides an opportunity to examine the impact of “safe migration” interventions through the inclusion of control sites where no activities are planned. This will enable an assessment of the counterfactual during mid-term and end-line stages of the project cycle. The data will provide a robust evidence-base for assessing which strategies worked and which did not in improving the outcomes of labour migration in target sites.

The report findings are structured by presenting the outcomes of migration first and then tracing them back through four stages of the migration process to gain a more detailed understanding of the experiences of migrant workers. These four stages are broken down into: (1) pre-migration preparations; (2) the migration process; (3) employment abroad; and (4) return and reintegration.

2.1 Research questions

The main areas of inquiry for the research are provided below by thematic area. For all questions, group-specific differences were also examined (based upon nationality, gender, legal status, sector of work, and other demographic criteria).

Labour rights protection

1. What are the wages and working conditions for migrant workers in destination countries? Are the working conditions different from those promised during recruitment?
2. What types of abuses do migrants face during recruitment and employment? Are they able to resolve their grievances?
3. What types of support services and information are available to migrants? Are they useful?
4. Are the labour and social protections established for migrants under law realized in practice? What are the protection gaps?
5. What communication mediums and approaches are most effective in reaching migrants?

Migration and development

1. What costs are involved in migration? How do migrants pay for them? How long does it take to pay off the debt incurred?
2. What challenges do migrants face in obtaining work or starting profitable enterprises upon return? What services are needed to better assist migrants with reintegration?
3. What types of financial services do migrants use? What are the obstacles to using formal banking services?
4. How much do migrants send home in remittances? What service providers are used? How much does it cost to remit? What are the remittances used for?
5. Do migrants acquire skills in destination countries? Are they applicable after return? If so, how do they acquire those skills?
6. What are the socio-economic outcomes of migration into low-skilled work within the ASEAN region?
7. What factors are associated with more positive or negative migration outcomes? In particular, is regular migration an important contributing factor to more beneficial migration experiences?

Labour mobility

1. How effective are different migration channels? What are the barriers to using legal channels for migration (particularly for women)?
2. What types of legal documentation do migrants obtain? How does their legal status impact on their wages, their working conditions, and their ability of assert their rights?
3. How do migrants find jobs? What additional labour market information is needed to allow migrants to make more informed decisions about employment?
4. What skills and qualifications do migrants have? Are migrants' qualifications and skills recognized by employers in destination countries?
5. What skills and qualifications are valued by employers? What efforts are made at job matching? Do migrants benefit from having relevant qualifications and skills?

2.2 Research Methodology

Data was collected using a mixed methodology approach, including the following quantitative and qualitative techniques:

- Desk review of literature and official data.
- Administered surveys of return migrant workers (the survey instrument is provided in appendix 1).
- In-depth interviews with return migrant workers.
- Key informant interviews with stakeholders.

A hub and spoke model network was established to ensure that high-quality data was collected by a field team who are knowledgeable and sensitive to local cultural practices. Rapid Asia managed the overall project and well-established local research firms were contracted in each country to conduct face-to-face surveys with return migrants and stakeholders. All interviews were conducted in local languages.

2.2.1 Research sample

During July–August 2016, a total of 1,808 return migrant workers (women = 49 per cent/men = 51 per cent) were surveyed in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (table 1). In addition, 96 qualitative interviews (women = 42 per cent/men = 58 per cent) were conducted with return migrant workers and stakeholders, evenly distributed across the four countries. Purposive sampling for qualitative interviews and random sampling for survey participants were applied, with attention paid to inclusion of marginalized groups within the migrant population (particularly irregular migrant workers and ethnic minorities).

In order to conduct a regional study and obtain comparable data between countries, eligibility criteria were applied restricting the respondents to return migrant workers who had been employed in Thailand or Malaysia only. These two countries were selected among the ASEAN nations because they are the two largest destination countries in the region and fall within the geographic scope of the ILO and IOM programmes.

Table 1. Research sample

Respondent	Location	Criteria	Sample
Return migrant workers	Cambodia Lao PDR Myanmar Viet Nam	• 18–45 years of age • Returned from work in Thailand or Malaysia during the last two years • Employed in low-skilled work in fisheries, domestic work, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, or hospitality and food services. • 50% women/50% men	Survey (n=1,808) In-depth interviews (n=60)
Stakeholders	Cambodia Lao PDR Myanmar Viet Nam	• Equal representation of government officials; recruitment agencies and employers; and trade unions, NGOs, mass organizations, and women's groups. • 50% women/50% men (to the extent possible)	Key informant interviews (n=36)[1]

2.2.2 Research sites

Figure 9 shows the selected survey locations in each of the four ASEAN target countries. A total of three provinces were chosen in each country. Two provinces per country were selected based upon the locations of ILO and IOM migrant worker resource centres (MRCs).

In addition to collecting data in the ILO and IOM intervention areas, the research applied a quasi-experimental design through the inclusion of one control province in each country where no activities will be implemented. This will allow for an assessment of the counterfactual during mid-term and end-line studies. The control sites were chosen through consultation with stakeholders to determine areas with similar circumstances in terms of labour migration flows and socio-economic contexts.

The reason for completing data collection entirely among return migrants in countries of origin was to allow for easier access to migrants who were employed in hard-to-reach sectors and to obtain findings with greater statistical power by narrowing the focus of the sample.

[1] A full list of stakeholders interviewed is presented in appendix 2.

Figure 9. Map of field research sites

Site	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Viet Nam
A	Banteay Meanchey	Savannakhet	Shan	Ha Tinh
B	Kampong Cham	Champasak	Mandalay	Thanh Hoa
C	Takeo	Khammuane	Kayin	Quang Binh

■ Intervention sites ■ Control sites

In each selected province, three to six villages with high concentrations of return migrants were identified based on input from MRCs and other stakeholders (table 2). To ensure a good geographic spread within the sample, respondents were intercepted at different locations within each village.

Table 2. Detailed location of field research sites

Country	Province/State	Village/Commune	Sample
Cambodia	Banteay Meanchey	Kouk Prich, Kouk Romiet, Ta Lei, Prei, Chaeng, Ou Kakaoh.	152
	Kampong Cham	Prah, Toul Por, Au Daung Pich, Trapang Kak, Au Daug Por Kak, Kdey Beng.	152
	Takeo	Tuol Lhong, Neal, Trapeang Khnar, Angkor Phdiek village, Chumreach Pen.	153
Lao PDR	Savannakhet	Phakkha, Phonsavanh, Sompoye, Nakhu, Khor, Sethong, Khamthao.	150
	Champasak	Donkoh, Nonsavang, Nady, Pamok.	150
	Khammuane	Khamkeo, Pung Nuea, Phong Bueng San Theung, Done Kio, Sadue.	150
Myanmar	Shan	Tin Htut, Kong Mong, Kart Wone, Wan Toung, Wan Kan.	151
	Mandalay	Sar Khar Village, Shar Taw, Nay Thit, Yay Wai, Tharse-Kyar Phet Kong.	148
	Kayin	Shwe Gun, Hti lone, Wut Gyi, Gyaing, Zar Tha Pyin, Yae Kyaw Gyi.	152
Viet Nam	Ha Tinh	My Loc, Cam Nhuong, Xam Duong.	150
	Thanh Hoa	Xuan Khang, Hai Long, Yen Tho, Can Khe, Yen Phu, Yen Hung.	150
	Quang Binh	Bắc Trạch, Thanh Trạch, Đại Trạch, Hải Trạch.	150
Total			**1,808**

2.2.3 Data analysis

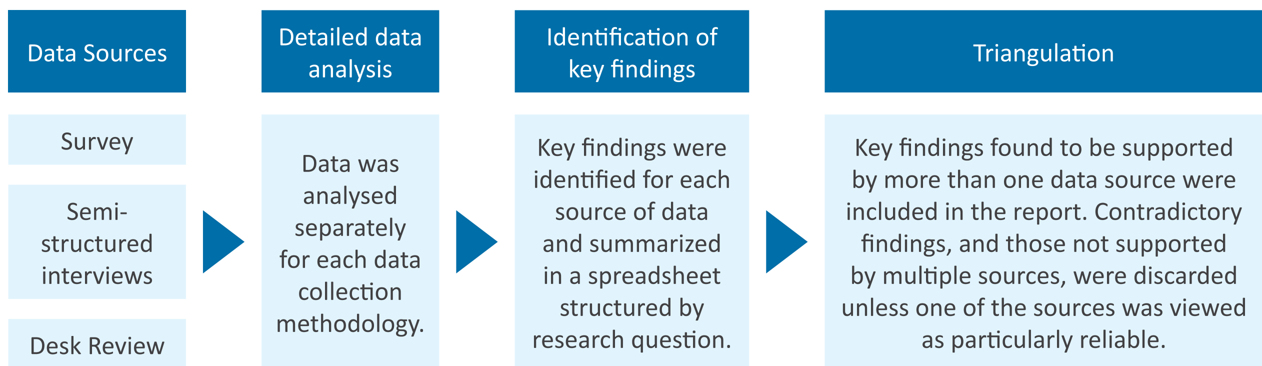
Desk review: Relevant documents were reviewed and analysed against the research questions and the findings from primary research methods.

Semi-structured interviews: For each interview conducted, responses provided by informants were summarized into a standardized analysis template, categorizing answers against the research questions. All interviews were recorded digitally, allowing the Research Team to follow up and clarify with respondents. Key findings were determined by identifying the most frequent responses, as well as noteworthy or representative case studies and quotes.

Surveys: The local research firms were responsible for data entry with regular data checks conducted by Rapid Asia to ensure quality. Particular attention was paid to the questions capturing ratio data (such as cost of migration, savings, remittances sent, and income) to make sure the data was consistent and to remove outliers. The datasets from each country were then integrated into one data file. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software.

Triangulation: Triangulation was applied to obtain greater assurance of the validity of the research findings and a broad range of perspectives. In this study, the multi-level combination method was applied.[2] Data from the desk review, semi-structured interviews and surveys were analysed separately so that key findings could be identified. These findings were then sorted by research question. Finally, the data was triangulated by examining the key findings across the three different information sources and selecting for inclusion those findings supported by more than one source. The triangulation process is illustrated in figure 10.

Figure 10. Data triangulation process



2.2.4 Gender mainstreaming

Specific measures were applied throughout the process of conducting the research to ensure a gender-responsive approach. The measures included recruitment of a gender expert to be a part of the research team; equal sample quotas of women and men; and disaggregation of data to support gender analysis of the results. Table 3 provides details of the steps taken to ensure gender was thoroughly mainstreamed in the study's approach.

Table 3. Measures for gender mainstreaming

Stage	Measures for gender mainstreaming
Research design and procurement	• Respondents in highly-gendered sectors of work targeted in eligibility criteria (such as women in domestic work and men in fishing work). • Inclusion of gender-specific issues within research instruments (such as maternity and childcare benefits, gender-based violence and discrimination, stigma faced by return women migrants, and empowerment of women). • Gender mainstreaming included as a criterion for assessing the quality of proposals.
Formation of project team	• Gender expert recruited.
Data collection	• Training provided to enumerators on gender sensitivity. • Applying a gender lens in the review of statistics and literature. • 50/50 sampling quotas for women and men respondents. (For qualitative interviews, it was not possible obtain an even gender balance due to highly male-dominated stakeholder groups. A split of 42% women and 58% men was obtained). • Inclusion of representatives from civil society organizations specializing in gender issues in key informant interviews.

[2] See USAID, "Conducting mixed-method evaluations", Technical Note, 2013.

Data analysis	• Disaggregation of data from women and men respondents to support gender analysis of the results (where significant differences were found). • Sectoral analysis of differences between highly-gendered sectors of work and between women and men within the same sectors. • Development of recommendations to promote gender equality and empowerment of women.
Validation meeting	• Balance of women and men participants. • Gender experts from ILO, IOM, UN Women, and stakeholder organizations in attendance to provide inputs. • Presentation and discussion of gender issues identified during the study. • Alternation between women and men during Q&A.

2.2.5 Quality assurance

Standards for sub-contracting

Only companies who are members of the European Society for Opinion and Market Research (ESOMAR) were recruited for data collection.

Development of research instruments

The survey questionnaire and interview guides were developed by the ILO and IOM, and reviewed in detail by Rapid Asia. After the tools had been agreed upon, they were sent to each country for localization, translation, and pre-testing. Translations were carried out by experienced translators and the translated versions checked by national ILO and IOM staff in each country before signing off on them. The results of the pre-test were used to make final adjustments to the instruments before undertaking data collection.

Enumerator training

Trainings for enumerators were held in each of the four countries, supervised by Rapid Asia and representatives from the ILO and IOM. All interviewers were provided with instruction on labour migration issues; the overall research objectives; sampling procedures; detailed question-by-question training on the instruments; use of the show cards on legal documentation; quality control procedures; ethical protocols; and other matters. Interviewers also participated in role-plays and interviews with actual respondents to help the interviewers become familiarized with the research instruments prior to commencing fieldwork.

Quality assurance checks

To ensure data quality, all completed questionnaires underwent a number of checks prior to data entry including:

- Validation of 20–30 per cent of all questionnaires for each interviewer. This was done through direct monitoring of fieldwork and call-backs to respondents to verify the data.
- After completion, supervisors checked each questionnaire for consistency, completeness, and whether they were filled out according to instructions. This was done in the field, and if mistakes were found, the interview was redone.
- All "clean" questionnaires were sent to the local companies' head office for final checks, coding (for open-ended questions), and data entry by their data processing departments.
- A specific checklist was provided to ensure that ratio data in connection with wages, migration costs, remittances, and other data of this type were checked for outliers.
- The data processing departments prepared the final data file for which a data map was used to ensure matching and "clean" data before submission to Rapid Asia.
- Rapid Asia ran several additional data tests to ensure the data was clean, consistent, and did not include outliers.

2.3 Research validation

The results of the research were presented at a regional validation workshop, held on 17 January 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand. Over 70 participants from government agencies, employer and recruitment agency associations, trade unions, civil society organizations, UN agencies, and academics from six countries attended.

The workshop generated useful feedback from this diverse group of participants for revision of the research report. In addition, small groups were formed along country lines that developed recommendations for application of the results of the study.

2.4 Research limitations

Within the ASEAN region, there is a lack of accurate statistical data on labour migration, particularly due to the large share of irregular migrant workers who are not fully captured in official data. Moreover, disaggregation of data on migrant workers in terms of gender and sector of work is not comprehensively available or entirely consistent in definition.

As a result, a reliable sampling frame does not exist and thus the statistical power of the research findings cannot be determined. In addition, the data collected was not a pure probability sample due to the attention paid to ILO and IOM intervention areas. Therefore, the results should not be considered statistically representative at national or regional levels. The sample allocation was determined by the need to have a large enough sample base to compare results between key sub-groups, including gender, country, sector of work, and legal status.

It is important to note that some aggregation of data was necessary to support this type of analysis due to difficulty in locating migrants who had been employed in some of the target sectors. The three sectors of hospitality/tourism (n=97), restaurants (n=185), and entertainment or sex work (n=9) were combined into a single sector: "hospitality and food services". Similarly, the fishing (n=51) and seafood processing (n=131) sectors were also combined due to the small number of migrants reporting such employment, establishing a new sector termed "fisheries work". In particular, more specialized approaches are clearly necessary to obtain a larger sample of migrant workers returning from employment in entertainment or sex work due to the stigma involved for return migrants in communities of origin.

The data on migration costs captured in this survey were collected as an overall estimate. A list of expenses to consider was provided to migrants in order to make the estimate, including for training, recruitment, passports, visas, travel, required testing and examinations, deposits, orientations, bribes, and other informal payments. However, a more detailed survey of migration costs is needed to determine which specific expenses are excessive. The ILO plans to conduct such surveys within the ASEAN region using the standardized ILO–World Bank KNOMAD methodology in the near future.[3]

Several relevant indicators for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adapted for measurement as part of the survey. This is in-line with the metrics that have been established for the SDGs, many of which include disaggregation by migratory status. Because of this requirement, the approaches piloted during the study can provide useful learning on measuring the indicators among migrant populations, as they require adaptation for collecting data from irregular migrants and those employed in the informal sector. However, it should be noted that measurement of the SDG indicators is generally intended to make use of official data gathered by national statistical offices using standardized methodologies, which have yet to be fully developed in some cases and could not be applied during the research.

Even though the methodology developed for assessing migration outcomes through a Migration Outcomes Index (MOI) proved fruitful in providing a migrant-centred and holistic tool, it must be acknowledged that there is significant opportunity to further strengthen the methodology by anchoring its approach to more established socio-economic data. This would assist with ensuring that the results obtained through its application are broadly representative.

Many topics in the survey questionnaire asked for additional detail through follow-up questions. In some cases, however, only a small number of return migrant workers were able to answer the more specific questions in each country, resulting in small sample sizes. This meant that the analysis of sub-groups was not always possible at the country level because the resulting sample bases were too small to hold any statistical validity. In such cases, analysis of sub-groups using the entire regional sample was conducted to determine whether there were differences.

The survey included questions dealing with wages, costs, remittances, and other financial data, which were collected using a number of different currencies depending upon country of origin and destination. In order to obtain comparable data, all currencies were converted to US dollars for analysis. Since exchange rates fluctuate over time, and the value

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[3] For more information, see https://www.knomad.org/data/recruitment-costs

of the US dollar in particular has appreciated against many Asian currencies in recent years, it was important to apply an average exchange rate that was responsive to the duration of the migration experiences.

The median period of time abroad for migrant workers was analysed and was used as the basis for calculating the average exchange rates. Since the median stay differed significantly between the four countries of origin, the exchange rate for each country was calculated individually rather than applying an overall average rate. Table 4 displays the median period of stay and the resulting exchange rates applied for each of the four countries.

Table 4. Exchange rates applied

	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Viet Nam
Median stay in destination country	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years
Destination currencies	Rate	Rate	Rate	Rate
Thai baht (THB/US$1)	35.49	34.22	33.84	33.12
Malaysia ringgit (MYR/US$1)	4.23	-	3.76	3.62
Origin currencies	Rate	Rate	Rate	Rate
Cambodia riel (KHR/US$1)	4 081.63	-	-	-
Lao PDR kip (LAK/US$1)	-	8 135.00	-	-
Myanmar kyat (MMK/US$1)	-	-	1 108.57	-
Viet Nam dong (VND/US$1)	-	-	-	21 442.00

2.5 Research ethical guidelines

Due to the sensitive and potentially incriminating nature of some of the issues investigated during the study, stringent ethical protocols were established for data collectors. The research teams were made to adhere to international best practices for conducting research with vulnerable populations, including application of the following standards:

1. Ensuring that all respondents understand the purpose of the survey and how the findings will be used;
2. Obtaining informed consent from respondents and notifying them of their rights to confidentiality;
3. Notifying participants that they are free to stop the interview at any time;
4. Maintaining the anonymity of respondents during the collection and analysis of data; and
5. Being sensitive to cultural norms during interactions with respondents and their family members.

2.6 Research terms and concepts

Migrant worker	A person who is engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national (International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990).
Regular migrant worker	A migrant worker or members of their family authorized to enter, to stay, and to engage in a remunerated activity in the State of employment pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party (International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990).

Irregular migrant worker	A migrant worker who leaves, enters, stays, or works without the necessary authorization or documents required under the laws of that State (IOM Glossary on Migration).[4]
Low-skilled work	Occupations that typically involve the performance of simple and routine physical or manual tasks. These occupations may require the use of hand-held tools, such as shovels, or of simple electrical equipment, such as vacuum cleaners. These occupations involve tasks such as cleaning; digging; lifting and carrying materials by hand; sorting, storing, or assembling goods by hand (sometimes in the context of mechanized operations); operating a non-motorized vehicle; and picking fruit or vegetables (International Standard Classification of Occupations, 2012).
Domestic work	(a) domestic work means work performed in or for a household or households; (b) any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship is a domestic worker; (c) a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker (Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)).
Informal sector	All economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements (Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)).
Recruitment agency	Any natural or legal person, independent of the public authorities, which provides one or more of the following labour market services: (a) services for matching offers of and applications for employment, without the private employment agency becoming a party to the employment relationships [that] may arise therefrom; (b) services consisting of employing workers with a view to making them available to a third party, who may be a natural or legal person (referred to as a "user enterprise"), which assigns their tasks and supervises the execution of these tasks; or (c) other services relating to job seeking, determined by the competent authority after consulting the most representative employers' and workers' organizations, such as the provision of information, that do not set out to match specific offers of and applications for employment (Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)).
Broker	Any natural or legal person not licensed by the State to provide one or more of the labour market services mentioned in the "recruitment agency" definition above. This term includes both individual brokers and social networks that offer services with or without remuneration.[5]

[4] There is no internationally accepted definition of the term "irregular migrant worker".

[5] There is no internationally accepted definition of the term "broker".

"There weren't many jobs available in Myanmar and I was so poor that I did not have any land to farm....so, I decided to go to Thailand to find work."

Male migrant worker from Myanmar

3. Profile of migrant workers

3.1 Destination country, gender, and legal status of migrants

Table 5 below shows the migration profile for return migrant workers broken down by destination country, gender, and legal status. Examining the differences by country of destination, the costs required to migrate to Malaysia (US$1,082) were more than four times higher than for Thailand (US$251), resulting in a much greater share of migrants who had to take out loans to cover the costs. Nearly three out of four migrants heading to Malaysia had borrowed money, while just one third of migrants to Thailand had done so. This largely reflects the greater number of migrants from Cambodia, Myanmar and Viet Nam journeying to Thailand through irregular channels, which are cheaper than regular migration.

An important gender difference revealed by the survey is that on average women migrant workers earn US$250 per month, whereas men are paid US$286. This mirrors the global situation, in which women workers everywhere are paid significantly lower wages than men (ILO, 2016d). A more detailed analysis of the wage gap by sector and nationality is provided in section 7.5.

The largest proportion of migrants had worked in manufacturing (29 per cent) and construction (21 per cent) but there were some notable differences in employment by gender. Women were more commonly employed in hospitality and food services (19 per cent), domestic work (18 per cent) and agriculture (15 per cent) than men, while men were more frequently working in manufacturing (32 per cent) and construction jobs (29 per cent) than women. This correlates closely with the findings of other research studies in the ASEAN region, which have found that women migrants are more frequently employed in sectors with high-levels of informality, such as domestic and agricultural work (ILO, 2017a).

Between migrants with regular and irregular legal status, there were a number of substantial differences. Regular migrants were more commonly working in manufacturing jobs (37 per cent) than irregular migrants (19 per cent) and much less likely to be employed in agricultural work (7 vs. 21 per cent). Moreover, irregular migrants were more than twice as likely to come from ethnic minority groups (24 per cent) than regular migrant workers (11 per cent). Notably,

although regular migrant workers had paid more in migration costs (US$572), taken out more loans (53 per cent) and required more time to migrate (61 days), their wages were about equal with irregular migrant workers. These financial and temporal considerations often play into the decision of many migrant workers to eschew obtaining legal documents in destination countries.

Table 5. Profile of migrant workers by destination country, gender, and legal status (n=1,808)

Sector of work	Total N=1,808 (%)	THA n=1,419 (%)	MYS n=389 (%)	Men n=926 (%)	Women n=882 (%)	REG n=1,018 (%)	IRR n=790 (%)
Domestic Work	11	11	9	4	18	9	13
Fisheries	10	6	27	10	10	13	7
Agriculture	13	16	3	11	15	7	21
Manufacturing	29	26	41	32	26	37	19
Construction	21	23	13	29	12	22	20
Hospitality and food services	16	18	8	13	19	13	21
Ethnicity	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Minority	16	19	6	14	19	11	24
Majority	84	81	94	86	81	89	77
Key migration statistics	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$
Median years abroad	3.3	3.1	4.1	3.4	3.2	3.8	2.6
Average days taken to migrate	52	44	83	51	53	61	40
Average cost of migration (US$)	430	251	1082	459	400	572	247
Borrowed to pay for migration (%)	42	33	73	42	41	53	27
Average loan amount (US$)	560	278	1024	578	541	677	268
Average months to pay back loan	8	5	12	9	7	9	4
Average days worked per week	6.4	6.5	6.2	6.4	6.4	6.3	6.5
Average hours worked per day	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Average monthly wages (US$)	268	264	286	286	250	270	266
Worked without documents (%)	44	52	12	42	46	-	100
Unemployed upon return (%)	9	10	5	7	11	9	10

Box 1

Stakeholder perspectives: Demographics of migration

Information from stakeholders supported the finding from the survey that there are a larger proportion of low-skilled migrant workers compared to skilled migrant workers. According to stakeholders, most migrant workers have completed primary and secondary school but some drop out and migrate at a very young age (12–15 years old).

Stakeholders from Myanmar and Viet Nam stated that men constituted the majority of migrant workers in the past but that the number of women migrant workers has increased as there is high demand for workers in sectors such as domestic work, garment factories and food processing. Myanmar stakeholders also noted that women are more commonly migrating on their own than in the past.

3.2 Sector of work for migrants

Table 6 shows the migration profile for return migrant workers broken down by sector of work. Of the two destination countries, Thailand was by far the more likely destination country overall (79 per cent), especially for migrant workers in agriculture, construction, and hospitality and food services. However, it is important to note that most of Malaysia's major countries of origin were not covered within the scope of the research, including Indonesia, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Gender balance was most skewed towards women in domestic work (82 vs. 18 per cent) and towards men in construction (71 vs. 29 per cent). However, a recent study by the ILO suggests that more women are beginning to enter construction work in Thailand, though often recruited into the industry alongside their husbands or male partners (ILO, 2016a).

It was notable that agricultural work employs a significantly larger proportion of migrants from ethnic minority groups (52 per cent), predominantly from Myanmar. This likely results from longstanding traditions of cross-border migration from Shan and Kayin State into work in the border areas of Thailand.

The monthly wages paid in agriculture were substantially lower than in other sectors (US$157). As agricultural work is not covered by minimum wage rules in Thailand unless it is year-round employment, the earnings can be much less than in more formalized industries. However, a similar lack of a wage floor exists for domestic workers, who were paid relatively high wages by comparison (US$275). The difference may be due in part to location of employment, as domestic work is often based in urban areas with a higher cost of living and commensurately higher wages. However, shortages of domestic workers may also have contributed to higher pay, as both Malaysia and Thailand have been faced with an insufficient number of workers to fill employer demands in recent years (ILO and UN Women, 2016).

The unemployment rate after return was most pronounced among those who worked in hospitality (15 per cent) and domestic work (14 per cent) and lowest among fisheries workers (2 per cent) and construction workers (5 per cent). This is possibly due to less developed service sectors in many countries of origin, which disproportionality affects the ability of women migrants to find work upon return.

Table 6. Profile of migrant workers by sector of work (n=1,808)

Destination country	Total n=1808 (%)	DOM n=192 (%)	FIS n=182 (%)	AGR n=237 (%)	MAN n=528 (%)	CON n=378 (%)	HOS n=291 (%)
Thailand	79	82	43	95	70	87	89
Malaysia	22	17	57	5	30	13	11
Gender	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men	51	18	53	43	57	71	42
Women	49	82	47	57	43	29	58
Ethnicity	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Minority	16	17	7	52	11	8	15
Majority	84	83	93	48	89	92	85
Key migration statistics	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$
Median years abroad	3.3	3.9	3.8	2.8	3.6	2.8	3.4
Average days taken to migrate	52	51	92	30	63	42	38
Average cost of migration (US$)	430	355	792	298	561	309	279
Borrowed to pay for migration (%)	42	31	66	26	45	49	30
Average loan amount (US$)	560	460	990	299	636	407	342
Average months to pay back loan	8	6	8	4	11	7	5
Average days worked per week	6.4	6.6	6.3	6.5	6.2	6.7	6.4
Average hours worked per day	10	11	10	10	10	10	10
Average monthly wages (US$)	268	275	338	157	284	283	264
Worked without documents (%)	44	52	29	71	28	42	56
Unemployed upon return (%)	9	14	2	12	8	5	15

Box 2
Migrant worker perspectives: Push and pull factors for migration

Information from interviews with return migrant workers found that wage differentials, financial instability and limited job opportunities were the main drivers for migration. In addition, some respondents said that they were influenced by relatives and friends who successfully worked overseas.

“I could see other people who migrated for work became better off financially; so I wanted to do it too.”
-Male migrant from Cambodia

“There weren’t many jobs available in my village, so migrating seemed like the best option.”
-Female migrant from Myanmar

3.3 Country of origin for migrants

Table 7 provides an overview of migration profiles by country of origin. Migrant workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Myanmar predominantly migrate to Thailand; whereas migrant workers from Viet Nam were evenly split between Malaysia and Thailand. Despite this difference, the recent trend among Vietnamese migrant workers has been an increasing number migrating to Thailand, often through irregular channels (see section 6.3).

There was no single dominant sector attracting migrants from across the four origin countries, with the top sector being construction for Cambodians (46 per cent), hospitality and food service for Lao (32 per cent), manufacturing for Myanmar workers (37 per cent), and fisheries for Vietnamese (29 per cent). However, manufacturing work did attract a large proportion of migrant workers from all four countries.

Unsurprisingly, the ethnicity of migrant workers was by far the most diverse among workers from Myanmar, with more than half (57 per cent) belonging to ethnic minority groups. Because of the data collection sites, Shan and Kayin migrants represented the largest minority populations surveyed. Ethnicity is an important factor influencing migration patterns in Myanmar because long-standing traditions of cross-border migration exist that are largely based on ethnic or kinship links (ILO, 2015f).

The median length of stay varied substantially when comparing the four countries. Migrant workers from Cambodia had the lowest average length of stay with one year, followed by migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (two years), Myanmar (three years), and Viet Nam (four years). The explanation for these differences is not entirely clear, though analysis of reasons for returning home found that Cambodian migrants were more likely than other migrants to return not of their own volition choice (see section 9.1).

Migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar reported the shortest average amount of time to migrate, at just 20 and 33 days respectively. The wait was significantly longer for Vietnamese migrants, who required a full 100 days to reach employment abroad. One reason for these differences in the time needed to migrate is that migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar predominantly migrated through informal channels, which are generally quicker (see section 6.2). In comparison, migrant workers from Viet Nam more frequently migrated through regular migration processes, which typically take a longer period of time.

Vietnamese migrant workers paid the most in migration costs (US$709), had to borrow the largest amounts (US$1,044), and took the longest time to pay them back (11 months). Much of this can be attributed to a higher portion of workers migrating regularly to Malaysia through recruitment agencies. Conversely, only about one quarter of Lao migrants had to borrow any money to migrate to Thailand, a journey that cost US$171 on average and was overwhelmingly made through irregular channels (96 per cent). The situation was similar in Cambodia, as most survey respondents migrated by simply crossing the border into Thailand, thereby lowering average migration costs (US$255).

Working conditions were uniformly demanding, with migrants from all countries working 9 to 11-hour days for six to seven days per week, which is beyond the legal limit in both Thailand and Malaysia. The majority of migrants earned below the legal minimum wage in spite of the long hours worked,[1] but there were substantial differences among workers from different countries. Vietnamese workers on average earned more than double the average wages of Myanmar migrants (US$357 vs US$176), even though Vietnamese migrant workers worked fewer hours per week on average.

Though not presented in table 7, a substantial wage gap between women and men migrants was found among migrants from all four countries of origin, with men paid between 8 (Viet Nam) to 27 per cent (Myanmar) more. An analysis of the data by sector to determine if the overall wage gap was the result of certain sectors being highly gendered showed that large wage disparities existed for all types of employment, except in manufacturing and hospitality.

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[1] On 1 January 2013, Thailand set a national minimum wage of THB300 per day (US$10) and Malaysia set a minimum wage of MYR900 (US$296) per month in Peninsular Malaysia and MYR800 (US$263) for Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan. During the time period covered by the study, these were the statutory wage floors enforced.

Nearly half of migrant workers were employed without documentation, with Cambodian migrants slightly more likely than others to hold regular legal status (65 per cent). It should be noted that this finding specifically relates to documents held during employment, and is not equivalent to the rates of regular versus irregular migration. The vast majority of migrants from across all four countries (73 per cent) used irregular channels to go abroad, though many acquired documentation to regularise their status after arrival in-country.

Table 7. Profile of migrant workers by country of origin (n=1,808)

Destination Country	Total n=1808 (%)	Cambodia n=457 (%)	Lao PDR n=450 (%)	Myanmar n=451 (%)	Viet Nam n=450 (%)
Thailand	79	92	100	71	51
Malaysia	22	8	-	29	49
Sector of work	%	%	%	%	%
Domestic Work	11	7	14	8	13
Fisheries	10	4	4	4	29
Agriculture	13	8	16	27	2
Manufacturing	29	29	24	37	27
Construction	21	46	11	13	14
Hospitality and Food Services	16	5	32	12	15
Ethnicity	%	%	%	%	%
Minority	16	4	4	57	< 1
Majority	84	96	96	43	99
Key migration statistics	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$	#/%/$
Median years abroad	3.3	1	2	3	4
Average days taken to migrate	52	55	20	33	100
Average cost of migration (US$)	430	255	171	587	709
Borrowed to pay for migration (%)	42	48	28	39	52
Average loan amount (US$)	560	241	152	596	1,044
Average months to pay back loan	8	5	3	10	11
Average days worked per week	6.4	6.6	6.4	6.4	6.3
Average hours worked per day	10	10	9	11	10
Average monthly wages (US$)	268	268	274	176	357
Worked without documents (%)	44	35	46	46	48
Unemployed upon return (%)	9	5	18	12	1

"I feel more confident after working in Thailand, better able to socialize even with people I don't know. I'm able to persuade people to buy my vegetables in the market. Before I migrated, I would not have been able to do this."

Female migrant worker from Cambodia

4. Assessment of migration outcomes

4.1 Development of the Migration Outcomes Index

Financial remittances are undoubtedly a significant outcome of labour migration among the four countries of origin studied. In 2015, an estimated US$16.9 billion was remitted to Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (World Bank, 2016), and recent research has suggested that the real total may be double that amount due to the large flows of remittances sent through informal channels that are not recorded (UNCDF, 2017).

However, the heavy emphasis placed on the macroeconomic importance of remittances within migration and development discourse can come at the expense of a more balanced and migrant-focused understanding of labour migration outcomes (Keijzer et al., 2016). Reviews of the existing body of evidence have concluded that a complex and heterogeneous relationship exists between remittances and development, making such unrestrained euphoria about their potential largely unjustified (De Haas, 2007; Carling, 2008).

To assist with redressing the asymmetry of the metrics used, a key analytical tool developed for the study is the Migration Outcomes Index (MOI). Much like the intent in establishing the Human Development Index in 1990, it was created "to shift the focus from national income accounting to people-centred policies" (Fukuda-Parr, 2003). The MOI also represents a break from the human trafficking paradigm that dominates much of the migration discourse within South-East Asia, offering a more nuanced assessment of migration outcomes rather than the overly simplistic binary of "trafficked or not trafficked".

The MOI provides a shortcut to assessing migration outcomes by generating a single number score, combining four financial indicators (income; tangible assets; savings; and debt) and four social indicators (life skills development; skill level of work; unemployment; and psychological, social, or health problems) to measure changes from before migration to after (table 8). Each indicator is measured as a dichotomy, categorizing outcomes as either positive or

negative during the data analysis. All financial and social indicators are weighted evenly within the aggregate index to provide a holistic assessment of migration outcomes.

The selection of the eight indicators was based upon consideration of critical outcomes for return migrant workers, as well as the areas of work planned by the ILO and IOM. Several iterations of the index were developed and tested, and the final set of indicators were found to be the most independent from each other. By including indicators with fewer associations, the MOI provides a more robust measure of the variation in migration experiences.

MOI scores are calculated at the individual respondent level and indexed on a range of 0–100 to provide an accessible benchmark against which to measure progress. The benefits of a single number score are that it facilitates comparisons between different groups of migrants and also allows for factors that contribute to positive or negative migration outcomes to be more easily identified.

Table 8. Migration Outcomes Index indicators

Social indicators	Positive outcome	Negative outcome
Life skills development	Improved	No change
Unemployed	No	Yes
Skill level of work	Improved	No change or reduced
Psychological, social, or health problems	No	Yes
Financial indicators	**Positive outcome**	**Negative outcome**
Income	Increased	No change or reduced
Tangible assets	Increased	No change or reduced
Savings	Increased	No change or reduced
Debt	No	Yes

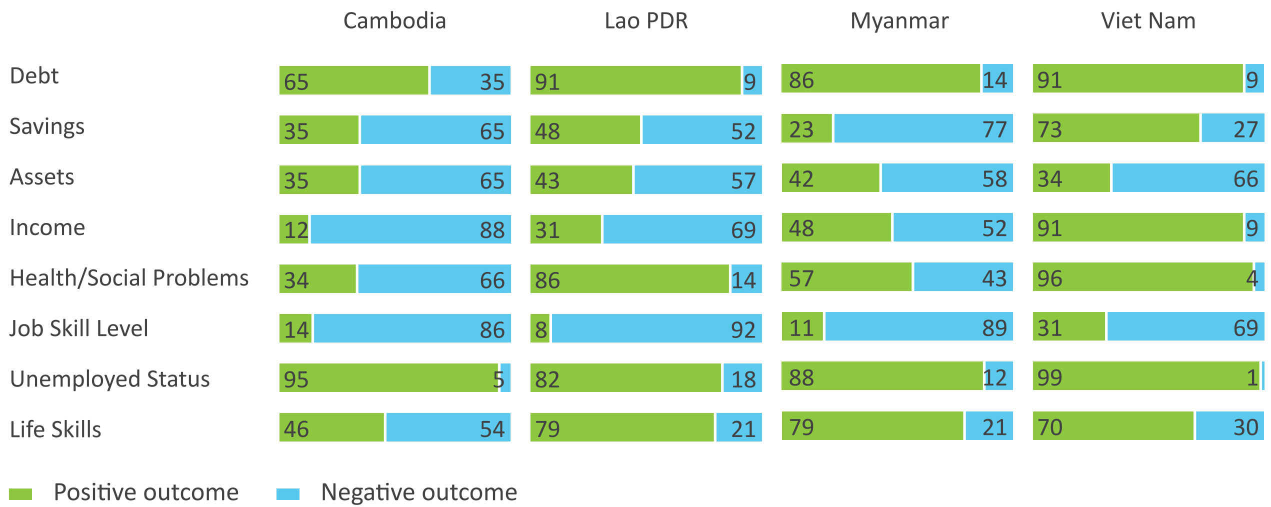
4.2 MOI indicator results

Analysis of the individual MOI indicator results across the four countries reveals some notable regional patterns, as well as distinct differences (figure 11). The majority of migrants in all four countries of origin were able to return without debts, but the extent to which their financial status had otherwise improved varied. More than half of migrants from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Myanmar were unable to increase their income, savings, or tangible assets from working abroad; while most Vietnamese migrants reported positive improvements in income (91 per cent) and savings (73 per cent).

Examination of social outcomes shows that most migrants from all four countries of origin were able to find some type of work upon return. However, few moved into higher skilled jobs, with Vietnamese workers the most successful at upskilling (31 per cent). More migrants reported acquiring life skills while abroad, such as leadership skills, foreign language ability, and financial literacy, with 79 per cent of both Lao and Myanmar migrants reporting this type of skills development. Social, health, and psychological problems resulting from migration varied dramatically from country to country, with two thirds of Cambodian migrants reporting difficulties upon return but only a few Vietnamese migrants (4 per cent) facing any such negative effects. Most of the problems experienced by migrant worker respondents were psychological in nature, relating to anxiety, depression, or boredom.

The results were fairly balanced between positive social and financial outcomes, which suggests that migration led to a complex set of changes in the lives of migrant workers that should not be oversimplified. Researchers have pointed out that a narrow focus on the potential of migrants to contribute to development through harnessing of their financial resources can actually lead to stagnation, shifting attention away from necessary structural political and economic reforms in countries of origin (De Haas, 2012). A study by the World Bank reached similar conclusions, cautioning that remittances are not a "magic bullet" for long-term development in Asia (Ahmad et al., 2014).

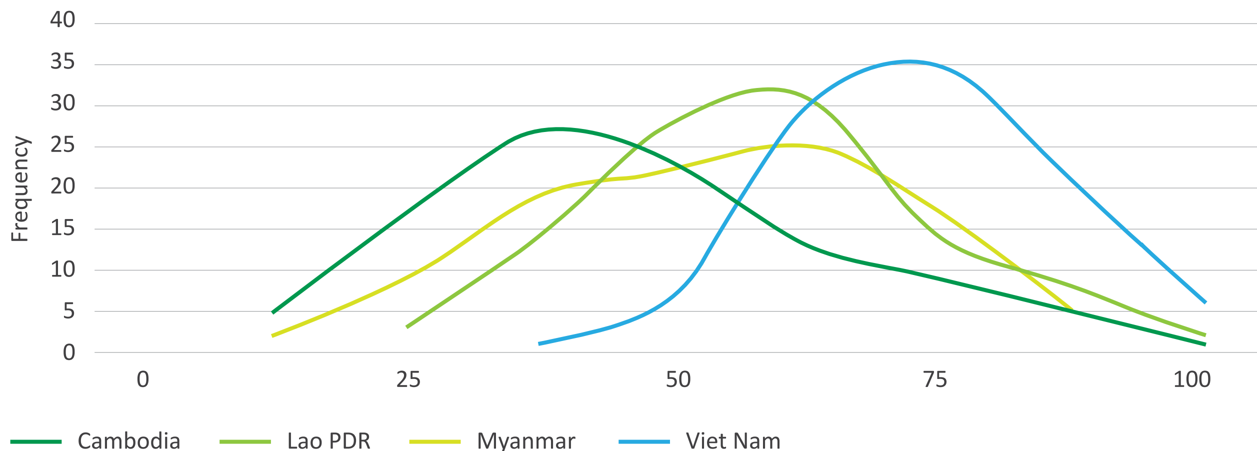
Figure 11. MOI indicator results by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



4.3 Distribution of MOI scores

The MOI score results show a normal distribution pattern in all four countries, suggesting that the index methodology is sensitive enough to discriminate between a wide range of positive and negative migration outcomes (figure 12). Overall, all four countries were slightly skewed towards more positive outcomes, except for Cambodia where the majority of migrant worker respondents had a negative migration experience.

Figure 12. Distribution of MOI scores by country of origin (n=1,808)



4.4 MOI scores for countries of origin

As displayed in figure 13, migrant workers from Viet Nam (index score of 73) had notably better outcomes than migrant workers from Cambodia (47), Myanmar (54), and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (59). This was supported by the qualitative findings of the study, which suggested that Vietnamese migrants have better outcomes due to incrementally higher skill-levels. It should also be considered that Vietnamese migrants on average had spent a much longer period of time working abroad (four years) than Cambodian migrants (one year), which is likely a contributing factor.

Exploration of the differences among sub-groups shows that the some of the largest variances in MOI scores were among Myanmar migrants, with ethnic minorities (index score of 50) and those migrating to Thailand (51) experiencing worse outcomes than Bamar migrants (60) and migrant workers employed in Malaysia (61). Previous research by the

ILO has found that ethnic minorities in Myanmar are marginalized under existing labour migration policies, with fewer opportunities to migrate regularly or to migrate to more lucrative destination countries (ILO, 2015f).

Women from most countries had less positive experiences than men, with the differences most pronounced among migrants from Myanmar (Women=50/Men=57) and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Women=57/Men=61). Both countries have policies in place that restrict the migration of women – particularly as domestic workers – which frequently has the effect of forcing women migrants to seek employment abroad irregularly to support their families, and in turn limits their coverage by labour rights protections and access to support services in the country of destination (ILO, 2017a).

Migrants who had completed secondary school had better outcomes than those with primary educations or no formal education; this was true in all origin countries where a comparison could be made. The value of education in improving experiences for migrant workers was particularly substantial for Cambodian migrants (None=43/Vocational=53) and Myanmar migrants (None=49/Secondary=57). The difference was much less meaningful among migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (None=59/Secondary=60). Previous research conducted in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has found that many families question the usefulness of further schooling for their children on the grounds that education does not lead to better jobs after migration to Thailand (TWG, 2008).

Figure 13. Index score by country of origin (n=1,808)

Index score	Total n=1,808	Cambodia n=457	Lao PDR n=450	Myanmar n=451	Viet Nam n=450
Thailand	56	46	59	51	75
Malaysia	66	52	-	61	71
Men	60	48	61	57	73
Women	57	46	57	50	73
Regular	58	49	59	57	71
Irregular	58	43	58	51	75
Majority	60	47	59	60	73
Minority	50	45	54	50	-
None	50	43	59	49	-
Primary	51	45	57	54	-
Secondary	64	51	60	57	73
Vocational	58	53	-	-	-

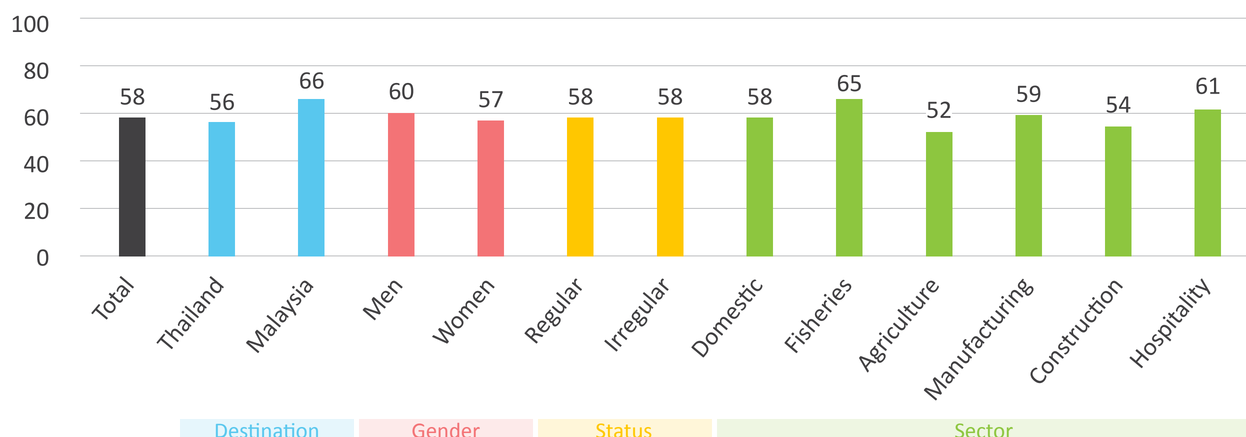
4.5 MOI scores for regional groupings

Figure 14 shows that the aggregate MOI score regionally was 58, which can be used as a point of reference in examining the differences among other regional groupings. The most significant differences were found to have a sectoral basis, as migrants employed in agriculture (index score of 52) and construction (54) had noticeably worse outcomes. Agricultural and construction work are both considered high-risk sectors for exploitation of vulnerable workers globally (ILO, 2014a).[1]

Migrants working in Malaysia (index score of 66) had better results than those employed in Thailand (56), with longer stays and slightly higher wages possible contributing factors. However, the survey findings also suggest that working in Malaysia entails much larger migration costs (US$1,082) in comparison to Thailand (US$251), which can significantly reduce the financial returns of migration. Migrant workers employed in Malaysia reported that on average it took them a full year to pay back the money they had borrowed to cover migration costs.

Smaller distinctions in migration outcomes between men (MOI score of 60) and women (57) were also present, with the former faring slightly better. However, it should be noted that the MOI methodology primarily measures changes relative to an individual's situation before migration, and therefore does not take into account the unequal starting point between women and men migrants.

Figure 14. Index score by destination, gender, legal status, and sector of work (n=1,808)



4.6 Impact of internal factors

An item analysis was conducted to gain a better understanding of how positive or negative outcomes for each of the eight MOI indicators affected the overall index results (figure 15). This is a critical issue to consider for project development, as it provides supporting evidence for the prioritization of specific areas of work in improving migration outcomes.

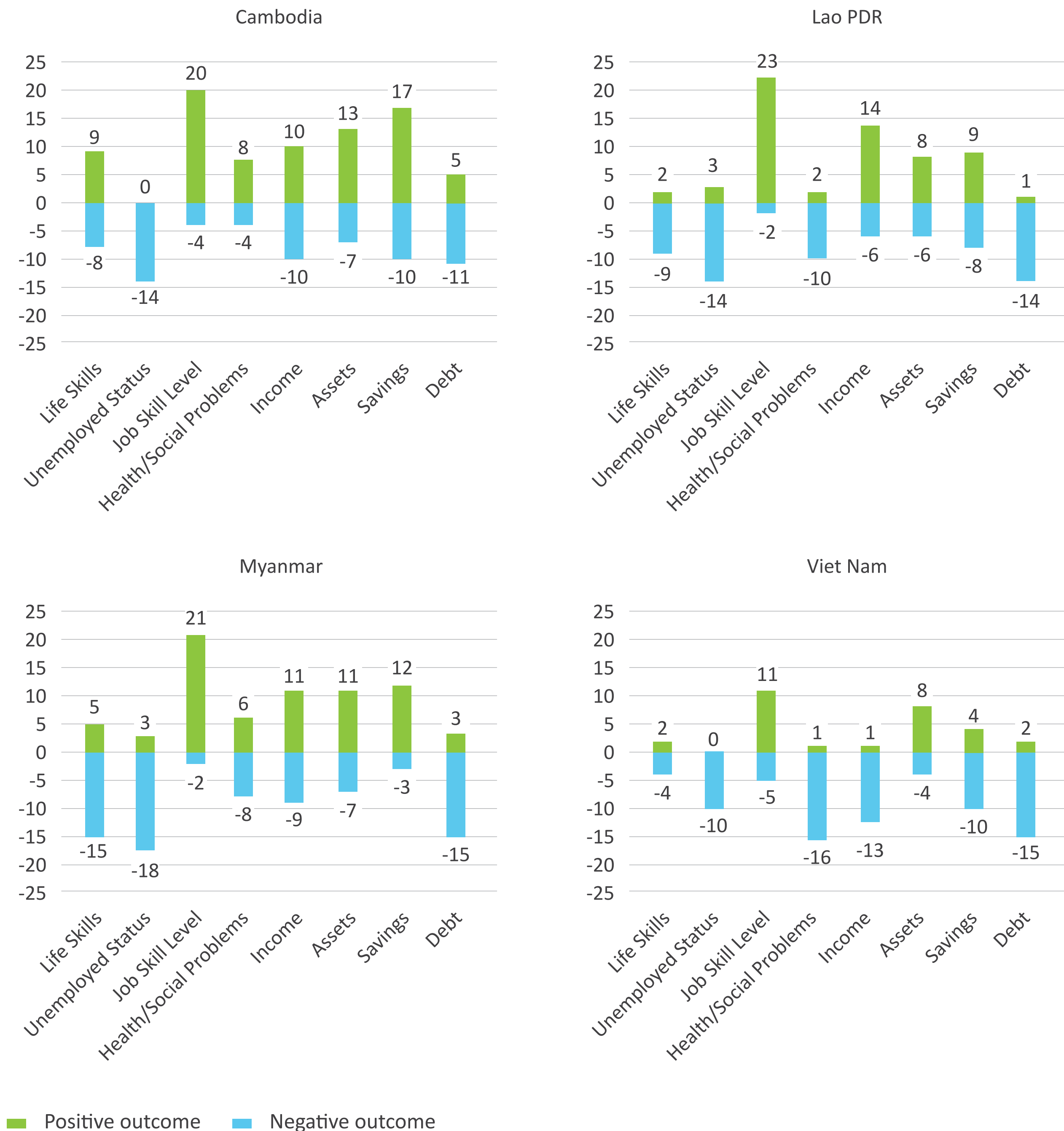
The analysis sought to identify key preventative factors (which subtracted significantly from the overall index score if negative) and key progressive factors (which added considerably to the aggregate score if the result was positive). Although it is important to note the variations across the four study countries to identify country-specific interventions, there were recurring patterns that are noteworthy.

The two most consistently significant preventative factors were being employed and not having any debts. This means that migrants who return home still in debt and unable to find a job typically had much worse outcomes compared to those who did not face the same problems. The number of migrants who experienced these two issues was relatively small, but for those who did, the negative effect was quite large.

[1] It should be noted that the ILO also considers work on fishing vessels to be a high-risk sector for exploitation and includes it under the category of agricultural work. However, for the purposes of this study, the "fisheries sector" refers to both work on-board fishing vessels and land-based employment in seafood processing factories, with the majority of the migrants surveyed employed in processing facilities.

The key progressive factor that emerged as the most significant in every country was upskilling. Migrants who reported an increase in the skill level of their employment from before migration to after – suggesting that they had acquired applicable skills while abroad – had decidedly better overall outcomes. Unfortunately, positive outcomes on skills development represents a significant gap, as the vast majority of migrant workers surveyed in all countries indicated that they did not obtain more skilled work upon return.

Figure 15. Item analysis – Deviation from average index scores by indicator outcome (n=1,808)



4.7 Impact of external factors

A driver analysis was conducted to assess the effect of five factors external to the MOI. This analysis measured the change in MOI score if one of these factors was true in comparison to whether the factor was false (figure 16). In order to test some of the commonly held assumptions about which practices and conditions contribute to better or worse outcomes for migrant workers, the following five factors were analysed in each country:

- Migrating through regular channels;
- Having a written employment contract;
- Having relevant job skills;
- Having legal documents for work; and
- Receiving at least the statutory minimum wage.

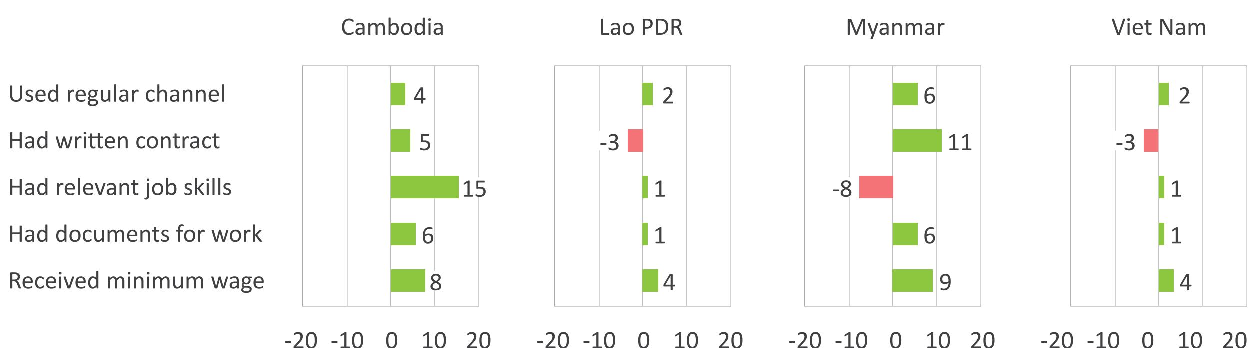
In particular, whether regular migration is in fact a better choice for migrant workers was a key issue of interest. Several qualitative research studies have questioned whether the formal processes established for migration are in the best interest of migrant workers, because they often lead to lengthy delays, greater expense, and administrative hassle without affording significantly greater labour rights protection, particularly for migration to Thailand (ILO, 2013c; ILO, 2015d).

The driver analysis found that the most consistently important external factor in improving outcomes for migrant workers across the four study countries was receiving the statutory minimum wage during their employment. As many migrant workers are employed in informal sectors of work that are not covered by the minimum wage laws in Thailand and Malaysia, or are otherwise not paid a legal wage due to non-compliance by employers, receiving the statutory minimum is a critical issue.

No clear association was found between the conditions of regular migration (using a regular channel, having a written contract, or obtaining legal documents) and better outcomes, with large variations existing among the study countries. For example, a written contract was the most critical factor for Myanmar migrants, but written contracts actually contributed to worse outcomes for migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

This finding was explored further within the results of the broader study, which determined that although migrants using regular channels experienced fewer problems than those using irregular channels for migration, the protection benefits can easily be negated by the challenges involved. The process for regular migration on average took more than three times as long, cost over three times as much, and usually required the services of a private recruitment agency. As a result, most migrant workers decided to migrate irregularly instead (74 per cent).

Figure 16. Driver analysis – Impact of external factors on index scores (n=1,808)



"The first time that I went to Thailand I used an agent because I needed advice. Last time I did everything on my own because I already had experience and knew how to go safely."

Male migrant worker from Cambodia

5. Pre-migration preparations

5.1 Availability of information on labour migration

Obtaining information about migration remains a significant challenge for migrant workers in the four study countries, as highlighted in figure 17. Overall, only one in six (17 per cent) reported that they had obtained information about migration through any communication medium before leaving their home countries. In many cases, migrants rely on word of mouth from friends and family or information from brokers because they are trusted sources even if not authoritative (ILO, 2013a).

Migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic were particularly unlikely to have accessed migration information prior to departure, with only 2 per cent obtaining information. Regular migrant workers were more likely to access information (25 per cent) than irregular migrant workers (7 per cent), with the difference particularly notable in Myanmar and Viet Nam. Fewer migrants heading to Thailand had information about migration (9 per cent) than those journeying to Malaysia (47 per cent).

In the aggregate, community meetings were the most frequent source of information on migration (6 per cent), followed by radio (4 per cent) and billboards and posters (4 per cent). Somewhat surprisingly, Facebook and other websites were not stated to be significant sources of information (2 per cent).

There was some variation by country, with the most common source of information for Cambodian migrants being radio (13 per cent); community meetings for Myanmar migrants (10 per cent); and billboards or posters for Vietnamese migrants (17 per cent). Very few Lao migrants reported receiving information from any source.

Figure 17. Obtained information before migrating by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

Obtained information	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	20	15	1	26	37
Women	14	13	3	7	31
Domestic Work	12	15	2	3	28
Fisheries	28	5	6	6	37
Agriculture	5	14	3	1	30
Manufacturing	24	17	0	27	48
Construction	19	13	2	35	38
Hospitality and Food Services	8	13	4	17	7
Regular	25	15	3	27	57
Irregular	7	13	2	5	9
Thailand	9	15	2	8	11
Malaysia	47	8	-	39	58

Box 3
Stakeholder perspectives: Migrant workers' access to information

Most stakeholders said that migrant workers were generally not able to make an informed decision about working abroad. Migrant workers' decisions mostly rely on information from friends and relatives who had migrated before. This perspective was consistent with the information reported by migrant workers surveyed for this study, who stated that friends and family and brokers were their key sources for information about migrating.

Stakeholders from Myanmar and Cambodia added that migrant workers often do not know where they can go for information, particularly in remote areas where services are less accessible. Some channels to promote greater dissemination of information included radio, television, websites, and job fairs.

5.2 Participation in skills training

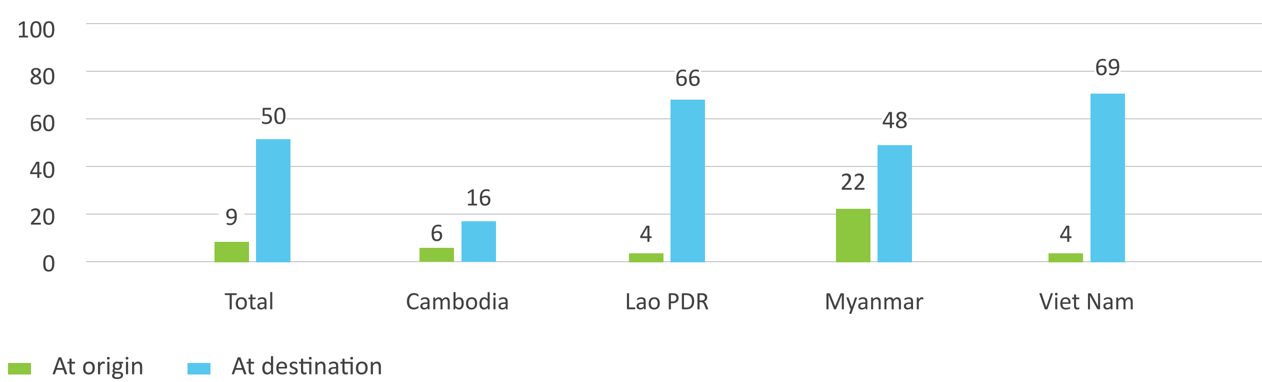
Overall, just 9 per cent of all migrant workers surveyed completed some form of skills training before migrating overseas for work (figure 18). Significantly more migrant workers received training in their destination country, representing half of the migrant workers surveyed (50 per cent).

On-the-job training in destination countries was by far the most common form of training (40 per cent), particularly for migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (65 per cent) and Viet Nam (55 per cent). The direct linkage between employer needs and the content of on-the-job skills training may be one factor explaining this result, as well as the fact that attending skills training prior to departure can significantly increase the cost and time required to migrate for work.

There was some variance among different nationalities in receiving training at destination. A solid majority of migrant workers from Viet Nam (69 per cent) and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (66 per cent) received training while they worked abroad; as did nearly half of Myanmar migrant workers (48 per cent). This was not the case for Cambodian workers, with only 16 per cent reporting to have received such training in their destination country.

Unavailability was the main reason why migrant workers did not attend training (35 per cent). A sizeable portion also stated they did not see any benefit of training (28 per cent) or did not think they had enough time (19 per cent). Paying migrants to attend training or committing to a wage increase for participants are some of the ways that employers can enable expanded skills training for their workers. They should also be guaranteed that they will not lose their job or be penalized as a result of taking time off for training (ILO, 2016a).

Figure 18. Completed skills training at origin and destination (n=1,808) (%)

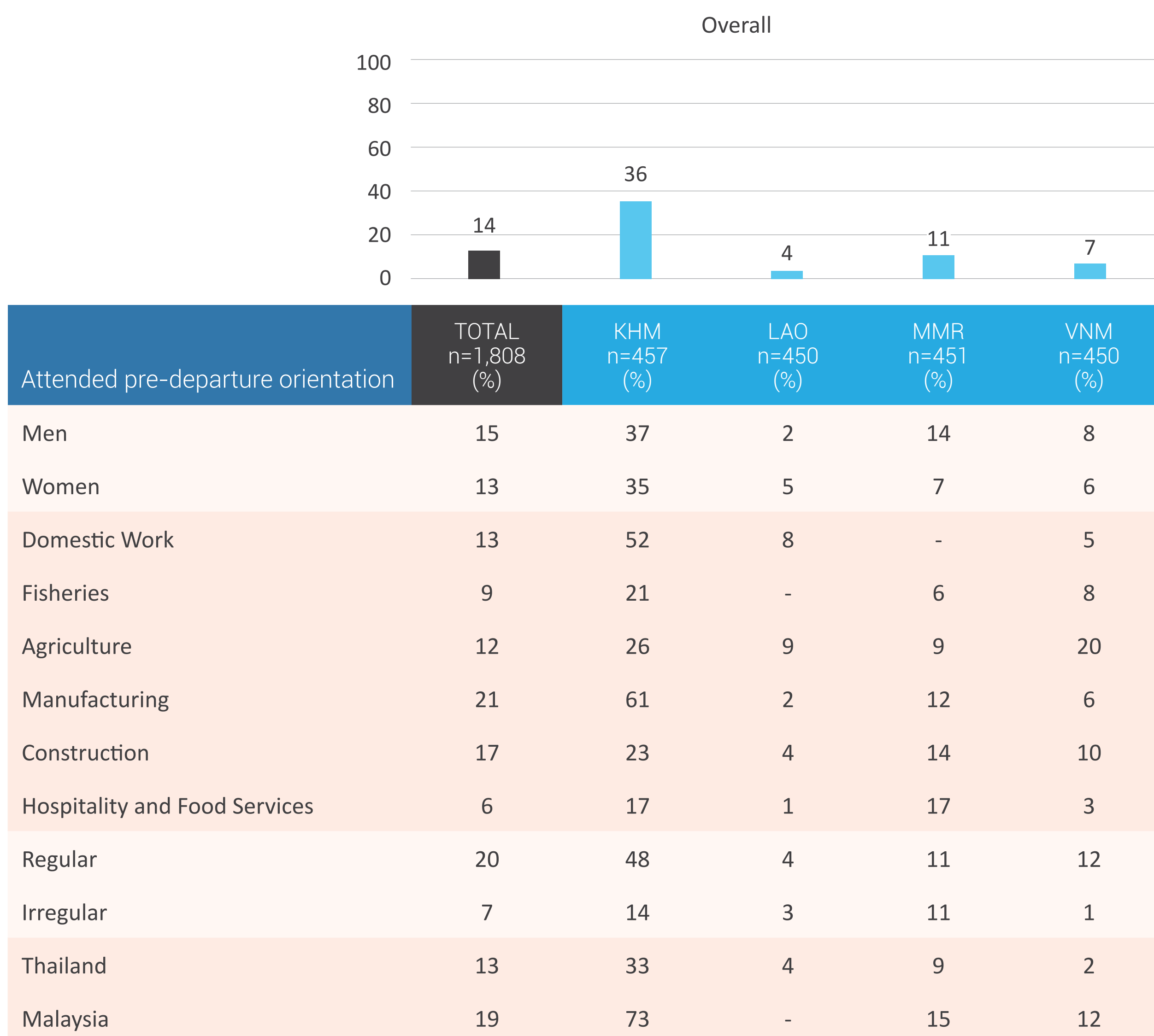


5.3 Attendance at pre-departure orientation

Pre-departure orientation is an important means for preparing migrant workers to go abroad. According to a recent report, the governments in many countries of origin within Asia are increasingly aware of the necessity of arranging pre-departure orientation for migrant workers (ADBI, OECD, and ILO, 2016). However, the survey results show that only 14 per cent of all migrant workers attended pre-departure orientation (figure 19). Cambodia had the highest attendance rate for orientation (36 per cent), followed distantly by Myanmar (11 per cent) and Viet Nam (7 per cent). Even these low results may be inflated, as there is often conflation between pre-departure orientation and other types of training or information provided prior to migration. For example, the ILO supports MRCs in countries of origin to deliver safe migration counselling and information to migrants before deciding about migration in order to support a more informed decision-making process.

The effectiveness of pre-departure orientation in preparing migrant workers for employment abroad is sometimes questioned on the basis of the content delivered mostly adhering to the interests of recruitment agencies. As a result, the training can become less about upholding their rights and more about teaching them to be compliant with employer wishes (Tayah, 2016). Nevertheless, among the 280 migrants surveyed who did attend a pre-departure orientation, the vast majority stated that the training was of practical use (86 per cent). Information on labour rights was said to be the most useful (32 per cent), followed by laws and legal obligations (17 per cent), culture and customs (13 per cent), and money and remittances (12 per cent).

Figure 19. Attended pre-departure orientation by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Attended pre-departure orientation	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	15	37	2	14	8
Women	13	35	5	7	6
Domestic Work	13	52	8	-	5
Fisheries	9	21	-	6	8
Agriculture	12	26	9	9	20
Manufacturing	21	61	2	12	6
Construction	17	23	4	14	10
Hospitality and Food Services	6	17	1	17	3
Regular	20	48	4	11	12
Irregular	7	14	3	11	1
Thailand	13	33	4	9	2
Malaysia	19	73	-	15	12

Box 4
Stakeholder and migrant worker perspectives: Awareness raising before going abroad

Stakeholders mentioned a broad range of things migrant workers should be aware of before migrating, including working conditions, contract terms, labour laws, customs and culture, assistance services, language training, social protection benefits, sending remittances, and financial management.

However, some migrant workers pointed out the information that they really needed was hard to provide in a formal training. Stakeholders suggested the best way to deliver such information to migrant workers is to increase the quality of information available within communities of origin.

> "It was more convenient to go by myself and I did not have to pay much – just for the bus ticket and broker fee because I did not have to buy any documents."
>
> Male migrant worker from Lao People's Democratic Republic

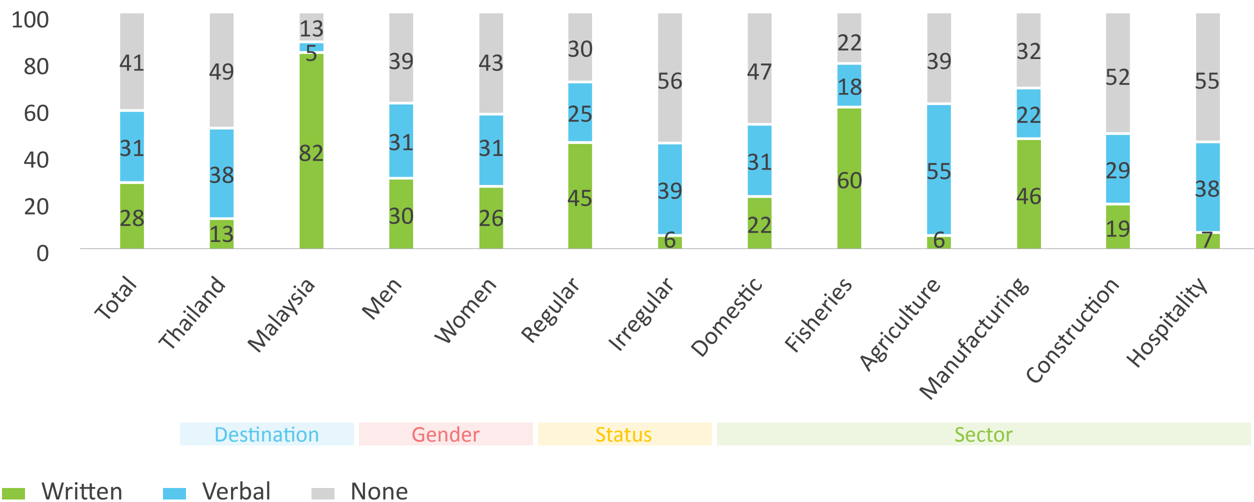
6. Migration process

6.1 Employment contracts

As shown in figure 20, only about one out of four migrant workers received a written employment contract before migrating (28 per cent). The likelihood of migrants signing a written employment contract was largely determined by the destination country. Workers who migrated to Malaysia received a written contract in over 80 per cent of cases, compared to 13 per cent for Thailand. This disparity is partly explained by the fact that those who migrated to Malaysia more often used regular channels, wherein a written employment contract is a requirement (ILO, 2015c).

Migrants who worked with a regular legal status received a written agreement 45 per cent of the time, compared to just 6 per cent for irregular migrant workers. There were also some prominent differences by sector of work. Migrants employed in the fisheries (60 per cent) and manufacturing sectors (46 per cent) were the most likely to have written contracts. Conversely, more than half of hospitality (55 per cent) and construction workers (52 per cent) did not have any agreement. The results indicate that even in more formalized sectors, such as construction and manufacturing, migrants are often not provided with clear terms of employment.

Figure 20. Employment contracts by destination, gender, legal status, and sector (n=1,808) (%)



6.2 Contract substitution

Having a written employment contract can potentially help to ensure decent working conditions for migrant workers and lessen the risks of migrant workers being exploited. In some countries of origin, governments require that contracts held by migrant workers are checked to see that they meet specific legal standards in order to support greater accountability.

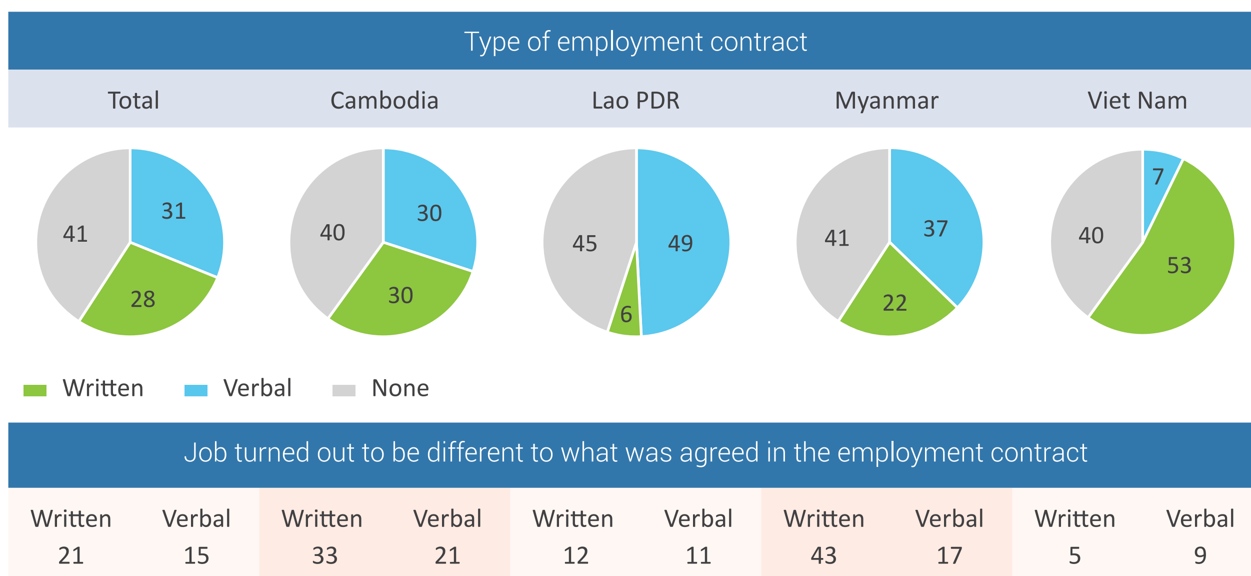
In practice, however, employment contracts may provide an inaccurate portrayal of the wages and working conditions for migrant workers. They may be required to pay more in fees than are specified; be assigned to a job different from that which is described in the contract; or find themselves faced with a different rate of pay, wage deductions, and benefits (ILO, 2016b).

In total, 18 per cent of the workers surveyed who had either a verbal or written employment contract (n=1,059) found that their job was not as described in their contract. Among those who experienced a discrepancy between their agreement and their actual employment (n=191), the most common differences related to wages (45 per cent), location (39 per cent), and sector of work (39 per cent).

Figure 21 shows that substitution was actually less prevalent when a verbal contract had been reached (15 per cent) in comparison to a written contract (21 per cent); though it can be assumed that this is partly due to the terms of employment being more extensive when agreed upon in a formal written contract rather than in a verbal agreement. Contract substitution was most frequent among migrants from Myanmar (43 per cent) and Cambodia (33 per cent) who had received written employment contracts.

ILO research has confirmed that contract substitution is a common form of fraudulent practice by recruitment agencies and employers in Thailand. It is not uncommon for a first contract to be drafted and signed for submission to authorities, while a second different contract contains the actual employment terms for the worker. The terms of this second contract will frequently change the conditions to be less favourable in a number of areas, including salary, job duties, and benefits. Workers are unlikely to learn of the deception until they arrive abroad; at which time they have likely already spent a large amount of time and money to secure employment and are not in a position to decline (2013b).

Figure 21. Type of employment contract and contract substitution by country (n=1,808) (%)



Written	Verbal	Written	Verbal	Written	Verbal	Written	Verbal	Written	Verbal
21	15	33	21	12	11	43	17	5	9

6.3 Migration channels

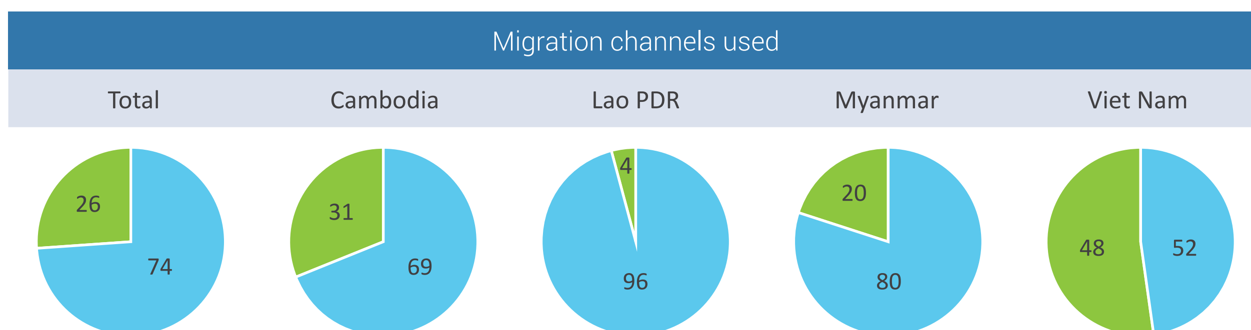
Migrant workers used a variety of regular and irregular channels to go abroad. Regular channels included licensed private recruitment agencies; direct recruitment by employers; and government agencies. The irregular channels utilized included unlicensed brokers, migrating via friends and family, or migrating independently.

Figures 22 and 23 presents an analysis of the utilization of migration channels, applying the classifications above. Overall, nearly three quarters of migrant workers went abroad through irregular channels (74 per cent), particularly those from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (96 per cent) and Myanmar (80 per cent). The small number of licensed recruitment agencies operating in the Lao People's Democratic Republic would likely make it difficult for many migrants to make use of regular migration channels even if they decided to do so.

Examining the most common forms of irregular migration, nearly half of Myanmar migrant workers (47 per cent) used unlicensed brokers; while migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (51 per cent) and Viet Nam (33 per cent) were most likely to migrate independently. The irregular migration channels used by Cambodian migrant workers were more evenly split between friends or family (27 per cent) and unlicensed brokers (26 per cent).

While many of these migration patterns are well-entrenched, there have been noteworthy changes in Viet Nam. In recent years, the means by which Vietnamese workers migrate has become more varied and complex as the number moving abroad has increased and the destinations in which they are employed have multiplied. A survey of over 23,000 migrants in Thanh Hoa and Ha Tinh provinces of Viet Nam found that Thailand had become the most common destination for both women and men, making use of overland routes through Lao People's Democratic Republic (for example through Lao Pao or via Thakhek into Mukdahan and on to Bangkok) (ILO, 2015h). These migration flows are almost entirely irregular, as the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between Viet Nam and Thailand has yet to be implemented and only permits employment in the fishing and construction sectors, where a relatively small number of Vietnamese migrants are employed.

Figure 22. Migration channels used by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

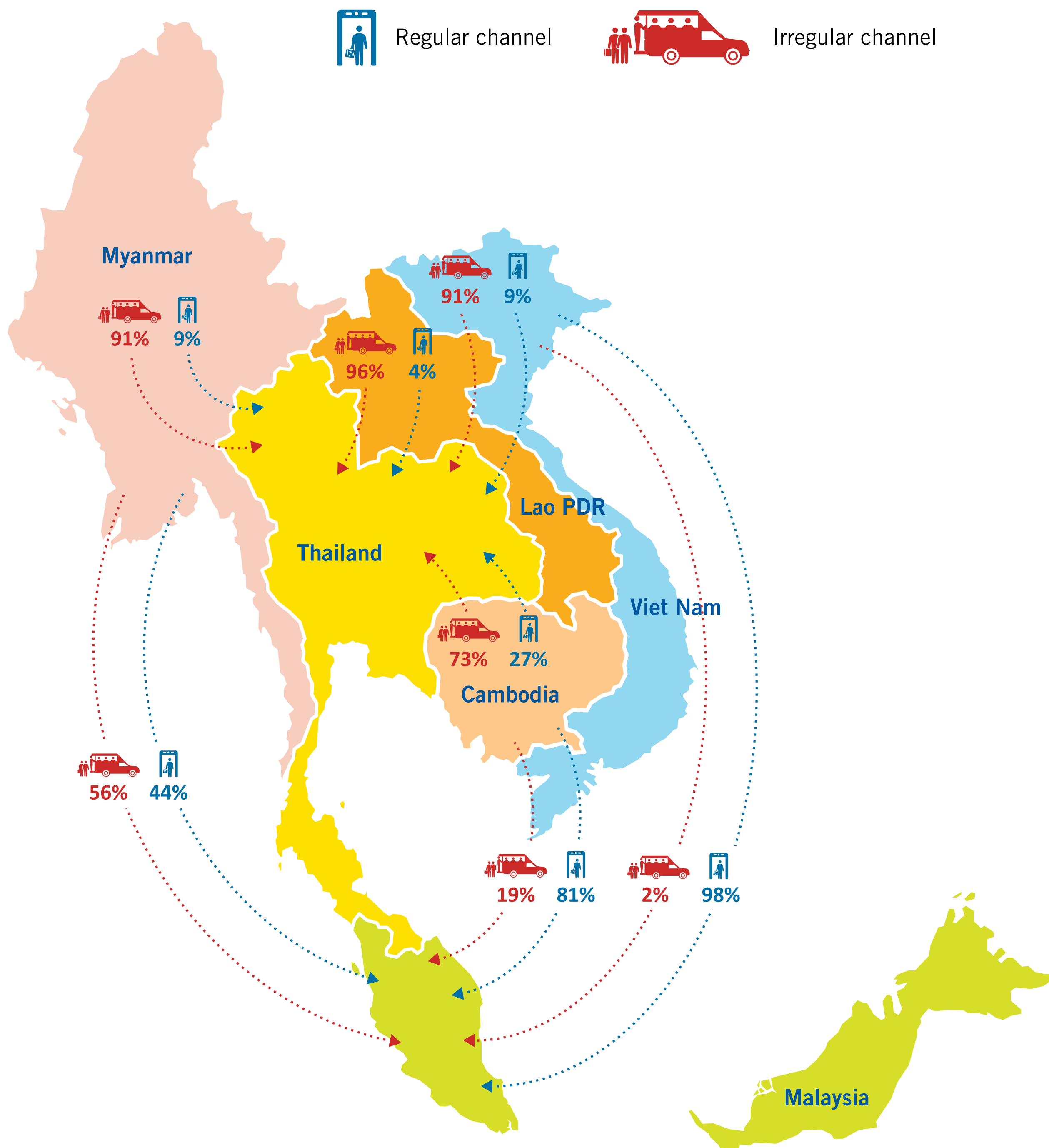


Channels used	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Government agency	1	-	< 1	5	< 1
Licensed recruitment agency	22	26	< 1	10	52
Direct recruitment by employer	3	5	3	5	-
Unlicensed broker	20	26	1	47	3
Friends or family	26	27	44	21	12
Independently	26	16	51	6	33
Other	2	-	-	7	-

Box 5
Stakeholder perspectives: Migration channels

Stakeholders explained that the proportion of migrant workers who use regular or irregular channels varied depending on destination country. Most migrant workers use irregular channels when going to Thailand, while the majority of those who are headed to Malaysia use licensed recruitment agencies. However, most informants agreed that overall, the majority of migrant workers still rely on irregular channels, such as unlicensed brokers, friends and relatives, or migrating independently.

Figure 23. Map of the utilization of regular and irregular migration channels (%)

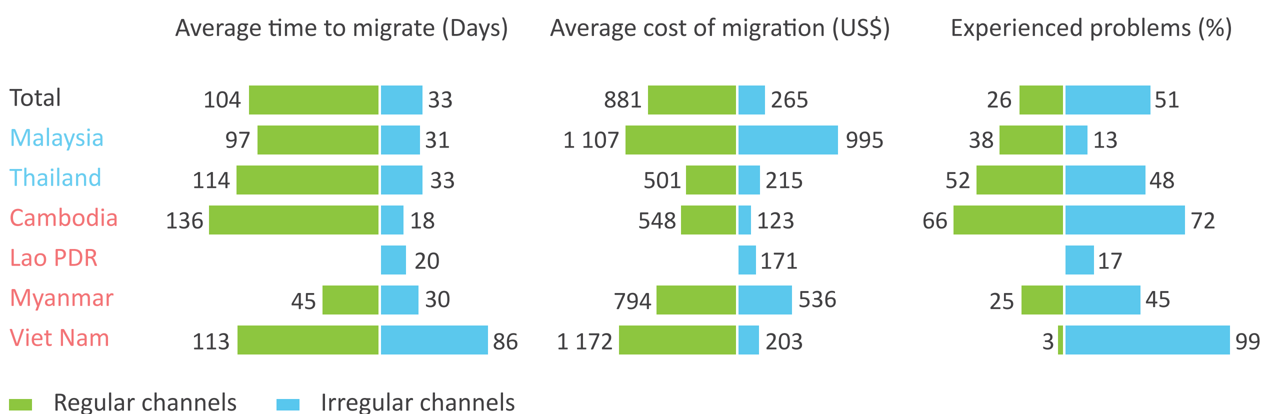


6.3.1 Effectiveness of regular and irregular migration channels

In order to look at the effectiveness of migration channels, regular and irregular options were compared in terms of the time taken to migrate, average cost of migrating, and the extent to which migrant workers experienced problems during the migration process. Figure 24 shows that irregular channels were more efficient and cost-effective compared to regular channels, and the difference was quite substantial. Migrating regularly required more than three times longer (104 days vs. 33 days) and three times the cost (US$881 vs. US$265) of irregular channels. Previous studies have confirmed the high expense, long amount of time required, and administrative complexity of migrating through regular channels to Thailand (ILO, 2015d; IOM, 2014).

Migrant workers using irregular channels were also nearly twice as likely to encounter problems during the migration process (51 per cent) as those making use of regular channels (26 per cent). However, migrating through regular channels does not always reduce the risks involved due to unethical recruitment practices. In Malaysia, formal recruitment of migrant workers is generally undertaken through labour outsourcing companies. Even though this recruitment system benefits employers by creating a ready pool of workers to draw from, migrant workers sometimes experience prolonged periods without work or remuneration upon arrival (Amnesty International, 2010). In addition, the introduction of intermediaries into the recruitment process has increased the cost substantially. The cost borne by migrant workers has been reported to frequently be more than double the rate stipulated by law (ILO, 2015e).

Figure 24. Effectiveness of migration channels by country of origin and destination



Box 6

Stakeholder and migrant perspectives: Licensed recruitment agencies

Many stakeholders held similar views on the benefits of using licensed recruitment agencies, including more accurate information, stable jobs, better working conditions, higher salaries, access to social protection benefits, and less chance of abuse and exploitation.

However, some migrant workers strongly disagreed, as they had negative experiences with recruitment agencies even though they were fully licensed to operate. They also pointed out that the high cost of services and the long lead times for migrating were major reasons for not using licensed recruitment agencies.

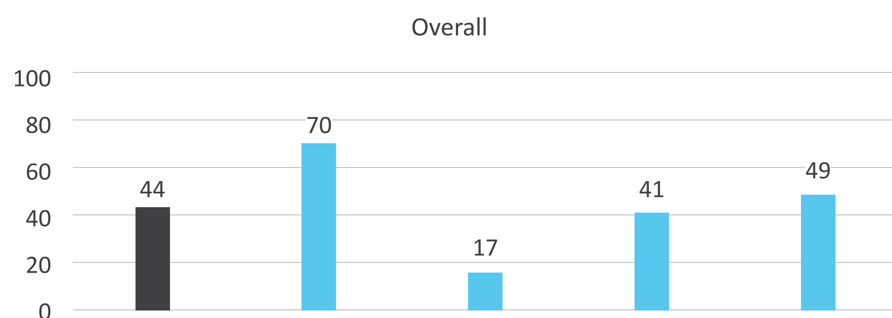
6.4 Problems faced during migration

About two in five migrant workers surveyed (44 per cent) experienced problems during migration, as shown in figure 25. Overall, the most commonly reported problems experienced during migration were lack of legal documentation (27 per cent), lack of information (13 per cent), and delays in deployment (12 per cent).

Cambodian migrants reported facing the most problems within the region (70 per cent), with both lack of legal documentation (41 per cent) and lack of adequate information (40 per cent) being the most widespread issues reported. Only a small share of migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (17 per cent) indicated they faced problems. This is potentially because almost no Lao workers migrated through unlicensed brokers; instead, they either used social networks of friends and family or migrated independently. In addition, migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic have a comparative advantage in speaking a language similar to Thai.

The subgroups of migrants most likely to experience problems were fisheries workers from Myanmar (88 per cent) and Cambodia (79 per cent). Previous surveys have shown that migrant workers in the fishing sector often face abuses and deceptive practices during recruitment. A study by the ILO found that migrant fishers are frequently recruited via brokers who charge fees for travel and placement services. While the majority of fishers voluntarily enter into these agreements, they sometimes find themselves unable to leave due to the incurred debt (ILO, 2013b).

Figure 25. Experienced problems during migration by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Experienced problems	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	44	70	14	43	49
Women	45	71	20	39	49
Domestic Work	54	58	20	78	76
Fisheries	30	79	-	88	20
Agriculture	27	60	26	16	40
Manufacturing	45	75	11	41	48
Construction	56	71	19	46	46
Hospitality and Food Services	44	63	18	54	86
Regular	36	66	17	49	4
Irregular	55	78	18	32	98

Box 7

Migrant worker perspectives: Problems faced during migration

Interviews with migrants confirmed that the lack of legal documents is a critical problem faced, as some had been deported or had to pay police for entering without legal permission. Other migrant workers stated that they had been deceived by brokers who had failed on their promise to find a job for them and had abandoned them in the destination country.

6.4.1 Assistance with migration problems

Table 9 illustrates the proportion of surveyed migrant workers who sought assistance for migration related problems, the sources of assistance, and if their problem was resolved. Overall, not many migrant workers sought assistance (29 per cent) when they encountered problems, with the exception of workers from Myanmar (58 per cent). Among those who did seek help, friends and family appear to be the most common source of aid in all four countries of origin.

Taking into consideration all migrants who experienced problems (n=803), the vast majority stated that their problems were not resolved (90 per cent). Even limiting the analysis to those migrants who actively sought assistance (n=233), only about one third (34 per cent) stated that they were able to obtain solutions for their problems.

Among the sources of assistance that a significant number of migrants accessed, friends and family and brokers were the most effective in resolving problems, reaching positive conclusions in 40 per cent and 34 per cent of cases respectively. Recruitment agencies were substantially less effective, resolving only 12 per cent of the problems they provided assistance with. Very few migrant workers sought assistance from official sources, suggesting an inability or unwillingness to access such support. A recent study on migrant worker access to justice reached similar conclusions. Because official complaint mechanisms are often inaccessible for migrant workers, they must make use of informal assistance and are often unable to obtain satisfactory remedies (ILO, 2017b).

Table 9. Assistance with migration problems by country of origin (n=803) (%)

Assistance with problems	TOTAL n=803 (%)	KHM n=321 (%)	LAO n=78 (%)	MMR n=185 (%)	VNM n=219 (%)
Sought assistance	29	27	36	58	5
Did not seek assistance	71	73	64	42	95
Source of assistance	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Friends or family	19	13	32	40	4
Broker	3	4	4	4	-
Recruitment agency	4	8	-	3	1
Community leader	-	-	-	-	-
Labour authorities	-	-	-	-	-
Police	1	-	3	1	-
NGO	< 1	-	-	1	-
Trade union	-	-	-	-	-
Other	4	4	-	9	-
Resolution	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Resolved problem	10	7	15	23	1
Did not resolve problem	90	93	85	77	99

Box 8
Stakeholder perspectives: Support services for migrant workers

Stakeholders explained that there are several sources of assistance available to migrant workers if they experience problems with their recruitment agency or broker. Most agreed that only a few migrant workers seek assistance from government agencies because they usually do not have adequate information about where to go or are unsure about approaching them for support. Consequently, migrant workers are more likely to contact family or friends for help when they need assistance.

6.5 Cost of migration

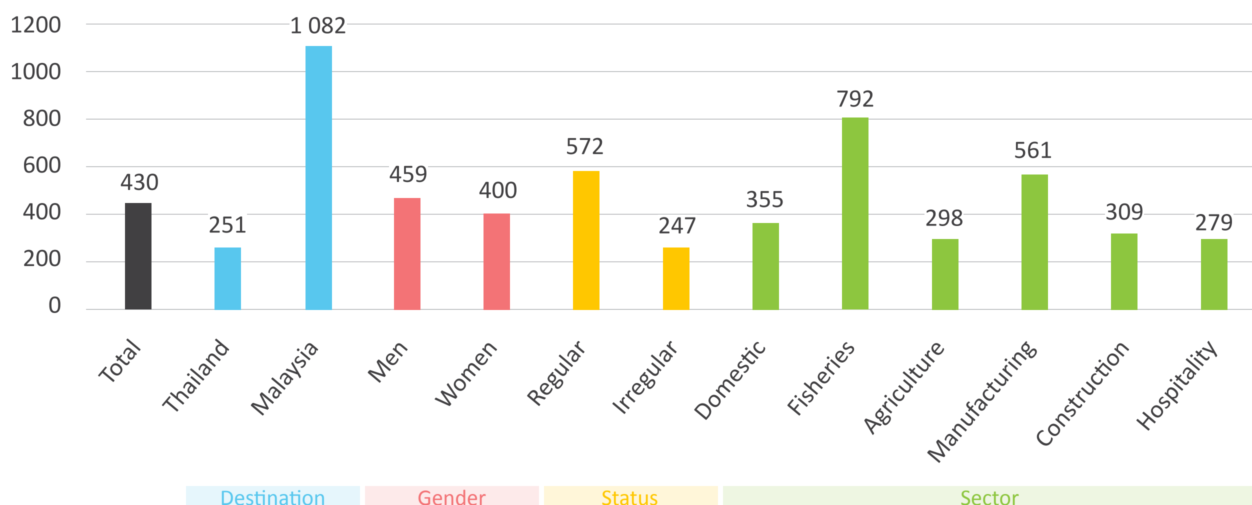
As shown in figure 26, the average cost of migration regionally was US$430.[1] The cost of migration was higher to migrate to Malaysia (US$1,082) than it was to migrate to Thailand (US$251), which likely results from higher levels of regular migration and the greater travel costs involved.

The process of migrating was much more expensive for migrants to obtain regular legal status. At an average cost of US$572, obtaining regular status was more than double the price of migrating into an irregular status (US$247), entailing many additional costs. Some of these expenses can be extortionate, such as the high cost of obtaining a passport in Cambodia. Although it was announced by the Cambodian Government that passports would only cost US$4 for migrant workers, in practice, they usually pay US$120 or more (IOM, 2014; ILO, 2016a).

The ILO's Convention on Private Employment Agencies, 1997 (No. 181) and General Principles & Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment stipulate that the costs of recruitment should not be borne by workers. Taking a similar position, IOM has worked in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders to develop the International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS), which is a voluntary certification system for international labour recruiters that promotes the Employer Pays Principle.

To date, Convention No. 181 has not been ratified by any ASEAN countries (ILO, 2017c). However, the Thai Government adopted the Royal Ordinance Concerning Rules on Bringing Migrant Workers to Work with Employers in the Kingdom in 2016,[2] applying the principle of zero-fee recruitment for migrant workers. This improved adherence with international labour standards is a positive step in reducing costs for migrant workers, though enforcement remains in early stages and the high fees paid in countries of origin have yet to be addressed.

Figure 26. Cost of migration by destination, gender, legal status, and sector (n=1,808) (US$)



Box 9
Stakeholder perspectives: Awareness of migration costs

Most stakeholders agreed that relatively few migrant workers were aware of the legitimate costs involved with migration. It was stated that information predominantly circulates through word of mouth in communities of origin as official information often does not reach migrant workers. Other stakeholders pointed out that in many cases the fees have yet to be fully standardized in policy.

[1] Cost of migration was described as including the following: training, recruitment, passport, visa, travel, examinations, deposits, orientation, bribes, and other informal payments.

[2] Subsumed by the Royal Ordinance Concerning the Management of Foreign Workers' Employment in June 2017.

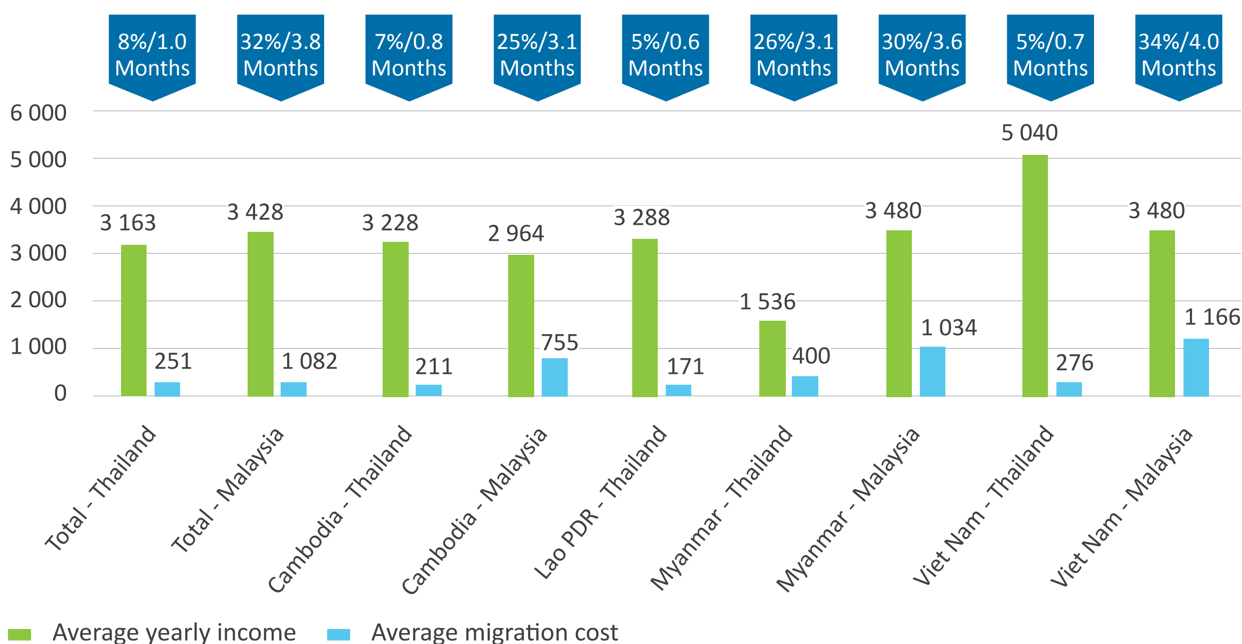
6.5.1 Recruitment costs as a proportion of income

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include "recruitment cost borne by employees as a proportion of yearly income" as a key performance indicator (10.7.1). To measure this indicator, figure 27 presents the total yearly income and cost of migration borne by migrant workers by migration corridor.

Migrant workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Viet Nam who had migrated to Thailand paid a smaller proportion of their salary in recruitment costs, covering their the expenses with one month of wages or less. Migrant workers from Myanmar, however, earned a much lower income in Thailand and incurred significantly higher recruitment fees, driving up the cost to around three months of wages.

From all countries or origin, migrant workers going to Malaysia encountered higher costs of between three and four month's wages. Examining specific corridors, Viet Nam to Malaysia was the most expensive (US$1,166). A more detailed survey of migration costs in the Viet Nam-Malaysia corridor using the standardized ILO and World Bank KNOMAD methodology produced similar results, finding that the average total expenditure for migrants is US$1,374 (ILO, Forthcoming).

Figure 27. Recruitment cost as a proportion of yearly income in US$ by corridor (SDG 10.7.1) (%/months)



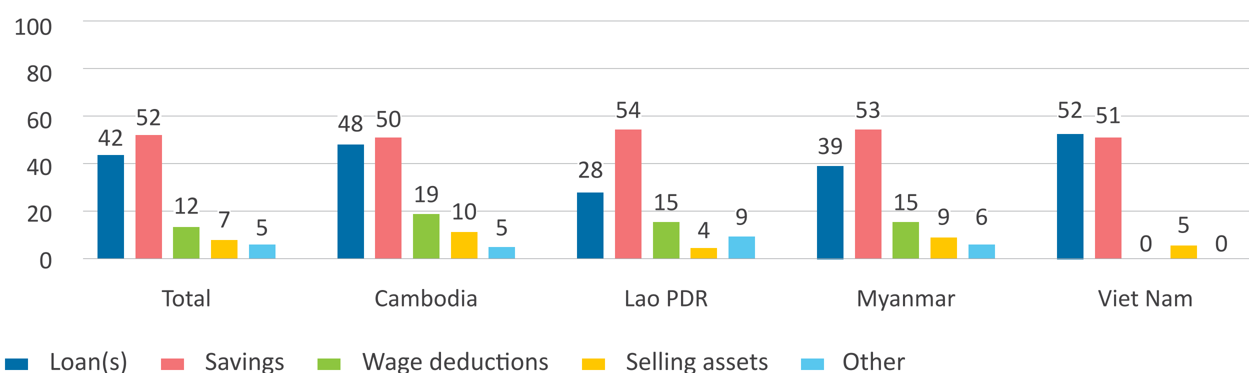
6.6 Source of funds to pay for migration

For a sizeable portion of migrants, paying for migration is funded by taking on debt. While more than half of the migrant workers surveyed used their own savings to pay for the cost of migration (52 per cent), quite a large portion needed to borrow money to migrate (42 per cent) or obtained a de facto loan from employers by paying for migration through wage deductions (12 per cent).

Reliance on debt to finance migration can carry with it considerable risk for migrant workers. An ILO study of recruitment to Thailand found that migrant workers who had taken out loans feared repossession of housing and land that they had to put up as collateral. Because of these sureties, they could not leave their employment until their debts were fully repaid and even reported receiving threats of physical violence if they were to abscond (ILO, 2013c).

The use of loans to pay for migration was particularly prevalent among Cambodian and Vietnamese survey respondents, with about half having borrowed money to migrate (figure 28). Relatively few workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (28 per cent) had to borrow funds, which may be explained by the fact that nearly all of the Lao workers surveyed had migrated through irregular channels, which generally have a lower cost.

Figure 28. Source of funds to pay for migration by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Box 10
Case study: Regular migration is not necessarily "safe migration"

Mr Sopheak from Takeo, Cambodia worked at a car wash in Thailand for two years. In 2012, he migrated to Thailand through the MOU process, making use of the services of a private recruitment agency. He decided to use this channel because he did not know anyone who had worked in Thailand who could assist him.

The process took about three months from application to placement. The service cost was US$620, including documents, transportation, and administrative costs. This amount was expensive for him and he had to borrow money from his friend to cover part of the cost, while the rest was deducted from his monthly wages.

When Sopheak started his job in Thailand, he was given a contract to sign by his employer written in Thai which he could not understand. After having worked at the car wash for one year, his employer was still deducting money from his salary to pay for the recruitment fee.

Sopheak's friend who worked at a petrol station said he could earn more income there. He wanted this job but was not able to leave the car wash because he was informed by his employer that he had not finished paying back the recruitment fee. This left Sopheak with two choices: either he had to pay the remaining fee in full or continue working at the car wash for another year.

Sopheak felt that the situation was very unfair, so he decided to talk with his employer. He was threatened that if he ran away from the job, the employer would call the police to have him arrested. Sopheak was fearful of police involvement because he did not want to go back to Cambodia until he had sent enough money to support his family. Though he was not treated well by his employer, he decided to work at the same job for the full two year period until he finished paying back the recruitment fee.

This case study shows that migrant workers using regular channels do not necessarily have more positive outcomes. The high cost of migration, long period of time required to migrate, unclear terms of employment and inability to change jobs can contribute to a highly restrictive and less beneficial migration experience. As a result, migrant workers in Thailand often prefer the low-cost and greater flexibility in employment offered by migrating irregularly.

6.6.1 Source of loans to pay for migration

As illustrated in table 10, friends and family represented the most important source of borrowed funds (54 per cent), especially for Lao and Vietnamese migrant workers. Cambodian and Myanmar migrant workers relied much more heavily on money lenders (43 per cent and 49 per cent respectively). Loans from private banks and community funds were seldom used, however, more than one third of migrant workers from Viet Nam borrowed money from a government bank (36 per cent). The Vietnamese Government offers low-interest loans to migrants as part of its labour export promotion programme in poor districts within 20 provinces.

Table 10. Source of loans to pay for migration by country of origin (n=752) (%)

Source of largest loan	TOTAL n=752 (%)	KHM n=219 (%)	LAO n=124 (%)	MMR n=174 (%)	VNM n=235 (%)
Private bank	1	1	1	-	1
Government bank	11	-	-	-	36
Microcredit institution	5	14	-	2	-
Friends or family	54	37	89	42	59
Money lender	26	43	5	49	4
Community fund	2	3	6	2	-
Other	2	2	-	5	-

Box 11

Stakeholder perspectives: Paying for migration

Stakeholders were in agreement that migrant workers rely heavily on borrowing money to pay for migration costs, as most migrants are young and have limited financial resources. Most take out a loan from friends and family or a local money lender. In other cases, they sign agreements with employers to pay for the costs upfront, which are recouped through wage deductions.

6.6.2 Loan details

As noted in the previous section, 42 per cent of migrant workers surveyed took out a loan to cover the cost of migration. Table 11 shows the average size of these loans, as well as the proportion of migrant workers who put up collateral to obtain their loan, the proportion who had already paid off their loans, the average payback period, and the average monthly interest paid.

Overall, migrants borrowed an average of US$560 to pay for migration costs. The loans were much larger in Viet Nam (US$1,044) than in Cambodia (US$241) and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (US$152), which are likely due to the higher migration costs for Vietnamese migrants using regular channels to go to Malaysia.

Among migrants who took out a loan (n=752), one in five needed to provide collateral to secure their financing (19 per cent). Most migrants put up land (10 per cent) or their homes (5 per cent) as a guarantee. While this may increase the risk of debt bondage while employed in destination countries, relatively few ended up actually losing their collateral due to default (1 per cent).

The average time required to pay back loans was eight months overall. Myanmar and Vietnamese migrants required longer periods (10 and 11 months respectively), which appears to be due to the larger size of the loans taken out. This can be an important factor in increasing migration costs depending upon the interest rates charged.

The possibilities for meaningful analysis of interest rates were somewhat limited given the small sample base for some loan providers, making a country breakdown impossible. In addition, interest rates were charged annually rather than monthly in some cases, meaning that a monthly interest rate had to be calculated. Even so, the findings suggest that the interest rates charged to migrants can be exorbitant.

Money lenders top the list with an average monthly interest rate of 6.1 per cent. Microcredit institutions were a cheaper source of loans, with a rate of 3.8 per cent per month, but relatively few migrant workers used them outside of Cambodia. Many migrant workers borrowed money from family and friends, but even so, they did not necessarily

obtain entirely interest free loans (0.8 per cent per month). For loans provided by government banks, which were often obtained in Viet Nam, the interest rate is 2 per cent per month. This can still prove costly for Vietnamese migrant workers given the long period of time required to pay them back.

Table 11. Loan size, interest charged, and time required for repayment (n=752) (%)

Loan details	TOTAL n=752	KHM n=219	LAO n=124	MMR n=174	VNM n=235
Average loan size (US$)	560	241	152	596	1044
Needed collateral (%)	19	21	3	22	23
Paid off the loan (%)	91	76	100	91	100
Average months taken to pay back loan	8	5	3	10	11
Average monthly interest rates	%				
Government Bank	2				
Microcredit institution	3.8				
Friends or family	0.8				
Money lender	6.1				

Box 12

Stakeholder and migrant worker perspectives: Managing debt

Stakeholders explained that debt can have serious impact on the lives of migrant workers and their families, including loss of the collateral used for loans in Myanmar. In destination countries, migrant workers reported that they had to work substantial amounts of overtime in order to pay back their debts. In some cases, they were forced to endure abusive working conditions as they desperately needed money to pay off their loans. It was also stated during interviews with some migrants that they were not able to send remittances to their families due to debt burdens.

> "I had to work overtime but the employer did not pay me for the overtime hours. Sometimes, the deliveries arrived in the middle of the night, so they called me to pick up the products and I did not get paid for that."
>
> Male migrant worker from Viet Nam

7. Employment and working conditions

7.1 Legal status

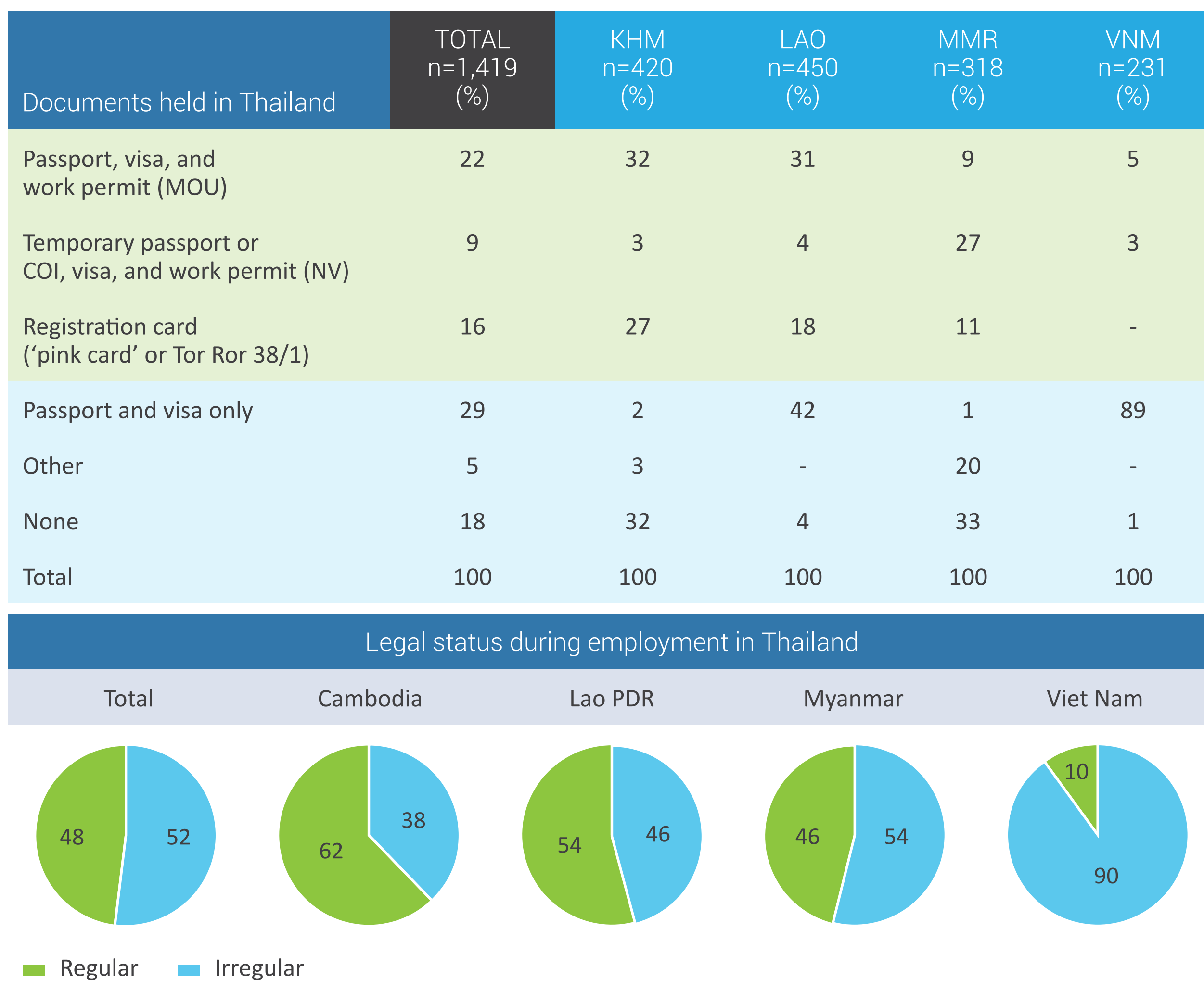
For the purpose of this study, a migrant worker with regular legal status was defined as one who possessed the required legal documentation for both stay and work. For migrants in Thailand, this documentation could include: (1) a passport, visa, and work permit; (2) a temporary passport/certificate of identity (COI), visa, and work permit; or (3) a registration card (known as a "pink card" or Tor Ror 38/1). For migrants who had worked in Malaysia, the documentation included: (1) a passport, visa, and a visit pass for temporary employment; or (2) a visit pass for temporary employment on its own.

It should be noted that legal status is far from static for migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia. Some migrants may initially migrate via regular channels and possess all of the required documents to work but become irregular later due to overstay or changes of employment. Others may have migrated irregularly but acquire documentation later through an amnesty or regularisation process. The precarious nature of permission to stay and work creates vulnerabilities for migrant workers, as it is tied to the inclination of their employer. Consequently, if a worker changes their employment without permission, they can lose their legal status not only to work but to remain in the destination country (Tunon and Harkins, 2017).

Figure 29 shows that among surveyed migrant workers who worked in Thailand, a small majority (52 per cent) held irregular status for most of their time in the country. However, legal status varied significantly by nationality. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of Vietnamese migrants worked irregularly in Thailand (90 per cent), which reflects the absence of an MOU or registration process for Vietnamese migrants during the time they were in-country. Many Vietnamese migrant workers remained in Thailand via monthly border runs to obtain visa exemption stamps for tourism until the Thai immigration authorities began cracking down on this loophole in May 2014.

Pictures of the various types of documentation held by migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia were shown to migrants to assist with obtaining a more accurate result. However, given the high complexity of the permission systems in Thailand and Malaysia, and the possible reluctance of migrants to disclose having worked without proper documentation, the proportion of irregular migrant workers should be regarded as a conservative estimate.

Figure 29. Documents held for the majority of time in Thailand by country of origin (n=1,419) (%)

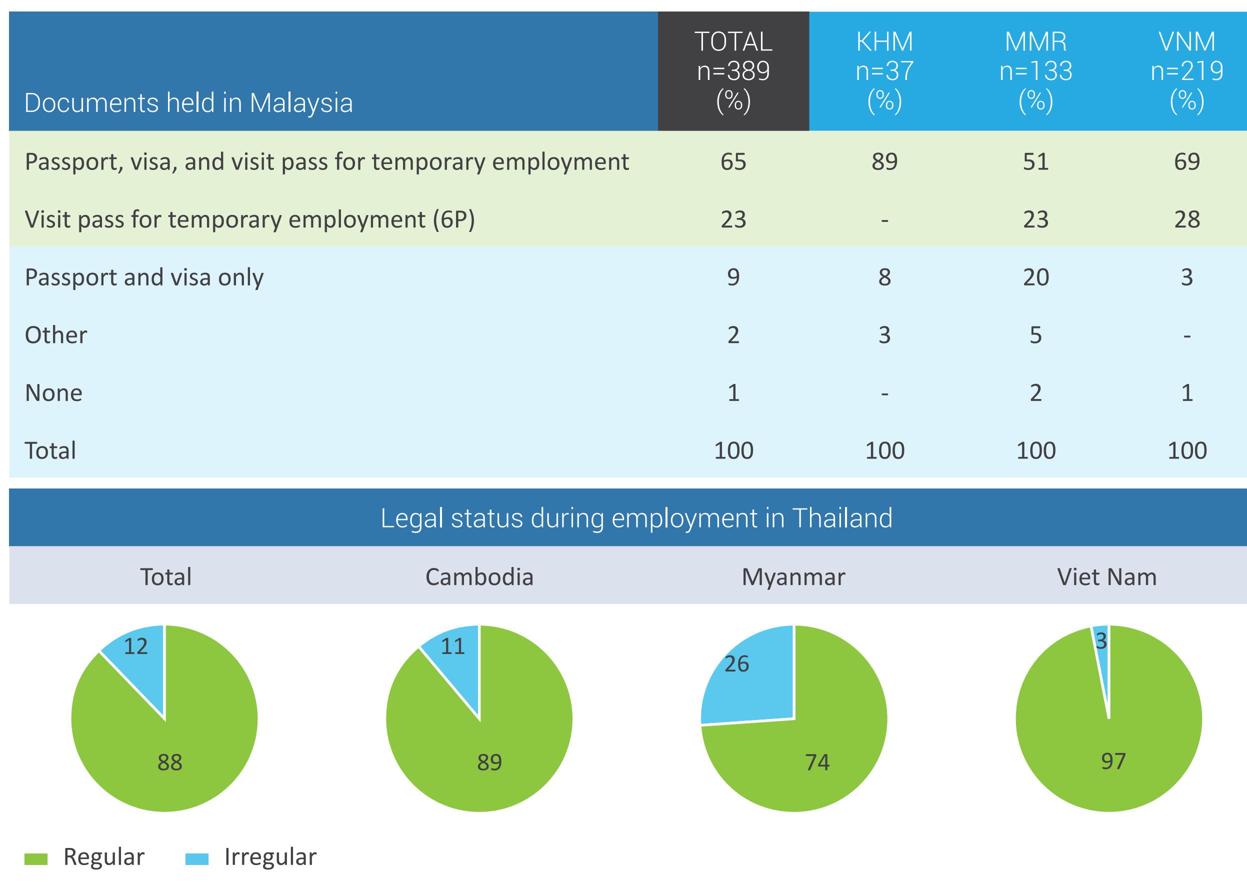


Documents held in Thailand	TOTAL n=1,419 (%)	KHM n=420 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=318 (%)	VNM n=231 (%)
Passport, visa, and work permit (MOU)	22	32	31	9	5
Temporary passport or COI, visa, and work permit (NV)	9	3	4	27	3
Registration card ('pink card' or Tor Ror 38/1)	16	27	18	11	-
Passport and visa only	29	2	42	1	89
Other	5	3	-	20	-
None	18	32	4	33	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

In contrast to Thailand, the vast majority of migrant workers who worked in Malaysia (88 per cent) held regular legal status, as shown in figure 30. This was particularly the case for migrants from Viet Nam, who were nearly all documented (97 per cent), but was also true for migrants from Cambodia (89 per cent) and Myanmar (74). No migrants from Cambodia reported obtaining documentation through the '6P' amnesty programme, whereas around one quarter of Vietnamese (28 per cent) and Myanmar migrants (23 per cent) had done so.

However, the findings on legal documentation are not representative of the overall picture in Malaysia, as they do not include migrants from the three countries that supply the greatest numbers of migrant workers: Indonesia, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Both Thailand and Malaysia have aggressively cracked down on irregular migrant workers in recent years, though the problems with stringent enforcement efforts to reduce irregular migration have been highlighted (Tunon and Harkins, 2017). Implementation of such policies contributes to a heightened risk of human rights abuses and prolonged detention of migrant workers. Moreover, the sudden losses to the migrant workforce that occurred in Thailand during June 2014 and July 2017 caused major disruptions for employers in several key industries (Harkins and Ali, 2017).

Figure 30. Documents held for the majority of time in Malaysia by country of origin (n=389) (%)



Documents held in Malaysia	TOTAL n=389 (%)	KHM n=37 (%)	MMR n=133 (%)	VNM n=219 (%)
Passport, visa, and visit pass for temporary employment	65	89	51	69
Visit pass for temporary employment (6P)	23	-	23	28
Passport and visa only	9	8	20	3
Other	2	3	5	-
None	1	-	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100

7.2 Informal payments to a government official

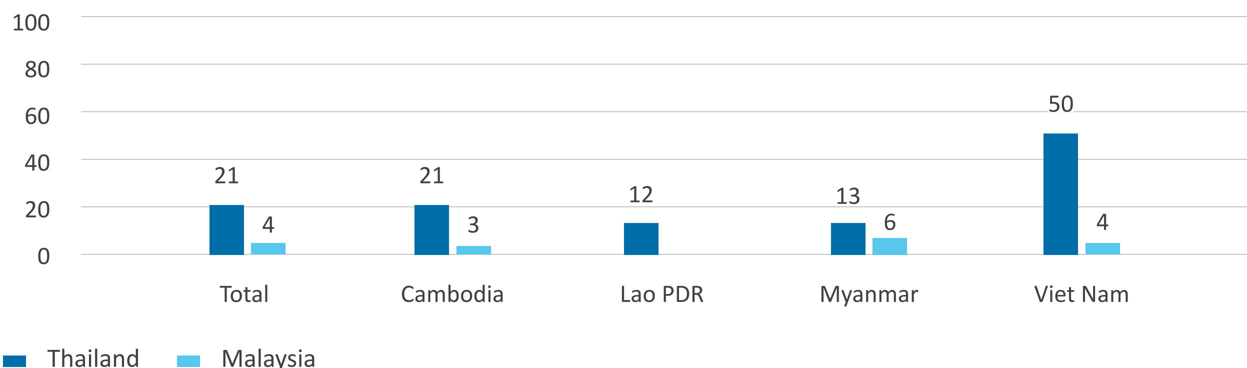
Return migrant workers were asked if they had ever made an informal payment to a government official due to not having legal permission to stay or work in Thailand or Malaysia. Figure 31 shows that fewer migrant workers in Malaysia (4 per cent) made an informal payment to a government official compared to those who worked in Thailand (21 per cent).

These figures are essentially a reflection of the fact that a much larger proportion of the migrants who had gone to Thailand had worked in an irregular status at some point rather than greater extortion of bribes. If this is taken into account, the findings show that such payments were made by roughly equal shares of migrants who were employed without documentation in Thailand (33 per cent) and Malaysia (44 per cent). This suggests that there may be additional informal costs associated with irregular migration that accrue over time, even if the initial expenses are significantly lower.

Systematic extortion of payments from irregular migrant workers in Thailand to avoid arrest and detention has been well documented in Thailand (Human Rights Watch, 2010) and the survey results suggest that a similar problem may exist in Malaysia. Addressing corruption and bribery has been incorporated within the SDGs as goal 16.5,[1] which includes a key performance indicator that has been adapted for measurement in figure 31.

[1] Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.

Figure 31. Proportion of migrant workers who paid a bribe to a public official by country of origin (SDG 16.5.1) (n=1,808) (%)



7.3 Job matching

Migrant workers were asked whether their skills were relevant for the jobs they held in destination countries. Overall, nearly two thirds of migrant workers surveyed (62 per cent) said they did not have skills relevant to their work when they were recruited (figure 32).

There were prominent differences in the level of job matching by country of origin. Almost half of migrant workers from Myanmar (49 per cent) and two out of five from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (42 per cent) stated that their skills were not relevant to their job, while the shares in Viet Nam (80 per cent) and Cambodia (75 per cent) were much higher.

Currently, job matching for migrant workers is limited in Thailand and Malaysia because they are typically recruited to fill the need for low-wage workers in labour intensive industries rather than because they are assessed as having experience or formal training that is relevant to the work. Moreover, the formal skills recognition systems that have been established within ASEAN are not particularly responsive to the demands of employers, as they were developed through consultation between the governments of Member States without substantial engagement from the private sector (ILO, 2016f).

Figure 32. Relevant job skills by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

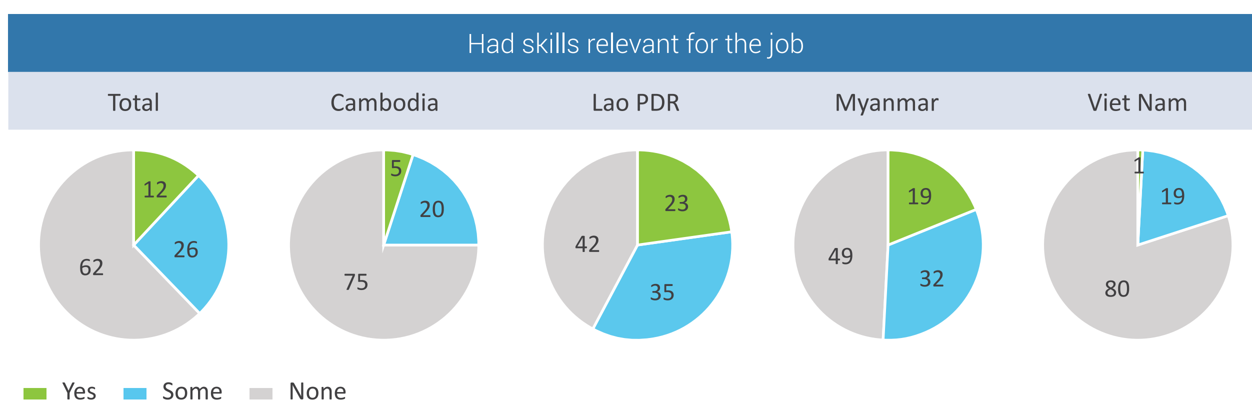


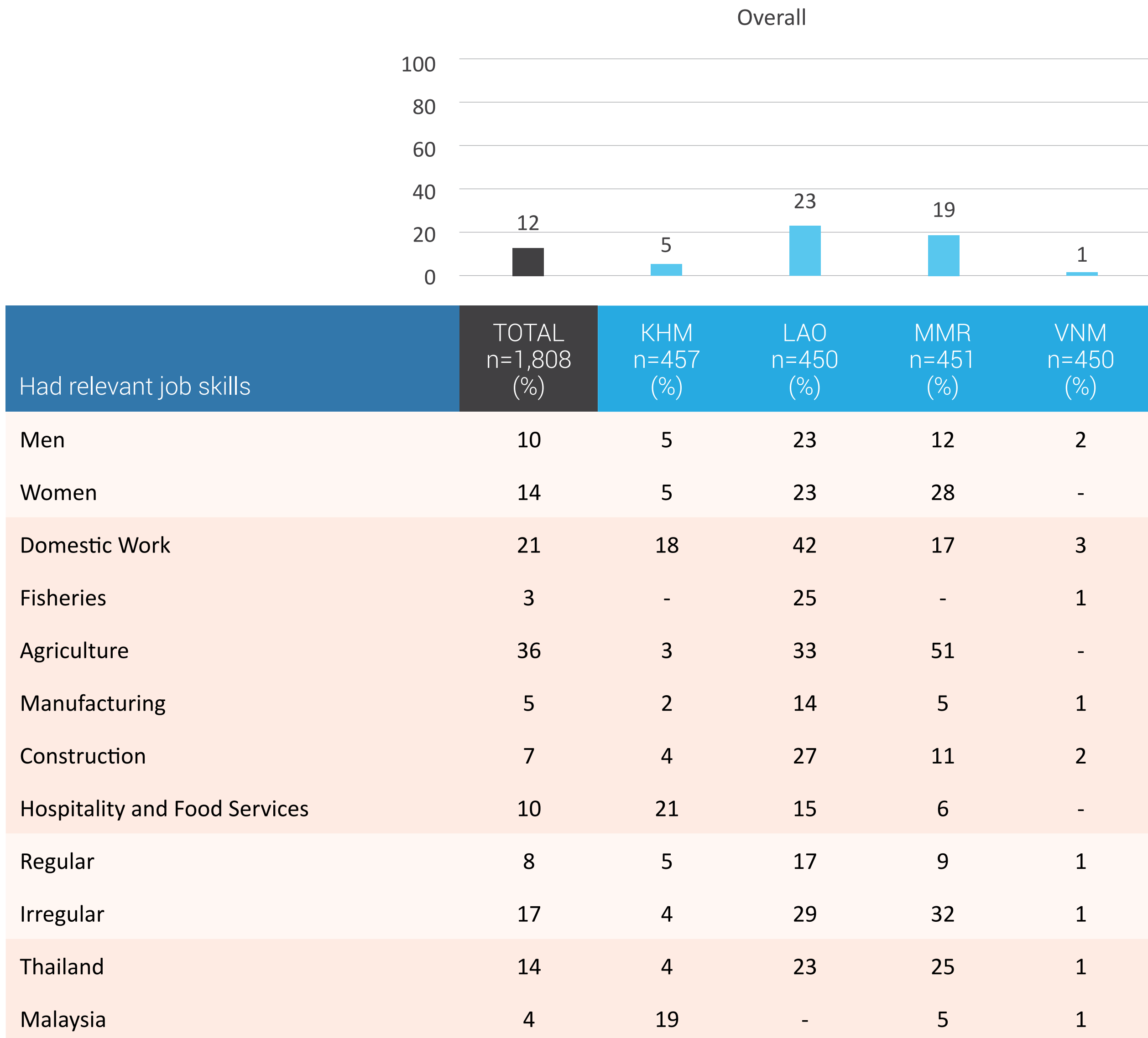
Figure 33 reveals that among migrant workers who had relevant job skills, the largest proportion overall were employed in agriculture (36 per cent) and domestic work (21 per cent). Comparing between countries of origin, some notable gender differences are apparent. For migrant workers from Myanmar, a larger proportion of women (28 per cent) had relevant skills. In addition, two in five Lao migrant workers (42 per cent) engaged in domestic work reported having skills that matched their job, who are predominantly women.

Box 13
Stakeholder perspectives: Choosing a job abroad

Stakeholders explained that migrant workers using regular channels are normally placed in a job by a recruitment agency. At first, they may want to choose the type of work themselves but they often end up accepting the recommendation of their recruitment agency. For irregular migrant workers, many look for a job through their friends or relatives, and some seek help from brokers.

The governments in both of these countries have been largely unsupportive of making use of the skills of women migrants as domestic workers. Myanmar instituted a generalized ban on migration into the sector in 2014 and the Lao People's Democratic Republic does not permit migration into professions that do not "broadly develop skills and/or technical knowledge, are contrary to tradition, culture and law or are dangerous to the health and safety of workers". Lao Government officials have generally indicated that this category includes migration into domestic work (ILO and UN Women, 2016; ILO, 2017a).

Figure 33. Relevant job skills by country of origin and sub-segments (n=1,808) (%)



Had relevant job skills	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	10	5	23	12	2
Women	14	5	23	28	-
Domestic Work	21	18	42	17	3
Fisheries	3	-	25	-	1
Agriculture	36	3	33	51	-
Manufacturing	5	2	14	5	1
Construction	7	4	27	11	2
Hospitality and Food Services	10	21	15	6	-
Regular	8	5	17	9	1
Irregular	17	4	29	32	1
Thailand	14	4	23	25	1
Malaysia	4	19	-	5	1

Box 14

Stakeholder perspectives: Relevant job skills

Stakeholders held differing views regarding the degree to which migrant workers from their countries had relevant skills for work abroad. Most stakeholders from Cambodia and Myanmar did not think migrants from their countries held applicable skills and believed that they generally do any job that is available. Stakeholders from the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, however, argued that the skills of migrants from their countries were suitable for the work they undertook. In all countries, stakeholders agreed that migrant workers benefit from having relevant skills, including higher salaries, promotions, training opportunities, and assistance in processing legal documents.

7.4 Labour rights protection

Figure 34 highlights the percentage of migrant workers who were not provided with any statutory labour rights, including annual leave, paid holidays, sick leave, having one day off per week, maternity leave, minimum wage, or overtime pay. Overall, one in ten (11 per cent) migrant workers surveyed did not receive any such labour rights protection. The likelihood of having none of the above labour rights was significantly higher for those migrating to Thailand (14 per cent) compared to those who migrated to Malaysia (3 per cent).

Irregular migrants were more likely not to be provided with labour rights, with nearly one in five undocumented migrant workers (19 per cent) stating that they did not receive any such protection. Irregular migrant workers are often excluded from labour rights protection in practice, though it has been made clear by the Ministry of Labour in Thailand that the Labour Protection Act is meant to be applicable regardless of legal status (Tunon and Harkins, 2017).

Across sectors of work, domestic work (16 per cent) and agriculture (15 per cent) were found to be the most common types of work where no labour protections were provided. In Thailand, both of these sectors are currently governed by ministerial regulations that provide protections that are less comprehensive than those stipulated in the Labour Protection Act. Likewise, domestic workers are currently excluded from most labour rights protections in Malaysia, with the exception of the right to notice of termination, and are referred to as "domestic servants" within the Employment Act (ILO, 2016c).

There are gendered implications for the lack of coverage, as the ILO and UN Women have found that women migrants are more likely to work in sectors that are excluded from labour and social protection (2015b). To assist with addressing this issue for sex workers, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recently recommended that Thailand ensure full application of labour laws and social benefits in all enterprises within the entertainment industry (CEDAW, 2017).

Figure 34. Not provided with any labour rights at work by destination, gender, and sector (n=1,808) (%)

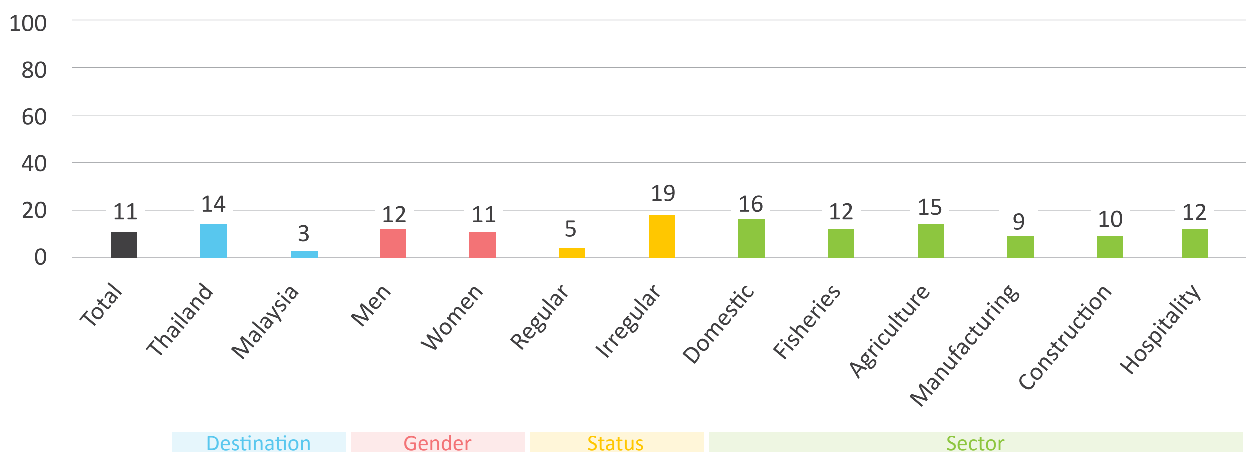
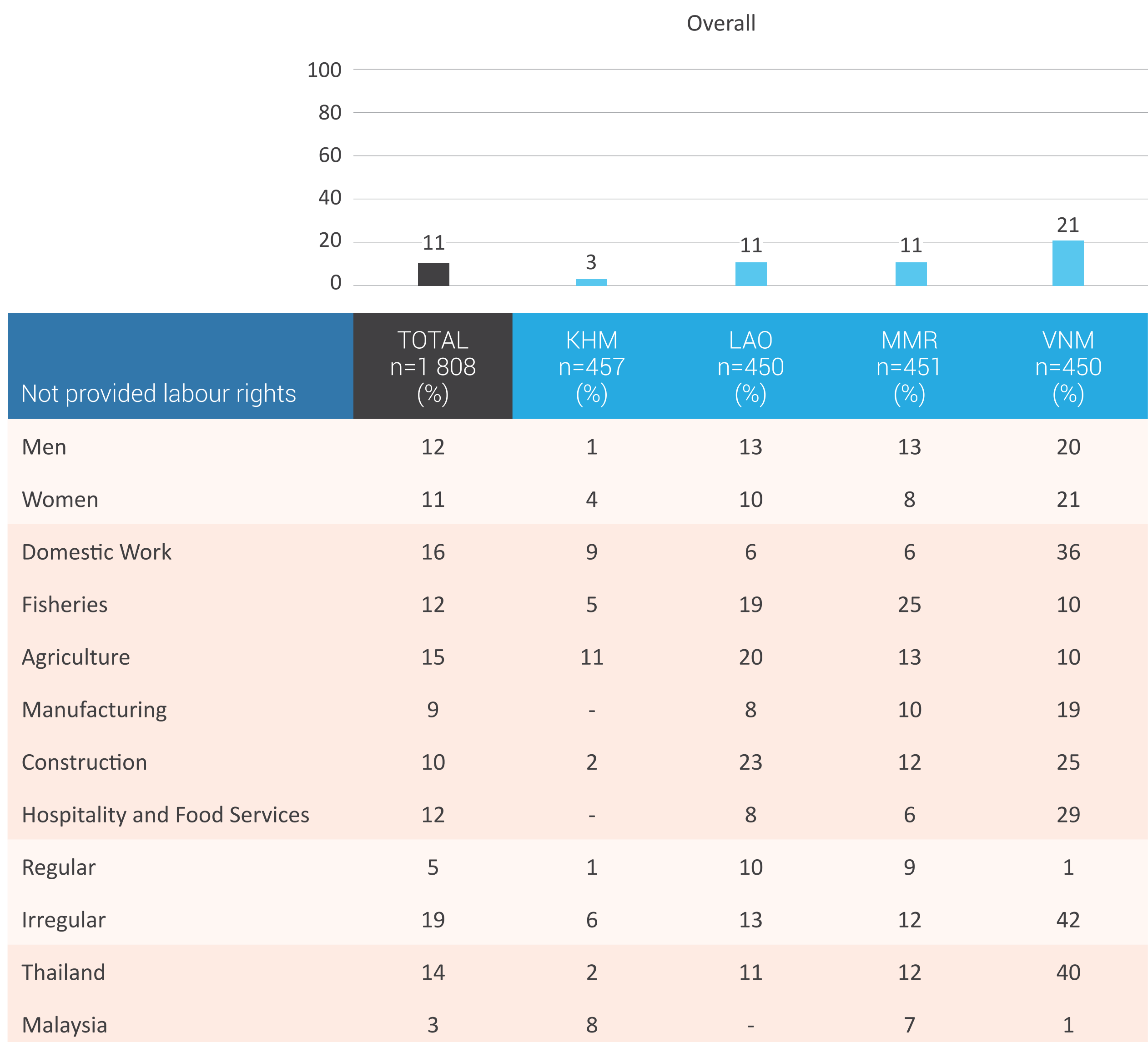


Figure 35 provides further information about the migrant workers who reported not receiving any labour rights while working abroad. About one in five migrants from Viet Nam (21 per cent) said that they did not receive any labour rights, which was significantly higher than the percentages reported by migrants from the other countries of origin. The high number of Vietnamese migrants reporting a lack of labour rights protection appears to be closely linked to high levels of irregular legal status in Thailand, where 40 per cent received no protection.

Looking at differences by sector, Vietnamese domestic workers were the most likely to not receive any labour rights (36 per cent). While Viet Nam currently sends a comparatively small number of domestic workers abroad, the recent bilateral agreements signed with several destination countries suggest that the numbers could increase dramatically, and it is important to consider what protection challenges this may bring (ILO, 2015i). Historically, domestic work has been unpaid because it was not formally recognized as work but rather as a basic responsibility of being a woman. Partially for this reason, it continues to be undervalued around the world. Within Thailand and Malaysia, perceptions that domestic workers are members of the household who do not require formal legal protection remain deeply engrained (ILO, 2016c; Rapid Asia, 2016; ILO and UN Women, 2016).

Figure 35. Not provided with any labour rights at work by country of origin and sub-segments (n=1,808) (%)



Not provided labour rights	TOTAL n=1 808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	12	1	13	13	20
Women	11	4	10	8	21
Domestic Work	16	9	6	6	36
Fisheries	12	5	19	25	10
Agriculture	15	11	20	13	10
Manufacturing	9	-	8	10	19
Construction	10	2	23	12	25
Hospitality and Food Services	12	-	8	6	29
Regular	5	1	10	9	1
Irregular	19	6	13	12	42
Thailand	14	2	11	12	40
Malaysia	3	8	-	7	1

Table 12 highlights the extent to which the migrant workers surveyed were provided with specific labour rights while they were working in Thailand or Malaysia.[2] Overtime pay (57 per cent), paid holidays (56 per cent), and paid sick leave (56 per cent) were reported as the most common types of labour rights provided. Overtime pay is particularly crucial to the livelihoods of migrant workers as their daily wages are typically low and many must work additional hours to earn a sufficient living. Receiving overtime pay allows migrant workers to support dependents in both countries of origin and destination, as well as repay debts acquired through migration (ILO, 2016a).

Only about two in five of migrant workers (42 per cent) stated that they were paid a wage at or above the statutory minimum while working in Thailand or Malaysia. Fewer migrant workers with irregular status (32 per cent) received the minimum wage compared to those who worked regularly (49 per cent). In addition, Myanmar migrants were much less likely to receive the minimum wage (19 per cent) than Cambodian (55 per cent) or Vietnamese migrants (54 per cent). In this regard, it is important to note that minimum wage policies are only truly effective if they include and protect groups that are vulnerable, disadvantaged or subject to discrimination. For example, if labour laws do not set wages for sectors or occupations primarily held by women or migrant workers, these groups will continue to suffer from inequality. In addition, there will be downward pressure on the wages of nationals, especially at lower and middle wage ranges (ILO, 2016e).

Just 8 per cent of migrant workers stated that that they were offered paid maternity leave benefits (though only considering women respondents, the proportion was 16 per cent). Domestic workers are specifically excluded from receiving maternity leave benefits in both Thailand and Malaysia, though this is redundant in the case of Malaysia as migrant women are immediately sent home upon becoming pregnant. In 2012, the Thai Government reversed its policy on deportation of pregnant migrant women, which it had previously argued was necessary to reduce child labour (ILO and UN Women, 2016; ILO, 2017a).

Table 12. Type of labour rights provided to migrant workers by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

Type of rights	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Paid annual leave	36	42	33	17	52
Paid holidays	56	71	58	35	59
Paid sick leave	56	89	44	40	50
One-day off per week	49	47	46	49	55
Paid maternity leave	8	9	2	2	19
Minimum wage	42	55	40	19	54
Overtime pay	57	79	33	48	66
Severance pay	11	11	29	1	2
Other	3	1	-	10	2
None	11	3	11	11	21

7.5 Gender wage gap

Figure 36 shows that gender differences in wages varied significantly between sectors but that in most cases men were paid substantially more than women. Overall, men earned a 14 per cent higher monthly wage. The gap is significantly

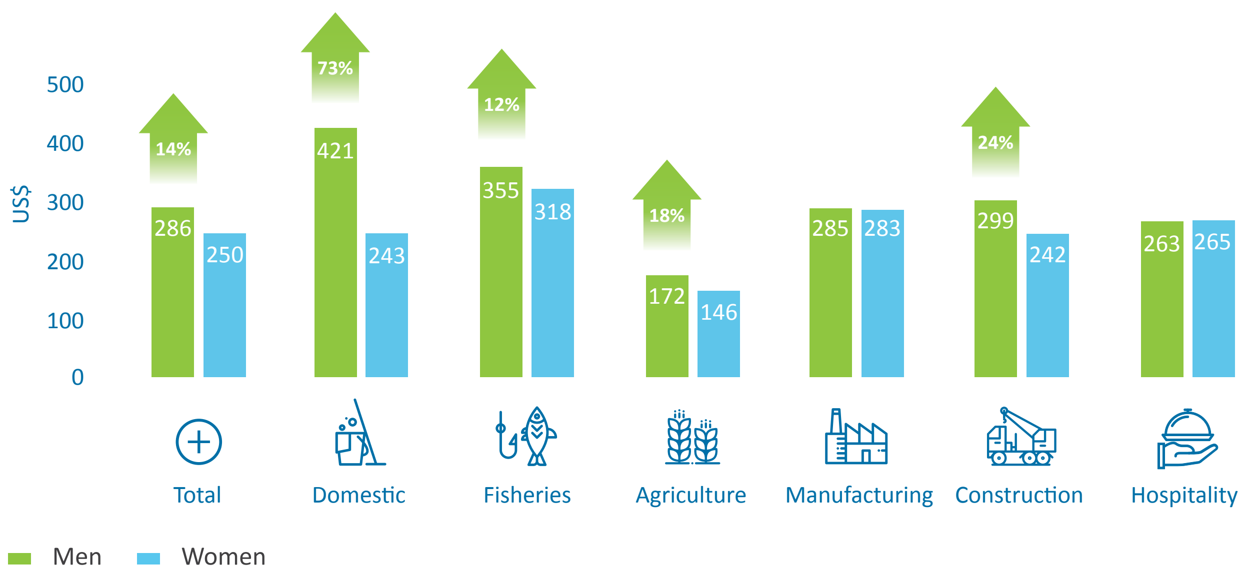
[2] The findings should only be interpreted as reflecting migrant workers' understanding of their entitlement to labour rights rather than their utilization in practice.

greater for domestic workers at 73 per cent, though relatively few men were found to be working in this sector.[3] In construction, men earned 24 per cent more than women, and in agriculture 18 per cent more. Manufacturing and hospitality work were found to have close to wage parity between men and women.

The gender wage gap also varied among workers based on country of origin but was nonetheless evident for all nationalities. The wage gap between men and women was most pronounced among migrant workers from Myanmar, with men earning 36 per cent more than women on average. Women from Cambodia also experienced a large gap in pay, earning 21 per cent less than Cambodian men. Wages were nearest to equal among Vietnamese and Lao workers, with men earning an average of 9 per cent more than women.

Pay discrimination on the basis of gender is a significant issue among migrant workers, just as it is among women and men workers everywhere. Although the trend has been towards a narrowing of the difference in wages globally, the gender pay gap is still estimated to be 23 per cent (ILO, 2016d). Sectoral segregation contributes to the difference in wages but discriminatory wage setting practices are also evident, with women migrants earning less for the same type of work. Eliminating the gender wage gap has been included in the SDGs within goal 8.5,[4] including a key performance indicator which has been adapted in figure 36.

Figure 36. Difference in average monthly earnings between women and men by sector (SDG 8.5.1) (n=1,808) (%)



7.6 Enrolment in social protection benefit schemes

Figure 37 shows that just 28 per cent of migrant workers surveyed enrolled in a public or private benefit scheme, such as social security, worker's compensation, or health insurance. Migrant workers from Viet Nam (46 per cent) were significantly more likely have been enrolled in a benefit scheme compared to workers from the other countries of origin, particularly in Malaysia (85 per cent). This is partially due to a higher percentage of Vietnamese workers surveyed having migrated regularly, and therefore being eligible to enrol.

Legal status of migrant workers appears to be one of the main determinants of enrolment in benefit schemes regardless of nationality, as nearly half of regular migrants (46 per cent) and only 5 per cent of irregular migrants were enrolled. Research on social protection for migrant workers in Thailand has confirmed that access to social protection

[3] Domestic work in South-East Asia is highly segregated by gender, with men working as gardeners, security guards and personal drivers and women as house cleaners, cooks and caregivers. Due to discriminatory gender norms, those jobs viewed as women's work tend to be lower remunerated, regardless of their actual complexity.

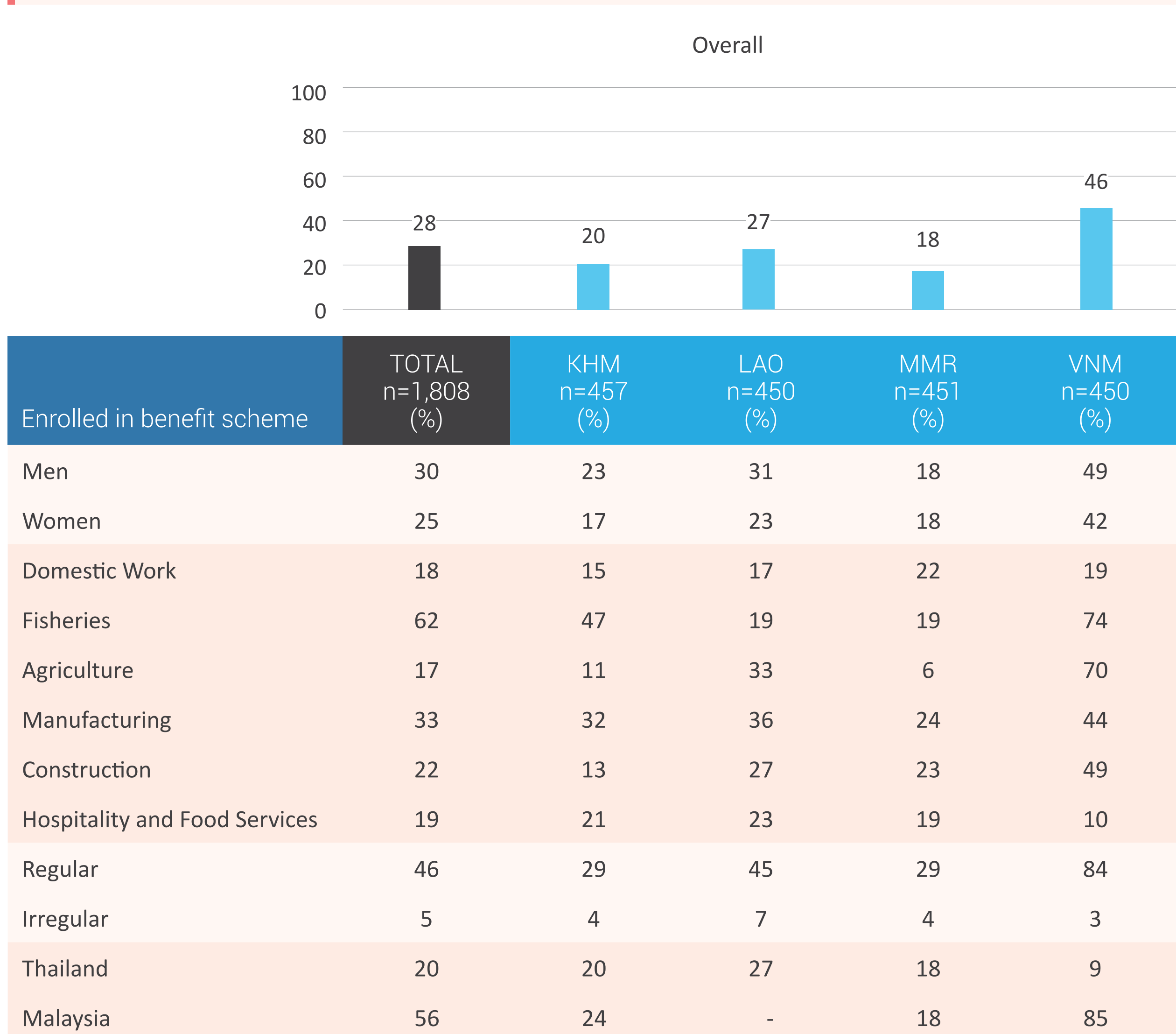
[4] By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

through government schemes is very limited for irregular migrants. Although they can buy into the Migrant Health Insurance scheme, concerns remain that the costs involved constitute a major deterrent for migrant workers to enrol. As with young and healthy people everywhere, many migrants may not see the benefit of voluntarily purchasing coverage given that they likely do not need to access health care frequently (Harkins, 2014a).

Thailand and Malaysia are not alone in struggling to provide adequate social protections to migrant workers. Because public benefit schemes were generally designed to provide protection to workers on a territorial basis, in many cases, they have not been sufficiently adapted for the changes in global labour markets that have increased the volume, ease, and rapidity of labour migration across international borders. As a consequence, the eligibility requirements for receiving entitlements often either explicitly exclude or create significant obstacles for migrants to avail themselves of their rights (for example, citizenship requirements, documentation requirements, minimum qualifying periods, and sectoral exclusions) (Tamagno, 2008).

The fisheries sector had the highest overall proportion of migrant workers with benefit scheme enrolment (62 per cent), which represents workers employed in seafood processing rather than those working on fishing vessels. It should be noted that migrant workers in the informal sector, including fishing, agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, domestic work and others are excluded from social security benefits in Thailand; as are domestic workers in Malaysia (ILO, 2016c; Harkins, 2014a).

Figure 37. Public or private benefit scheme enrolment by country of origin and sub-segments (n=1,808) (%)



Enrolled in benefit scheme	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	30	23	31	18	49
Women	25	17	23	18	42
Domestic Work	18	15	17	22	19
Fisheries	62	47	19	19	74
Agriculture	17	11	33	6	70
Manufacturing	33	32	36	24	44
Construction	22	13	27	23	49
Hospitality and Food Services	19	21	23	19	10
Regular	46	29	45	29	84
Irregular	5	4	7	4	3
Thailand	20	20	27	18	9
Malaysia	56	24	-	18	85

Table 13 shows that public health insurance (16 per cent) and social security (13 per cent) were the most common benefit schemes for migrant workers to enrol in the aggregate. However, there were major variances between nationalities. Very few Cambodians or Lao migrants were enrolled in social security benefits (1 per cent), whereas Vietnamese migrants were much more likely to be (38 per cent), which appears to be closely related to holding regular legal status during employment.

The private sector role in providing health insurance to migrant workers was found to be minor, with only 6 per cent of migrant workers enrolled. This may partially be explained by the very extensive public health system in Thailand, which migrants can utilize through either the social security scheme or Migrant Health Insurance scheme. However, the proportion of migrant workers who benefit is small, with only about one third of the targeted population enrolled in the Migrant Health Insurance scheme in 2016 and low utilization (Tangcharoensathien, Thwin and Patcharanarumol, 2017).

As this suggests, for the minority of migrants who are registered in social protection schemes, enrolment does not necessarily mean they were able to fully utilize their entitlements. Use of social protection benefits by migrant workers is often restricted by a variety of factors that prevent equal access, including lack of awareness about the process to make a claim, language barriers, lack of official marriage and birth certificates, and discriminatory treatment. The result for regular migrants is that they are required to pay into social protection systems where they have no opportunity to use several of the benefits, and very limited access to others (Harkins, 2014a).

Table 13. Type of benefit enrolment by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

Type of benefit	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Social security	13	1	14	1	38
Workers' compensation	4	5	1	2	6
Government health insurance	16	9	15	9	31
Private health insurance	6	11	5	4	2
Education or training	< 1	1	-	-	1
Other	3	-	-	4	7
None	72	80	73	82	54

Box 15
Stakeholder perspectives: Social protection benefit schemes

Stakeholders pointed out that employers have an obligation to provide social protection benefits to migrant workers, such as social security and workers' compensation. They explained that in many cases, however, employers may not register their workers for the schemes to which they are eligible. In addition, some migrant workers may not wish to register for such benefits due to the payroll taxes they entail or because the enrolment process is cumbersome.

"Some migrants get insurance because it makes it cheap to see a doctor in the hospital. Others are not willing to take this step because their salary will be reduced to pay for insurance. They'd rather keep their full salary."

-A representative of the Burmese Women's Union

7.7 Labour rights abuses

Figure 38 shows that more than half of all migrant workers surveyed (59 per cent) experienced labour rights abuses during employment. Among the four countries of origin, Cambodian (80 per cent) and Vietnamese (76 per cent) migrants were most likely to experience rights abuses.

There were no gender differences found in the likelihood of experiencing labour rights abuses, with equal proportions of men and women facing abuses. However, several studies have found that women migrant workers may be more vulnerable to abuse in certain sectors, such as for domestic work in a private residence (Harkins, 2014; Hugo, 2002; ILO and UN Women, 2015a).

Fisheries and construction were the two types of work most prone to mistreatment (69 per cent) but there were major differences by nationality and no discernible patterns. For Cambodian migrant workers, employment in construction was most likely to be abusive (83 per cent), whereas for Lao workers it was in the agricultural sector (51 per cent), in fisheries work for Myanmar workers (81 per cent), and in hospitality and food services for Vietnamese (81 per cent).

The research findings suggest that labour rights abuses against migrant workers are very common regardless of the type of work they are employed in. Previous sectoral studies in Thailand and Malaysia have documented that women and men migrant workers may face exploitative working conditions in the fishing sector (ILO, 2013b), domestic work (ILO and UN Women, 2016), construction industry (ILO, 2016a), poultry industry (Swedwatch, 2015), tourism sector (Schyst Resande and Fair Action, 2015), electronics manufacturing (Verité, 2014), palm oil plantations (Vartiala and Ristimäki, 2014), and others.

Figure 38. Experienced labour rights abuse during employment by country of origin and sub-segments (n=1,808) (%)

Experienced labour rights abuse	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	59	81	29	49	77
Women	59	79	31	50	75
Domestic Work	60	82	35	69	71
Fisheries	69	58	38	81	73
Agriculture	52	77	51	43	80
Manufacturing	55	81	17	42	76
Construction	69	83	23	51	77
Hospitality and Food Services	51	67	29	63	81
Regular	59	82	28	50	71
Irregular	59	75	33	49	81
Thailand	58	80	30	53	80
Malaysia	61	78	-	41	71

Box 16

Stakeholder and migrant perspectives: Narrow focus on exploitation within supply chains

Several stakeholders voiced concern about the sectoral limitations of efforts to address exploitation in Thailand and Malaysia, feeling that they are usually more responsive to the reputational concerns of major corporations than the actual jobs in which migrants are most likely to be exploited. Domestic and sex work were particularly highlighted as "off the radar" for initiatives to improve migrants' working conditions.

"I was exploited by my employer….they forced me to work because I did not know what I was getting into when they hired me to clean their home. In the end, they took my money and mobile phone and left me only enough for the bus ticket to return home."

-Female migrant worker from Lao PDR

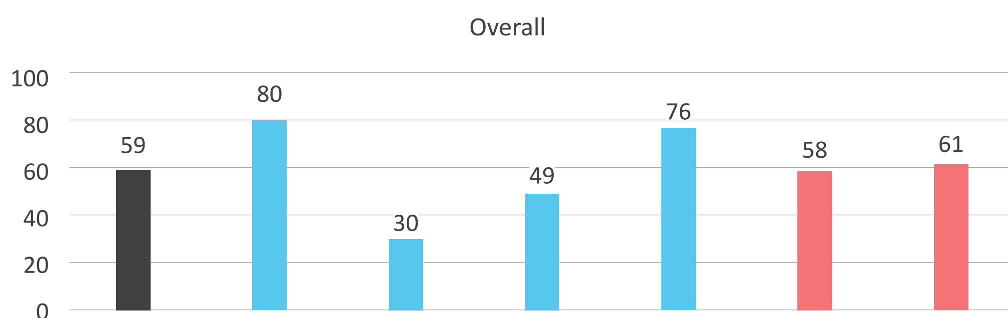
Figure 39 reveals the types of labour rights abuses faced by migrant workers. Overall, confiscation of identification documents (21 per cent), wages being withheld (17 per cent), and restricted movement (17 per cent) were the most common violations experienced by migrant workers.

The patterns of abuse varied considerably by country of origin. Over two out of five migrant workers from Cambodia had their wages withheld (42 per cent), while less than one of ten Vietnamese and Myanmar workers faced similar labour rights violations. Retention of identification documents was more commonly experienced by migrants from Viet Nam (38 per cent) and Cambodia (35 per cent), with fewer Myanmar (10 per cent) and Lao workers (2 per cent) having their documents confiscated. Being paid below the minimum wage was a frequent abuse experienced by migrant workers from Myanmar (20 per cent), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (19 per cent), and Cambodia (15 per cent), though it was much less prevalent among Vietnamese migrants (1 per cent).

Analysing labour rights abuses by destination country, migrant workers who held jobs in Malaysia (43 per cent) were much more likely to have their identification withheld than those who worked in Thailand (15 per cent). On the contrary, migrant workers employed in Thailand more commonly had their wages withheld (20 per cent) and wages below the legal minimum (15 per cent) than migrants going to Malaysia. These findings closely match the results of an ILO study on access to justice for migrant workers, which found that the patterns of abuse differ somewhat between Thailand and Malaysia. The most common types of complaints filed in Thailand were related to wage theft (non-payment of wages, wages below the legal minimum, etc.), whereas those in Malaysia were more directly coercive in nature (withholding of legal documents, inability to take leave from work, and excessive overtime) (ILO, 2017b).

Key sectoral differences identified in the patterns of abuse were substantially higher rates of retention of identification documents in fisheries work (41 per cent) and withholding of wages in the construction sector (40 per cent). The nature of the modern construction industry, with multiple layers of subcontracting, has meant that wage theft and withholding by employers is a systemic characteristic of many local construction markets. At the end of these long and complex subcontracting chains, migrant workers are a great distance from the sources of finance that ultimately 'trickle down' into wages for their work (ILO, 2016g).

Figure 39. Type of labour rights abuse experienced by country of origin and destination (n=1,808) (%)



Type of abuse	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)	THA n=1,419 (%)	MYS n=389 (%)
Wages withheld	17	42	5	7	15	20	9
Wages below minimum	14	15	19	20	1	15	8
Excessive overtime	14	13	4	24	15	14	13
Confiscation of ID	21	35	2	10	38	15	43
Illegal wage deductions	8	17	1	8	6	9	6
Restriction of movement	17	24	2	15	28	19	10
Harassment or abuse	5	13	1	4	-	5	4
Gender discrimination	1	1	-	3	-	1	1
Fired due to pregnancy	1	1	-	1	-	1	-
None	41	20	70	51	24	42	39

Box 17

Migrant perspectives: Pregnancy while employed abroad

Several migrants told stories about discriminatory treatment by employers during pregnancy, including pressure to leave their jobs and return home. The common understanding among many women migrant workers was that getting pregnant is prohibited during their employment abroad.

"When I was two months pregnant, the company forced me to quit the job because they said that it would affect my work. They also did not tell me if they would take me back after I gave birth."

-Female migrant worker from Viet Nam

7.7.1 Assistance with labour rights abuses

Table 14 shows that not many of the migrant workers surveyed who experienced labour rights abuses while working abroad sought assistance (21 per cent). A previous study found that most migrant workers in South-East Asia do not make a complaint unless their livelihoods or basic human dignity are clearly threatened, as lodging a complaint usually means the end of their employment relationship (ILO, 2017b).

Employers and managers or family and friends were reported as the main sources of assistance for migrant workers. However, only a few migrant workers (7 per cent) stated that their problems were resolved. The implication is that official complaint mechanisms remain out of reach for most migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia and there are significant limitations in the effectiveness of more informal approaches to dispute resolution.

Despite being provided with equal access to complaint mechanisms under law, the number of cases pursued by migrant workers remains negligible in comparison to the number of violations committed against them. In practice, many migrant workers are not able to exercise their right to seek redress for violations. Lack of awareness about their rights under the law, as well as the constraints posed by language barriers, lack of legal status, fears about accessing government services, and the possibility of retaliation by employers, means that utilization remains slight in relation to the prevalence of labour rights abuses occurring (ILO, 2016c; Harkins, 2014b).

Table 14. Assistance with labour rights abuses by country of origin (n=1,064) (%)

Assistance for abuse	TOTAL n=1,064 (%)	KHM n=365 (%)	LAO n=136 (%)	MMR n=223 (%)	VNM n=340 (%)
Sought assistance	21	24	25	39	4
Did not seek assistance	79	76	75	61	96
Sources of assistance	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Friends or family	8	9	7	22	1
Employer or manager	10	11	19	15	3
Embassy or consulate	< 1	-	-	2	-
Recruitment agency	2	5	-	-	-
Community leader	< 1	-	1	-	-
Labour authorities	< 1	-	1	-	-
Police	-	-	-	-	-
NGO	-	-	-	-	-
Trade union	< 1	-	1	-	-
Other	1	3	-	4	-
Resolution	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Resolved	7	6	13	11	2
Did not resolve	93	94	87	89	98

Box 18

Stakeholder perspectives: Seeking assistance for labour rights abuses

According to stakeholders, migrant workers generally seek assistance for violations of their labour rights through friends and relatives, recruitment agencies, diplomatic missions, or NGOs. Migrants who were recruited through licensed recruitment agencies could also contact their office in the destination country. For those migrants without legal documentation, they were said to normally seek assistance from friends and family, as they are typically reluctant to seek assistance from government agencies.

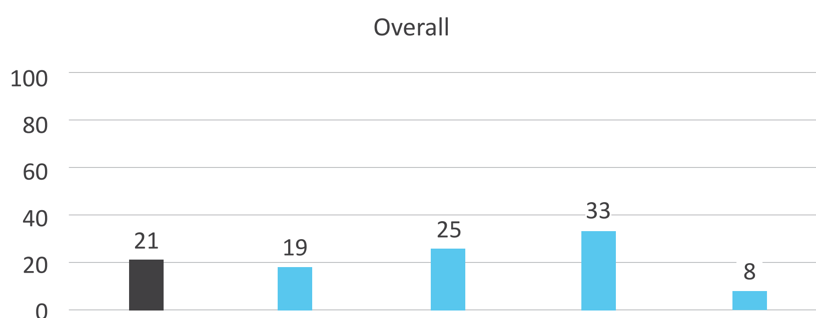
7.8 Mobility within the labour market

Only about one out of five migrant workers (21 per cent) were able to change their sector of work while employed abroad (figure 40). It is notable that this figure was much smaller for migrant workers who entered into fisheries work (9 per cent), where labour shortages have become increasingly acute in Thailand. It was also lower in Malaysia, where just one out of ten migrants were able to move to another sector of work (10 per cent). The results show that labour mobility in destination countries is generally very limited, which is likely due to the highly restrictive policies established on migrants changing employment.

Work permits in Thailand and Malaysia are tied to one employer, and the lack of flexibility in changing employers can lead many workers to become irregular in order to change workplaces. Prohibiting or limiting the ability of migrant workers to change employers can add to workers' vulnerability by creating a dependency that is easy to exploit. It can also contribute to the preference to migrate through irregular channels, which, while still posing risks, is often perceived by workers as allowing greater agency and flexibility during their employment (Tunon and Harkins, 2017). Tight restrictions can also be counterproductive, as they may prevent migrants from filling labour market needs that were not identified due to limitations in capacity to conduct labour market assessments.

Examining the differences by sector, hospitality workers were the most likely to have changed their work at destination, with more than one quarter switching their employment type (26 per cent). Conversely, migrants employed in fisheries work were the least mobile, as only 9 per cent changed their employment. This result may be closely tied to the location of work, as in some coastal fishing communities there are likely to be fewer opportunities for migrants to seek other types of employment.

Figure 40. Changed sector of work in destination country (n=1,808) (%)



Changed sector of work	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Men	24	24	29	36	7
Women	18	14	21	29	9
Domestic Work	22	15	18	53	10
Fisheries	9	21	25	37	2
Agriculture	23	31	19	25	-
Manufacturing	20	9	22	32	16
Construction	22	22	35	32	7
Hospitality and Food Services	26	33	30	37	6
Regular	21	16	28	37	4
Irregular	21	25	22	27	12
Thailand	24	19	25	39	11
Malaysia	10	16	-	16	5

Box 19
Case study: Barriers in access to justice for women migrant workers

Ms Trang migrated to Thailand through a broker introduced to her by a friend from her local village in Thanh Hoa, Viet Nam. The broker found a position for Trang at a textile factory and organized her migration to Thailand. Trang was aware that she would migrate irregularly and therefore did not expect to receive the same benefits as a regular migrant worker.

During her time at the textile factory she was paid THB250 per day, which is below the legal minimum wage. Her salary was deducted to repay the costs of her migration during the first five months of employment. Trang was also required to sign a contract before starting work. Feeling that she had to find a job quickly, she signed the contract despite not fully understanding its contents.

Box 19 (cont.)

After having worked for two months in Thailand, Trang discovered that she was three months pregnant. When the factory manager was informed of her pregnancy, she was pressured to resign as the manager claimed that her pregnancy would affect her ability to work. The manager also informed Trang that a previous employee had suffered a miscarriage while working for the textile factory and the factory had been obligated to take responsibility. The factory wished to avoid a similar situation and therefore had a policy of not employing workers while pregnant. Further, the manager informed Trang that this was clearly stated in the contract that she had signed.

Trang's friends tried to convince the manager to let her remain at the factory, however, their attempts were unsuccessful and she had to leave the factory without receiving any compensation. Trang knew that her dismissal was unfair, but she did not know where she could seek assistance due to her irregular legal status.

Trang decided to ask her broker for help to negotiate with the factory manager. The broker counselled that it would be better if she found a new employer instead and offered to assist her for an additional fee. Trang paid the first half of the fee and told the broker that she would pay the rest after she received her first month of wages from the new job. Instead of finding a new employer for Trang, the broker took her money and was never heard from again. Feeling frustrated and hopeless, Trang decided to return to Viet Nam and borrowed money from her friend for the ticket home.

Trang's experience as a migrant worker is illustrative of the kinds of challenges that women migrant workers face in seeking redress for labour rights abuses. Migrant workers are often unaware of who they can turn to when they need assistance, and the options available are often less accessible for women migrants. In the end, despite a clear violation of Trang's labour rights, she had no option but to return home without obtaining remedy.

7.9 Freedom of association

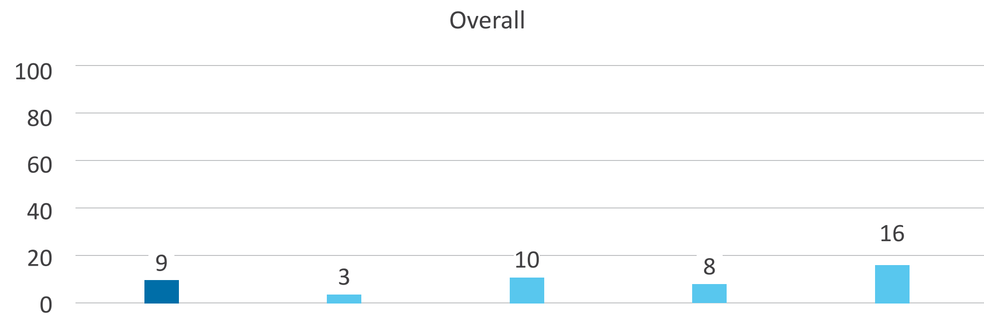
Figure 41 shows that less than one in ten of the migrant workers surveyed had joined a trade union or association (9 per cent). However, it should be noted that trade union membership is also low among nationals in Thailand, as there is not a well-established culture of organized labour. Estimates suggest that only about three per cent of the Thai labour force have joined trade unions (Hayter, 2015).

Participation was highest among migrant workers from Viet Nam, with approximately one in six Vietnamese migrant workers (16 per cent) having joined a union or association. Cambodian workers were the least likely to organize (3 per cent), which may be somewhat surprising given the very active trade union movement in Cambodia in recent years.

One obstacle to union membership among migrant workers is that they often work in informal sectors which do not have a significant history of organizing in Thailand or Malaysia, such as agricultural work, domestic work, and fishing. Migrants are prohibited from forming their own unions to fill these gaps or serving in leadership roles in existing unions, which may limit their ability to voice their specific concerns (ILO, 2015a). Attempts to officially register a domestic workers' association in Malaysia have already been denied twice by the Government (ILO, 2016c).

Understanding the importance of protecting the rights of all workers in order to avoid a race to the bottom on working conditions, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress has been active in reaching out to migrant workers to join trade unions in Malaysia. However, the operating environment remains extremely challenging in this regard as migrants often cannot remain in-country long enough to benefit from collective bargaining agreements and/or are reluctant to actively engage with trade unions due to fear of retaliatory dismissal and deportation (ILO, 2016c).

Figure 41. Joined a union or association by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Type of association joined	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Trade union	4	1	-	-	16
Migrant worker association	3	-	10	1	-
Women's group	< 1	-	1	-	1
Religious group	2	2	-	5	-
Other group or association	1	-	-	2	-
None	91	97	90	92	84

Box 20
Migrant worker perspectives: Organizing into unions or associations

Information from migrant interviews sheds light on why most migrant workers surveyed did not join a union or migrant worker association. Lack of information, interest, time, and permission from employers were said to be key factors in the decision not to participate in organizing activities.

"My employer didn't allow me to leave the house, so I didn't know if there were any associations."
-Female migrant worker from the Lao People's Democratic Republic

"I spent most of my time at work. After getting back home, I was tired and did not have interest in participating in any union or association, so I did not look for further information about them."
-Male migrant worker from Viet Nam

> "I could not send money through a remittance service because I had no legal documents. So I asked someone from the same village to bring money home for my family because I trusted them."
>
> Female migrant worker from Viet Nam

8. Remittances

8.1 Remittance sending practices

As shown in figure 42, the vast majority of migrant workers regularly sent remittances home while working abroad (93 per cent). There was little variation in this practice among subgroups of migrants, regardless of their gender, nationality, sector, destination country, or legal status.

However, the specific remittance channels used differed markedly by country of origin. Overall, the hundi[1] or broker system (32 per cent) was the most popular channel used, followed by "hand carry by others" (20 per cent), money transfer organizations (19 per cent), and banks (15 per cent). Hundi or broker systems were the most popular options among migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (58 per cent) and Myanmar (55 per cent). Banks or hand carry by others were favoured by Vietnamese migrants sending remittances (46 per cent). Money transfer organizations (such as Western Union) were the most frequent choice by Cambodian migrant workers (44 per cent). In comparison to other countries in the region, Cambodia and Viet Nam have been noted as possessing more formalized remittance markets, while the remittance market in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar are at relatively early stages of development (UNCDF, 2017).

Most of the migrant workers surveyed did not have a bank account, even in their home country. Vietnamese migrant workers were an exception in this regard, with 28 per cent having a bank account at home and 42 per cent opening a bank account while working overseas. By comparison, just under one in five migrant workers from Cambodia and Myanmar opened a bank account in the country of destination (18 per cent) – a rate that is still more than double that of Lao migrants (8 per cent). This may partially explain why most migrant workers, except Vietnamese, did not choose to use banks when remitting funds home.

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

An ILO study of migration practices in Myanmar found that many migrants have limited experience in dealing with financial institutions before migrating and therefore have less confidence in using them to send remittances. Because of a history of periods of high inflation, low interest rates offered on deposits and at least three episodes of demonetisation since independence, there is thought to be a lingering public distrust of the banking system in Myanmar (ILO, 2015f). Though the banking sector is more developed in Cambodia, a similar distrust of financial service providers exists, with many Cambodians still haunted by memories of the Khmer Rouge era when money was abolished entirely (Lewis, 2012).

The substantial barriers to financial inclusion for migrants should also be taken into consideration in interpreting the results. Documentation is required to open a bank account in both Thailand and Malaysia, which makes it difficult for irregular migrant workers to do so. The Bank of Thailand requires banks to check the validity of visas before providing services, even for existing customers. Moreover, due to the isolated location of some workplaces and restricted movement, migrant workers may not be able to easily access financial services even if they have valid documentation. Research on migrant customer experiences at banks in Thailand by UNCDF found that disrespectful treatment was also a reason that some migrants avoid using banking services, as they simply did not feel welcome (2017).

Figure 42. Remittance sending, channels used, and bank account ownership by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

Remittance channel used	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Bank	15	4	3	4	46
Money transfer organization	19	44	32	2	1
Hundi or broker system	32	13	58	55	3
Hand carry by others	20	15	6	11	46
Hand carry by self	7	3	1	25	-
Other channel	7	21	-	5	3
None	7	10	12	5	-
Bank account ownership	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
In country of origin	11	2	8	8	28
In destination country	22	18	8	18	42

Box 21

Stakeholder perspectives: Remittance channels

Stakeholders explained that regular migrant workers were more likely to use a bank account or money transfer organization to send money to their families. For irregular migrants, hand carry and use of brokers to remit money were more common. In some cases, employers helped migrant workers to transfer money through their personal bank account.

8.2 Remittance amounts and fees

As shown in table 15, irregular migrant workers were able to remit more money and paid lower fees compared to regular migrant workers. The average amount remitted by irregular migrants was US$184 per month, with a fee of 2 per cent paid, whereas regular migrants sent US$171 per month and paid 3.6 per cent. While the reason for the difference in amounts sent is not entirely clear given roughly equal wages, it is possible that irregular migrants may have higher net earnings due to fewer deductions for recruitment fees, social security contributions, and other costs associated with regular migration. They may also be more likely to hand carry their remittances home at no cost or use low-cost broker systems than regular migrants, reducing their expenditure on service fees.

There were also differences between the amounts remitted by men and women migrant workers. Men remitted on average US$187 per month compared to US$166 for women. However, this largely reflects the gender wage gap, as both men and women remitted nearly the same proportion of their earnings each month. For comparison, a contextually relevant survey conducted among approximately 1,000 Myanmar migrant workers employed in Thailand found equal median remittance amounts between men and women, with women remitting a slightly greater share of the lower wages they received (Turnell, Vicary & Bradford, 2007).

Table 15. Remittance amounts per month and fees charged by regional segments (n=1,682)

Remittances and fees	Total n=1,682	Thailand n=1,304	Malaysia n=378	Men n=854	Women n=828	Regular n=963	Irregular n=719
Avg. amount remitted (US$)	177	176	180	187	166	171	184
Avg. remittance fee (US$)	5.30	3.90	9.20	5.30	5.30	6.10	3.70
Fee Proportion (%)	3.0	2.2	5.1	2.8	3.2	3.6	2.0

Lowering the costs of remittances for migrant workers has been included in the SDGs as goal 10.C,[2] which includes an indicator that has been adjusted for measurement in table 16. For migrant workers headed to Thailand, the average fee was a relatively low 2.2 per cent and did not vary significantly by country of origin. This is likely due to the high prevalence of remittances sent through informal channels. In contrast, those workers who migrated to Malaysia paid significantly higher fees of up to 8 per cent.

In general, workers who migrated to Malaysia remitted less money and paid higher fees than those who migrated to Thailand, with the notable exception of Myanmar migrant workers who frequently made use of the low-cost hundi system. Migrant workers often favour the informality, flexibility and low-cost of the hundi system, however, ensuring the safety of these informal transfers still requires attention.

[2] By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent.

Table 16. Remittance cost as a proportion of the amount remitted by corridor (SDG 10.C.1)

Remittance cost	TOTAL THA n=1,304	TOTAL MYS n=378	KHM - THA n=330	KHM - MYS n=16	LAO - THA n=395	MMR - THA n=127	MMR - MYS n=302	VNM - THA n=230	VNM - MYS n=218
Avg. amount remitted (US$)	176	180	163	137	163	222	154	245	162
Avg. remittance fee (US$)	3.90	9.20	3.90	11.20	3.10	3.30	5.60	5.50	12.40
Fee Proportion (%)	2.2	5.1	2.4	8.2	1.9	1.5	3.6	2.2	7.7

Box 22

Case study: Financial exclusion of migrant women employed in the informal sector

Ms Chantrea is a rice farmer in Takeo, Cambodia. She migrated to Thailand two years ago with the assistance of a friend from the same village who had previous experience working there. The friend introduced Chantrea to Mrs Ploy, the owner of a massage parlour in Bangkok, who was looking for additional help.

Chantrea's first three months in Bangkok passed smoothly and without complications. Mrs Ploy offered her accommodation in her house for a small fee. Despite being paid below the minimum wage (US$250), Chantrea still managed to remit about US$100 to her family. Chantrea used a friend to hand carry the money to her family at no charge except for a small gift. She did not feel comfortable using formal channels to send remittances as she did not have any legal documents permitting her to work in Thailand and believed it would be a complicated process. Moreover, Chantrea did not go out much as she did not want to risk being arrested and forced to pay off the police.

After some time, Chantrea's friend got married and returned to Cambodia leaving her without anyone to bring money to her family. Around the same time, the massage parlour changed owners and Mrs Arisa became Chantrea's new employer. She offered to send remittances to Chantrea's family through her personal bank account.

Chantrea decided to accept her offer and US$30 was deducted from her salary to send to her family every month. Even though Chantrea did not have any receipt and felt the US$10 transfer fee was a bit high, she was initially very satisfied with the system as her family received the money very quickly. However, not long after her family informed her that they had not received any money for four months. Chantrea decided to confront Arisa who blatantly denied any wrongdoing. The other migrant employees at the massage parlour told her they had similar experiences.

As the main breadwinner for her family, Chantrea's family were forced to borrow money from their neighbours to cover household expenses when the money stopped arriving. Feeling cheated and not knowing where she could seek assistance, Chantrea finally decided to quit her job and return home, forfeiting her last month of wages.

This case study exemplifies some of the difficulties faced by women migrants employed informally in remitting money to their families. Using formal remittances services is in many cases not an option, as they require identification documents or a bank account. Remitting through formal channels is further complicated by irregular migrants' limited freedom of movement, which restricts their access to financial institutions. Instead, migrants often rely on informal channels to send remittances, which can expose them to greater risk.

8.3 Use of remittances

Migrant workers reported using remittances for a number of different purposes, which have been categorized into "productive use" and "other use" to provide an analytical framework.[3] This should not be interpreted as a value judgement as the importance of using remittances to pay for immediate household needs cannot be discounted and consumption can contribute to economic growth. It is also important to acknowledge that remittances are privately held funds, and that it is entirely at the discretion of migrant workers as to how they make use of them.

Figures 43 and 44 show that overall, the majority of migrant workers used remittances for other purposes, which was true in all countries of origin. In particular, the funds received were used for household expenses (64 per cent) and purchase of consumer products (52 per cent). This is understandable given that, in many cases, remittances were the main or sole form of income for recipients.

Among productive uses of remittances, paying for their children's education (32 per cent) and retaining as savings (27 per cent) were the most frequent types. Children's education also represented the largest gender difference in use of remittances, with women migrants 10 per cent more likely than men to use their funds for this purpose. Similar findings have emerged from other studies by the United Nations, suggesting that women migrants tend to allocate more resources for the benefit of their children (UN-INSTRAW, 2008).

Vietnamese migrant workers were exceptional in privileging support for family members (60 per cent) over household expenses (28 per cent), which may reflect greater household financial resources. In contrast, Lao migrants overwhelmingly used their remittances to pay for the expenses of their households (91 per cent) as they often did not have another source of income.

Generally speaking, families of migrant workers are financially better off due to the increased income derived from receiving remittances (ADBI, OECD, and ILO, 2015). As noted in chapter 4 however, whether remittances represent a panacea for long-term development in countries of origin within the region remains the subject of much debate.

Figure 43. Use of remittances by country of origin (n=1,682) (%)

Use of remittances	TOTAL n=1,682 (%)	KHM n=410 (%)	LAO n=395 (%)	MMR n=429 (%)	VNM n=448 (%)
Buying farm land, livestock or equipment	11	21	6	14	3
Children's education	32	28	19	41	38
Starting a business	4	1	1	6	9
Savings	27	34	11	18	42
Building a house	17	17	31	19	4
Donations	3	-	1	11	1
Household expenses	64	76	91	63	28
Consumer products	52	40	84	55	32
Supporting family members	25	27	7	4	60
Paying debts	30	45	9	22	41
Other	2	5	-	3	1

[3] The categories were developed for the purpose of this research as no international standard exists defining productive use of remittances. Moreover, the difficulties of making an absolute distinction between what is a productive use and what is not have been pointed out in other studies (GIZ, 2013).

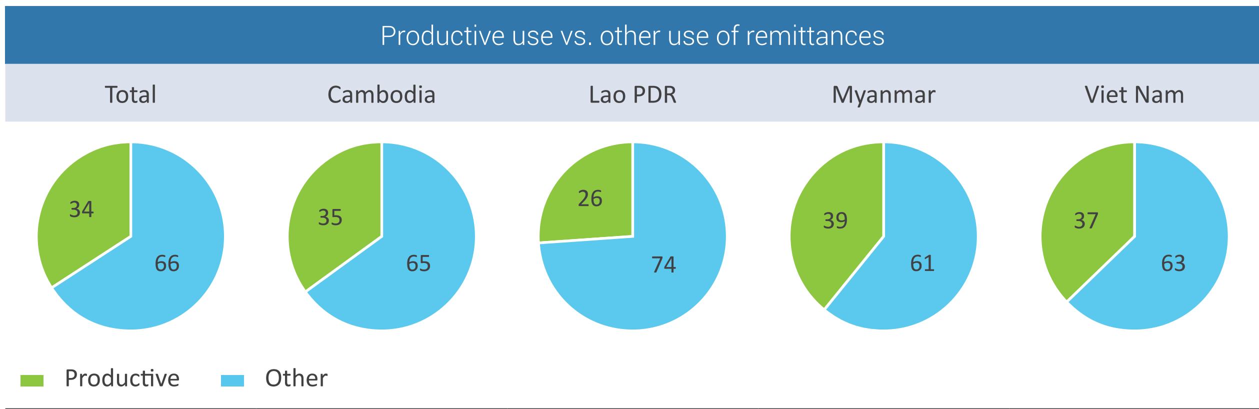


Figure 44. Map of average remittances sent and their most common uses in countries of origin (US$)

Household expenses

Supporting family members

Myanmar

US$154

US$222

US$163

US$245

US$162

Lao PDR

Thailand

Viet Nam

US$163

US$137

Cambodia

Malaysia

"While in Thailand, I was working in a tailor shop, so I gained some knowledge and skills about this type of work. But when I returned back home, there was no tailor shop where I could get a job and I do not own a sewing machine."

Female migrant worker from Lao People's Democratic Republic

9. Return and reintegration

9.1 Reason for returning home

Migrant workers were asked what prompted them to return to their home country, as shown in figure 45. Their reasons for return were divided into two categories during analysis: voluntary and involuntary return. While this is an oversimplification of the complex set of factors involved in the return of migrant workers, it is useful in assessing the extent to which they had some discretion over this event.

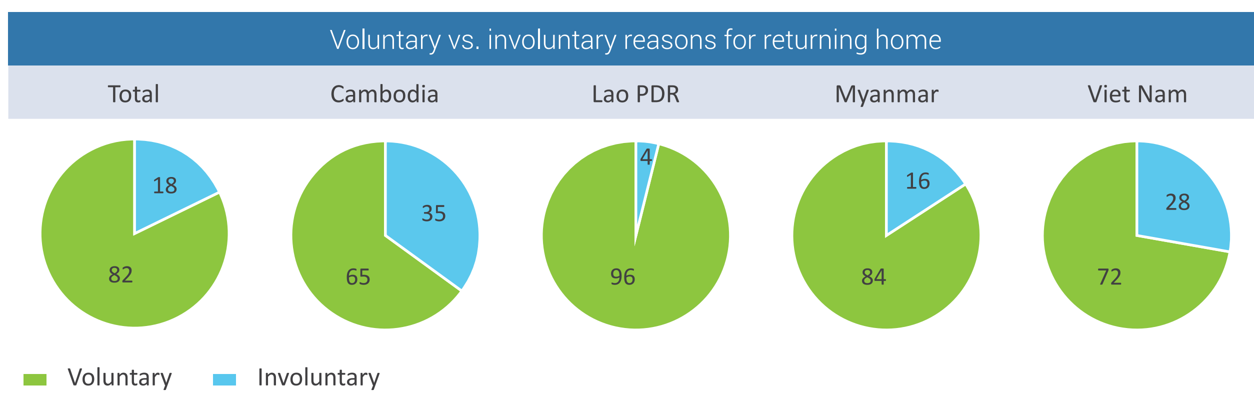
Overall, the vast majority of migrant workers surveyed returned home voluntarily (82 per cent), particularly as a result of family obligations (33 per cent) and homesickness (23 per cent). On the contrary, only 18 per cent of migrant workers were forced to return home, primarily due to the end of their visa or work permit (12 per cent). This finding has important implications, as it is often assumed that migrant workers would stay indefinitely in Thailand or Malaysia unless restrictive policies are kept in place.

Particularly for migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (96 per cent) and Myanmar (84 per cent), a clear majority decided to return home on their own. Vietnamese migrants were unique in that the top motivation for return was the expiration of their permission to stay (26 per cent), though homesickness (22 per cent), saving enough money (19 per cent), and family obligations (18 per cent) were almost equally common reasons for going home. Cambodian migrants were the mostly likely to return home involuntarily, with more than one third of those who explained their reasons saying they had no choice in the matter (35 per cent).

Only 2 per cent of migrant workers returned home due to a deportation. Even among those migrants who worked in an irregular legal status – only 4 per cent were deported – with the largest portion returning home due to family obligations (39 per cent). This follows the global experience, in which law-and-order measures taken in isolation have proven ineffective in curtailing unregulated migration flows. These results hold true even where investments in enforcement have skyrocketed, as they have in the United States and several other countries where near militarization of borders has been attempted (Papademetriou, 2005).

Figure 45. Reason for returning home by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

Main reason for return	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Deported	2	4	-	2	1
Exploitation or abuse	3	6	1	3	1
End of visa or work permit	12	13	2	6	26
Lost job	2	5	1	2	-
Saved enough money	6	-	3	1	19
Work opportunities at home	4	1	2	2	9
Family obligations	33	29	42	44	18
Homesick	23	12	40	16	22
To give birth	6	9	8	3	3
Other	11	22	1	18	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100



9.2 Skills development

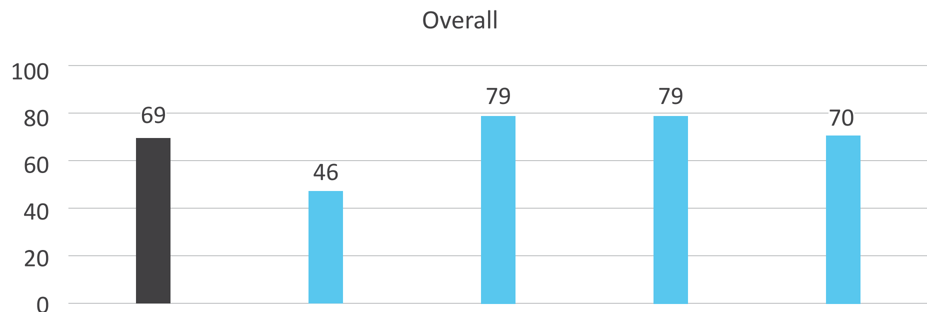
As depicted in figure 46, the majority of migrant workers developed one or more skills during their time in destination countries (69 per cent). Overall, migrant workers were most likely to have developed foreign language proficiency (38 per cent), followed closely by social skills and confidence (36 per cent) and vocational skills (36 per cent).

Examining differences among subgroups, Vietnamese (54 per cent) and Myanmar migrants (51 per cent) most frequently developed social skills and confidence, while Lao migrants gained vocational skills (59 per cent) and Cambodian migrants acquired financial literacy (39 per cent). Cambodian migrants were somewhat less likely to have developed skills overall however (46 per cent). Exploring sectoral variations, migrant workers employed in hospitality and food service sector were the most likely to report developing skills during their time abroad, as nearly four out of five acquired new capabilities (79 per cent). They were also the most successful in developing vocational skills at 45 per cent.

While the findings seem promising in terms of the potential of migration to build the skills of migrant workers, only 16 per cent of migrants who had developed skills felt that they were applicable upon return. Particularly in Viet Nam, only a very few migrants felt their newly acquired skills were useful after return (3 per cent). Although there are obvious reasons why speaking Thai or Malay might not be particularly relevant in countries of origin, the explanation for why social and vocational skills are not applicable is somewhat more complicated. Return is often a challenging

experience for migrants, with unrecognized qualifications and loss of social capital abroad contributing to difficulties reintegrating into society and labour markets. In some cases, this can lead to problems such as unemployment or social isolation (TWG, 2015).

Figure 46. Developed skills while abroad by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Skills developed	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Leadership skills	14	-	19	35	2
Social skills/confidence	36	13	26	51	54
Foreign language proficiency	38	20	46	40	48
General literacy or numeracy	15	14	36	10	1
Financial literacy	20	39	33	5	1
Vocational skills	36	15	59	39	30
Business skills	7	10	12	2	4
None	31	54	21	21	30
Skills used	n=1,238 (%)	n=208 (%)	n=356 (%)	n=357 (%)	n=317 (%)
Able to use skills	16	13	25	21	3
Not able to use skills	84	87	75	79	97

Box 23
Stakeholder perspectives: Applying new skills upon return

Most stakeholders agreed that it is difficult for migrant workers to apply the skills they acquired after return as appropriate jobs are often not available. In Cambodia, for example, those who gained construction skills may not be able to make use of them as there is a low demand for construction in their home villages. Many of those who wish to set up a business struggle due to the lack of an enabling environment. It was stated that if migrants cannot find satisfactory work after return, they are more likely to migrate again, which contributes to problems with “brain drain”.

Box 23 (cont.)

The views of stakeholders in the Lao People's Democratic Republic were somewhat different, as they felt that Lao migrant workers were generally able to apply their job skills after their return. They also stated that some return migrant workers were successful in starting their own businesses or improving the profitability of family business.

"They do use the skills they have learned in Thailand after returning to Laos. For example, migrants who worked at a construction site can become contractors when they come back. Those who worked at a restaurant or in retail open small shops in the village."

-Representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Lao People's Democratic Republic

9.3 Skill level of work

The skill level of jobs held before migration were compared to those held after return to determine if changes had occurred. Figure 47 displays the skill level of the job held by migrant workers before and after migration, considering the sector the worker was employed in abroad.[1]

Overall, a significant number of migrant workers were able to improve their job skill level following their return from working abroad, with the number of surveyed workers in semi-skilled jobs or higher more than doubling from 11 per cent to 23 per cent. The majority of surveyed workers, however, remained employed in low-skilled work upon their return (68 per cent) and an additional 2 per cent of workers found themselves unemployed.

Migrants employed in domestic work, manufacturing, and hospitality and food service reported the biggest improvements in job skill level upon return (14 per cent). Among those who worked in these industries, the proportion who found work at a semi-skilled or higher level upon return more than doubled compared to before migration.

However, it was notable that migrants employed in hospitality and food services (15 per cent) and domestic work (14 per cent) were also the most likely to be unemployed upon return. This suggests that similar job opportunities were not available in their home communities. As discussed in section 9.5, only 7 per cent of migrant workers were employed in these two professions upon return.

Figure 47. Skill level of work before migration and upon return by sector worked in abroad (n=1,808) (%)

[1] To measure the skill level of migrant workers systematically, the study adapted questions from the four skill levels defined in the ILO's International Standard Classification of Occupations (ILO, 2012). A progressive scale was applied, from low-skilled (e.g. general labourer such as a cleaner or farmhand) to high-skilled work (e.g. engineer, teacher, medical practitioner).

Among the four countries of origin, Vietnamese migrant workers had by far the most success finding work at a higher skill level, with 27 per cent of workers increasing the skill level of their work after returning home (figure 48). This is probably explained by the relatively more industrialized economy of Viet Nam, which offers more opportunities for higher skilled work than in the other countries of origin studied.

Lao migrants were the least likely to find a higher skilled job upon return, at just 4 per cent. It appears that a key reason that return migrant workers in the Lao People's Democratic Republic found limited opportunities for improvement was that a larger proportion faced unemployment after going home (18 per cent).

Despite the significant differences found, it is notable that migrants from all countries of origin showed increases in job skill level upon return. This adds support to the theory that migration and can substantially contribute to labour force development if migrants are provided with opportunities to apply their skills within the domestic market upon return.

Figure 48. Skill level of work before migration and upon return by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

9.4 Work situation

In some cases, the work situation of migrant workers changed significantly upon returning home, either for the better or for the worse. Table 17 examines shifts in the type of employment that migrants held from before migration to after. The largest change overall was an increase in the portion of migrants who were self-employed (5 per cent). Consistently across countries of origin, migrants were more likely to work for themselves upon return, which likely includes a large portion of farmers. Working for an employer was the greatest decline in the type of employment, with 4 per cent fewer migrants.

Looking at the variance by country, the biggest change for Cambodian migrants was a decline in working for an employer (11 per cent). Lao migrant workers were both more likely to leave unpaid work for their families (7 per cent), as well as to be unemployed (8 per cent). Vietnamese were also more likely to leave unpaid family work (10) but also to take up self-employment (9 per cent). Return migrants in Myanmar were most likely to leave work for an employer (6 per cent) and were more likely to be unemployed (4 per cent).

While the differences between countries are complex, it appears that the changes in the work situation from before to after migration were the most positive for Vietnamese migrants and the least so for Lao migrant workers – at least in terms of obtaining paid employment. Lack of coherence between employment and labour migration policies may be one factor behind this result, creating inefficiencies within the Lao labour market. The Lao Government has yet to develop a clear national policy on labour migration, though it remains a critical livelihood strategy for hundreds of thousands of Lao nationals.

Table 17. Change in work situation from before migration to after by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

	TOTAL n=1,808		KHM N=457		LAO N=450		MMR N=451		VNM N=450	
Work situation	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)
Work for an employer	**24**	-4	**19**	-11	**10**	-2	**16**	-6	**52**	+3
Self-employed	**39**	+5	**62**	+5	**31**	+3	**38**	+3	**26**	+9
Business owner	**2**	+1	**2**	-	**2**	+1	**1**	+1	**2**	+2
Unemployed	**9**	+2	**5**	-	**18**	+8	**12**	+4	**1**	-3
Unpaid work for family	**24**	-3	**11**	+5	**38**	-7	**27**	+1	**20**	-10
Other	**2**	-2	**1**	+1	**-**	-5	**6**	-4	**-**	-1

Note: CUR=Current, CHG=Change.

Box 24
Case study: Stigma faced by women migrant workers upon return

Ms Aluna recently returned to the Lao People's Democratic Republic after having worked in Thailand for two years. Migrating together with some friends, Aluna quickly found a job at a beauty salon. Aluna was happy with her job, where she earned US$220 per month and also had free accommodation and food.

After working there for a year, Aluna was forced to find a new employer as the owner of the beauty salon decided to close the business. It was however not long before she found a new job, this time at a massage parlour where her employer trained her in Thai massage. Aluna was able to earn more money working at the massage parlour, enabling her to send monthly remittances to her family. The increase in income also allowed Aluna to save enough money and return to Lao People's Democratic Republic after one year.

Upon her return, Aluna was treated badly by the members of her village as a rumour had started about her working as a sex worker in Thailand. The rumours had a negative impact on Aluna, who became depressed and had conflicts with her family.

"At first I felt very depressed and embarrassed. All my neighbours said bad things about me behind my back. They looked down on me and my family. Even the grocery shop owner didn't want to sell things to me. It was very difficult for me in that time. My family and I almost decided to move to another village, but we still had land here," Aluna said.

The rumours also limited her ability to find employment in her village as the local beauty salon refused to employ her. The owner claimed that the other employees and clients might feel uneasy about her presence in the salon. In the end, Aluna was unable to find a job in her village and decided to become a street food vendor in a nearby village. As the income she earned from this job was meagre, she realized would be unable to pay for her son's education and would need to migrate to Thailand again.

Aluna's experience reveals the difficulties that some women migrants face upon returning home. The social stigma associated with migrating can have significant consequences for women, even to the point of hindering their ability to find work. This case also highlights the need for programs that address the negative attitudes that exist towards migrant workers – not only in destination countries but also in countries of origin.

9.5 Sector of work

As table 18 shows, about half of all migrant workers were employed in agriculture upon return (51 per cent), which represents a substantial decrease (11 per cent) from their employment prior to migration. This suggests that some return migrant workers were able to break into new and potentially more profitable employment, with the largest gain in factory work (4 per cent).

However, no other sector of work experienced anywhere near as significant a shift, which shows that the work migrants do abroad seldom translates directly back to employment in their country of origin. Two thirds of migrant workers were employed in manufacturing, construction, and hospitality and food services in destination countries (66 per cent), while only about one in five were upon return (22 per cent). The results indicate that countries of origin should be more concerned about the wasted skills of return migrants, as their newly acquired expertise appears to be under-utilized.

Viet Nam may serve as an example of how to better leverage migrants' skills upon return. More than one quarter of Vietnamese migrants worked in manufacturing while overseas (27 per cent) and an almost equal number returned to the same type of jobs in Viet Nam (23 per cent). It appears that many of these workers transitioned out of agricultural work and found higher-skilled work in the industrial sector, which closely adheres to the long-term development goals of many countries of origin within the region.

Table 18. Change in sector of work from before migration to after by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

	TOTAL n=1,808		KHM n=457		LAO n=450		MMR n=451		VNM n=450	
Sector of work	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)	CUR (%)	CHG (%)
Domestic	**3**	-	**-**	-	**1**	-	**10**	+3	**1**	-2
Fisheries	**2**	-	**-**	-2	**2**	-	**2**	+2	**5**	+2
Agriculture	**51**	-11	**67**	+2	**59**	-9	**38**	-13	**40**	-27
Manufacturing	**11**	+4	**2**	-7	**2**	-1	**4**	-	**34**	+23
Construction	**7**	+1	**9**	+1	**6**	-	**4**	+1	**11**	+3
Hospitality	**4**	+1	**-**	-1	**6**	+4	**-**	-	**1**	+1
Other	**13**	+2	**16**	+5	**5**	-2	**28**	+1	**3**	+2
Unemployed	**9**	+2	**5**	-	**18**	+8	**12**	+4	**1**	-3

Note: CUR=Currently, CHG=Change.

9.6 Income

Migration was found to have a positive impact on the income of migrant workers in their origin communities. Figure 49 shows the change in income from before to after migrating for work. The average income across all four countries before migration was US$62 per month and increased to US$100 upon return, representing an increase of US$38 per month. This would represent 16 per cent average annual wage growth, which is substantially higher than the approximately 4.7 per cent experienced by ASEAN workers as a whole during this period (based on modelled estimates from ILOSTAT for 2010-2015).

Those migrating to Malaysia received larger wage gains (US$65) than those who migrated to Thailand (US$31), which is partially due to a proportionally larger share of Vietnamese workers employed in Malaysia and the longer period of time migrants worked there. Those migrating for work in fisheries (US$54) and manufacturing (US$49) were also better off upon return, especially in comparison with migrants who worked in agriculture (US$13). Though agricultural

work is the largest employment sector in all four countries of origin studied, suggesting there is likely no shortage of job opportunities for returning agricultural workers, the rural areas where such jobs are located are also where poverty is often the most severe in South-East Asia (ILO, 2014b).

Figure 49. Change in monthly income before migration and after return by regional segments (n=1,808) (US$)

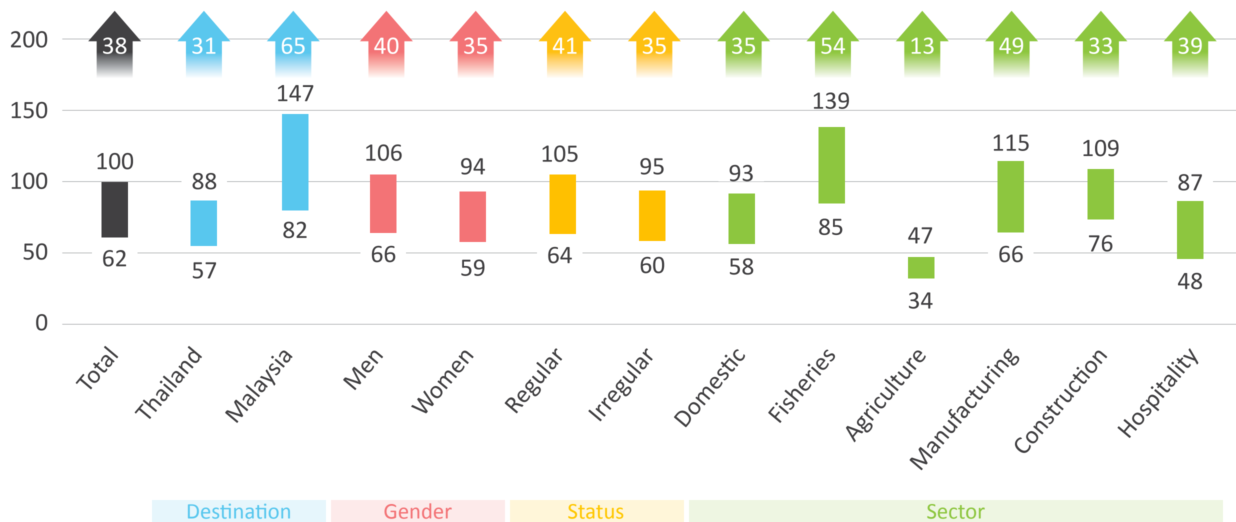
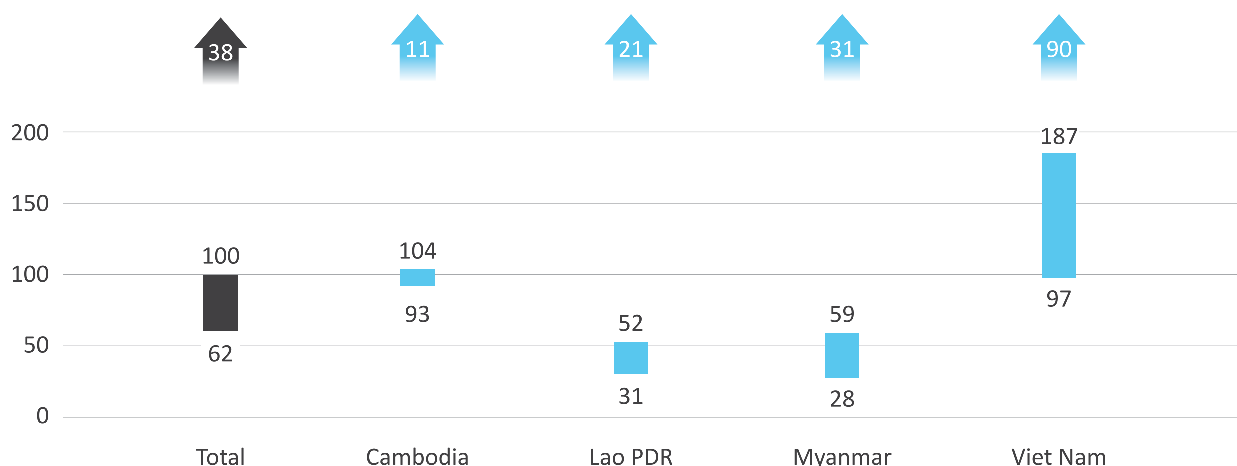


Figure 50 shows the change in migrants' earnings by country of origin. Cambodian migrant workers received the smallest increases in income, which increased from US$92 to US$104. Myanmar migrant workers had the largest relative gain, more than doubling their pre-migration monthly wages – from US$28 to US$59. The biggest jump in absolute earnings was for migrant workers from Viet Nam, who experienced a US$90 increase in their monthly income.

Breaking the data down further, there were some significant differences in wage growth for certain sectors that each nationality of migrants had worked in while abroad. Among Cambodian migrants, employment in hospitality and food services increased average income by US$42. For Lao migrants, returning from work in construction was the most lucrative, increasing income by US$70. Both manufacturing and fisheries work increased income by US$42 for Myanmar migrants, while returning from manufacturing work had the largest increase for Vietnamese workers at US$104. It is likely that these sectoral outliers were partially the result of greater demand for skills and experience that are in shorter supply within countries of origin.

Figure 50. Change in monthly income before migration and after return by country of origin (n=1,808) (US$)

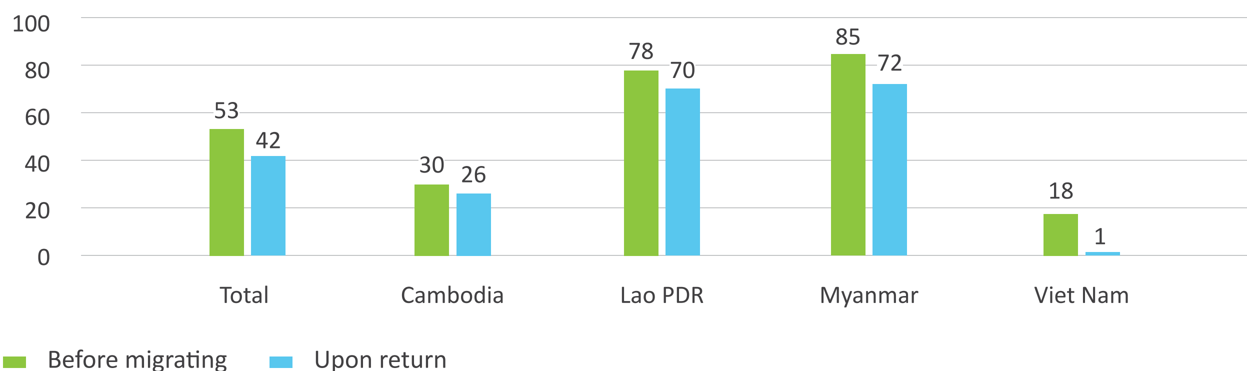


9.6.1 Poverty reduction

The international poverty line has recently been raised to US$1.90 per day by the World Bank, which is the equivalent of US$57 per month. Poverty reduction has been incorporated into the SDGs as goal 1.1,[2] including a key performance indicator that has been adapted for measurement in figure 51. Overall, more than half of migrant workers were living in poverty before going abroad (53 per cent). After returning from migration, poverty was reduced in all four countries of origin, with 11 per cent of migrants rising out of financial destitution.

Though the comparisons do not take into consideration differences in the cost of living between countries, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (70 per cent) and Myanmar (72 per cent) had the largest number of migrants who remained below the poverty line after returning home. Migrant workers from Viet Nam fared considerably better, with nearly all migrant workers escaping poverty after return (17 per cent). These findings suggest that migration can be an effective strategy in decreasing poverty, though the results must be interpreted within the broader socio-economic context. All four countries of origin in the study experienced rapid GDP growth during the last five years of between 5 to 8 per cent annually, which was likely a significant contributing factor to the alleviation of poverty among migrants in addition to their employment abroad.

Figure 51. Proportion of migrant workers below the international poverty line before and after migration by country of origin (SDG 1.2.1) (n=1,808) (%)



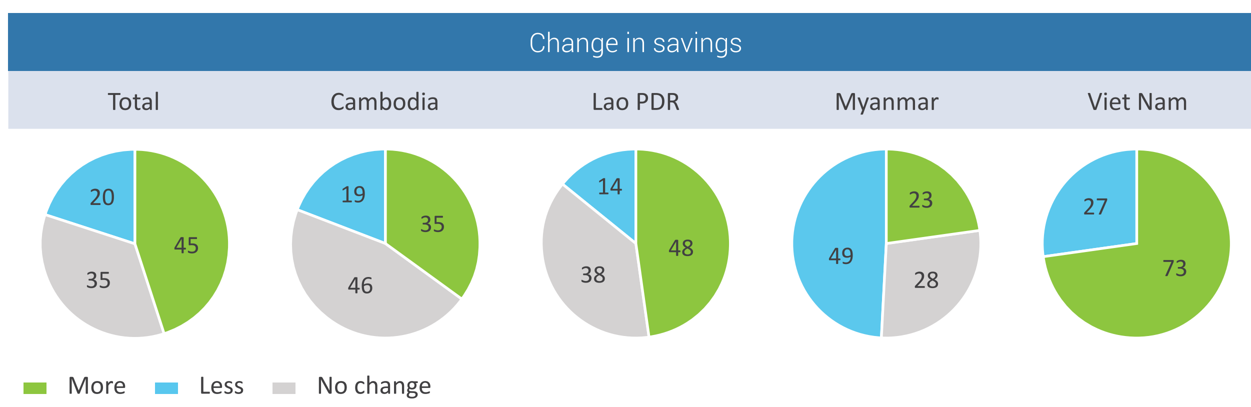
9.7 Savings

Figure 52 examines the change in migrants' savings amounts in their home countries from before migration to after. Nearly half of migrants said they had more savings upon returning from abroad (45 per cent). Migrant workers in Viet Nam were the most likely to increase their savings, where almost three quarters (73 per cent) said they had more savings upon return. Myanmar migrants were the least likely to have more savings after returning from abroad (23 per cent) and almost half stated that they actually had less money saved (49 per cent). Wages were clearly an important factor determining whether migrants could put away more money in their savings accounts – with migrants from Viet Nam earnings twice as much in monthly wages as Myanmar migrants. However, greater financial inclusion may also be part of the explanation, as Vietnamese migrants were much more frequently banked in both countries of origin and destination than Myanmar migrants.

Overall, migrants reported an average balance of US$706 after returning home. There was notable inequality in the average amounts saved by gender, as men reported savings balances that were 55 per cent greater than women's. The gender pay gap identified in the survey results likely contributed to this disparity but the extent cannot be determined as the differences may have existed prior to migration.

[2] By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day (recently increased to $1.90 per day).

Figure 52. Change in savings from before to after migration by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



9.8 Tangible assets

Asset ownership is another indicator of the extent to which migrant workers benefit from migration. Table 19 shows the proportion of migrant workers who owned different types of assets in each country after return and the percentage change from before migration.

The preference for what to buy with the money earned was fairly consistent across countries. Overall, the increase in ownership of mobile phones (32 per cent), motorbikes (27 per cent), refrigerators (23 Per cent), and televisions (22 per cent) was the largest. White goods, including refrigerators and washing machines, saw particularly sharp increases in Viet Nam.

The results suggest that migrants can usually afford a greater amount of consumer goods upon return, though not always longer-term assets. Only 3 per cent of migrants were able to purchase land and 2 per cent to start a business. In Cambodia, where less than half of migrants owned their home before migrating (43 per cent), just 12 per cent were able to buy a house upon return. The implication is that labour migration usually improves the quality of life for migrant workers and their family members temporarily but does not always lead to more durable changes.

Table 19. Change in asset ownership from before to after migration by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)

	TOTAL n=1,808		KHM n=457		LAO N=450		MMR N=451		VNM N=450	
Assets	CUR (%)	INC (%)	CUR (%)	INC (%)	CUR (%)	INC (%)	CUR (%)	INC (%)	CUR (%)	INC (%)
House	85	+4	55	+12	100	-	87	+3	100	+3
Business	4	+2	4	+2	1	-1	8	+3	2	+2
Land	60	+3	62	+9	85	+4	37	-	56	-
Livestock	23	+4	1	+1	63	+10	27	+5	2	+2
Motorbike	73	+27	45	+20	90	+29	69	+34	87	+25
Car or truck	3	+2	1	+1	5	+3	3	+2	4	+4
Cooking stove	57	+3	43	+9	100	-	29	+5	58	-2
Refrigerator	46	+23	1	+1	87	+29	15	+11	81	+52
Television	73	+22	49	+16	94	+25	59	+29	92	+18
Air conditioner	9	+7	-	-	2	-	-	-	33	+28
Washing machine	15	+12	-	-	16	+11	2	+2	41	+35
Mobile phone	85	+32	85	+15	86	+26	76	+56	91	+29
Gold or jewellery	38	+16	40	+12	32	+21	60	+13	21	+21

Note: CUR=Current, INC=Increase

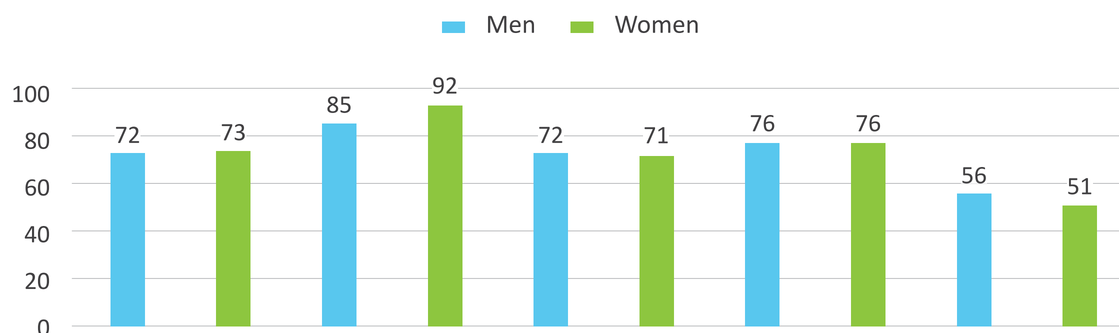
9.9 Social empowerment

To better understand whether employment abroad is socially empowering, migrants were asked if they felt that they had more control over household decision-making as a proxy indicator (figure 53). In particular, whether migration is a meaningful factor in increasing women's decision-making authority was assessed by comparing the changes they experienced with those of men.

Overall, there was no significant difference between women and men migrants as both expressed greater agency upon return. Nearly three quarters of women (73 per cent) and men (72 per cent) migrant workers stated that they had more control upon some types of decision-making. Greater input on management of household finances (57 per cent) and decisions about purchases (51 per cent) were the most commonly reported changes.

Migration was most empowering for women in Cambodia (92 per cent) and least so for Vietnamese women (51 per cent). The biggest differences between the two countries was with regards to financial management, migration and purchasing decisions, where Cambodian women reported much more substantial improvements than experienced in Viet Nam. This result is supported by the findings of a nationally representative survey in Viet Nam, which determined that rigid perceptions of men's and women's roles are an underlying cause of gender inequality. In particular, Vietnamese women often deeply internalize this value and are willing to compromise their individual well-being and advancement to maintain it. Regardless of gender, the majority of those surveyed agreed that men should have the final say in more important matters relating to land, housing and purchasing of assets, while women should be in charge of caregiving and household tasks (ISDS, 2015).

Figure 53. More control over household decisions for women and men by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



	TOTAL		KHM		LAO		MMR		VNM	
Household decision	M n=926 (%)	W n=882 (%)	M n=232 (%)	W n=225 (%)	M n=225 (%)	W n=225 (%)	M n=243 (%)	W n=208 (%)	M n=226 (%)	W n=224 (%)
Finances	57	61	75	85	51	57	53	64	48	40
Purchases	51	57	64	78	44	52	53	60	43	37
Employment	31	25	26	24	24	12	35	36	39	30
Migration	18	20	48	49	15	8	4	15	6	6
Education	27	28	22	23	38	36	18	28	30	25
Health care	37	44	54	69	42	35	21	34	34	38
Leisure	23	25	28	23	25	19	17	39	21	21
Politics	4	2	1	2	12	5	3	1	-	-
None	28	27	15	8	28	29	24	24	44	49

Note: M=Men, W=Women

Box 25
Migrant worker perspectives: Social empowerment

Some migrant workers felt they had more control over their lives as a result of migrating, particularly for women. They reported that they had more self-confidence, were treated with more respect, and were able to influence important decisions. Others said that they had managed to become more independent after returning home.

"I have the right to voice my opinion more with my family, including on spending decisions. My family listens to me now when I have something to say."

-Female migrant worker from the Lao PDR.

"I was able to move out from my parents' home and buy my own house."

-Male migrant worker from Myanmar.

9.10 Social, psychological, and health problems

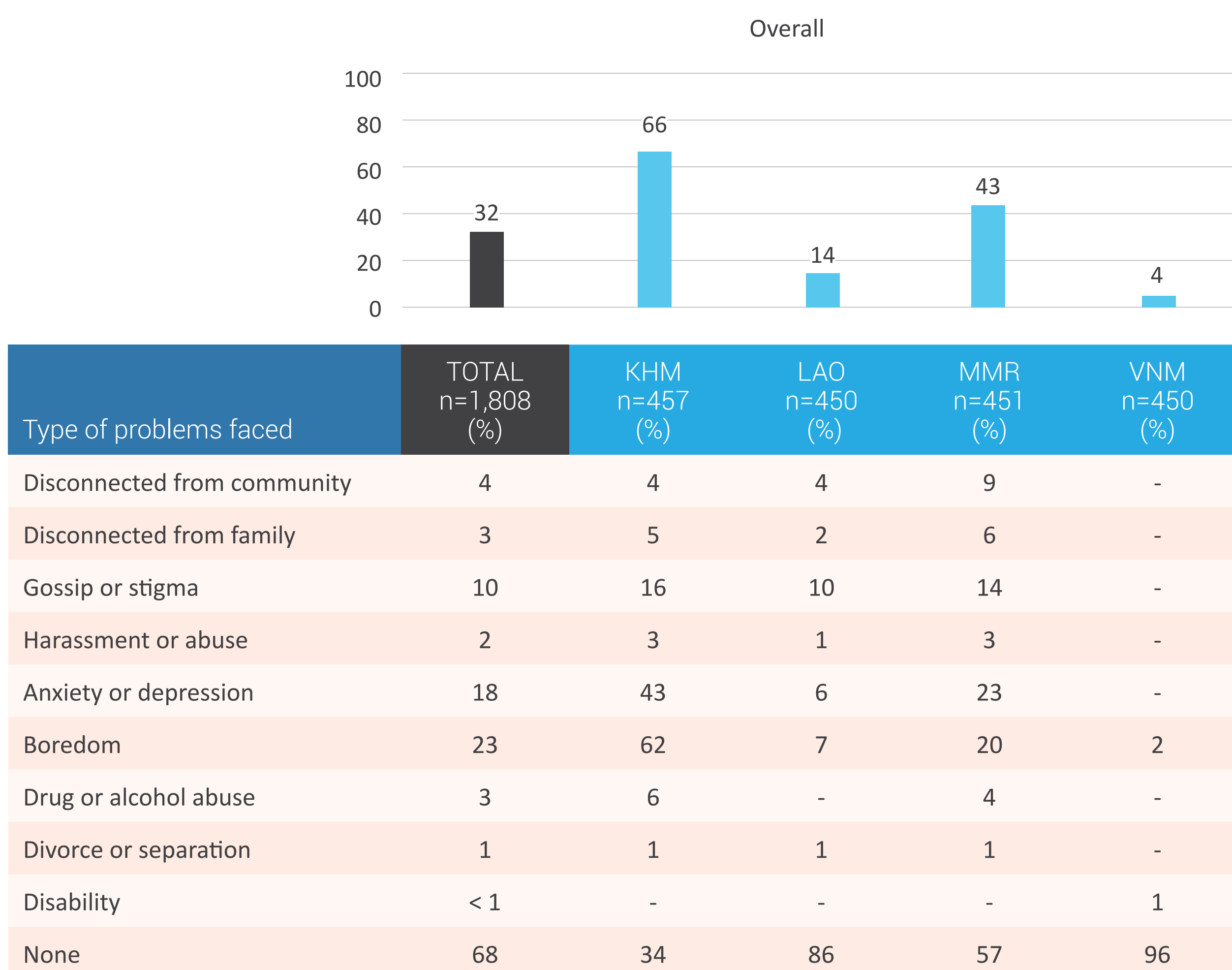
About one third of all migrant workers surveyed (32 per cent) experienced psychological, social, or health problems upon return, as shown in figure 54. Severe boredom (23 per cent) and anxiety and depression (18 per cent) were the most prevalent problems among the migrant workers surveyed, two closely related psychological issues which may stem from difficulties in readjusting to a very different daily routine back home.

Prominently more migrant workers from Cambodia (66 per cent) and Myanmar (43 per cent) experienced these kinds of problems compared to those from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (14 per cent) and Viet Nam (4 per cent). There were also substantial differences based upon sector of work and destination country, as migrants returning from construction work (43 per cent) and those employed in Thailand (35 per cent) were more likely to have problems upon return.

One in ten migrant workers (10 per cent) said that they faced stigma or gossip upon return. Women continue to face negative perceptions in many communities of origin, as well as restrictive government policies that further legitimize such paternalistic attitudes. A recent study by the ILO found that women migrating for domestic work may face negative public attitudes back home due to their government's signalling through bans that domestic work is neither respectable nor safe (2017a). Though these restrictions are intended to address the risk of exploitation faced by women migrant workers, they are often implemented in clear violation of the articles of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

In spite of an increasing number of women migrant workers within South-East Asia and their integral contribution to the livelihoods of the families, their primary role is still often viewed as homemakers and caregivers in many areas (Hugo, 2002). When women challenge these norms through labour migration, particularly into types of work deemed to be of lower status, they may face strong social sanction upon returning home.

Figure 54. Social, psychological, or health problems faced upon return by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Type of problems faced	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Disconnected from community	4	4	4	9	-
Disconnected from family	3	5	2	6	-
Gossip or stigma	10	16	10	14	-
Harassment or abuse	2	3	1	3	-
Anxiety or depression	18	43	6	23	-
Boredom	23	62	7	20	2
Drug or alcohol abuse	3	6	-	4	-
Divorce or separation	1	1	1	1	-
Disability	< 1	-	-	-	1
None	68	34	86	57	96

Box 26

Stakeholder perspectives: Negative perception of women migrant workers

Stakeholders confirmed that women migrant workers face more negative perceptions than men in all four of the countries of origin. In Lao People's Democratic Republic, it was explained that women migrant workers are often stigmatized as "bad women". Some people look down on them or spread gossip, such as suggesting that they worked in the sex industry, brought shame on their families, or poorly represented Lao culture. Stakeholders from Cambodia added that discrimination was a problem, particularly for women with HIV/AIDS, those who were abused, or have been separated from their husbands.

"Some women, especially those in rural area, face a lot of criticism when they return to the village. They are seen as a failure as a woman because of leaving their children and family to go work abroad. Women who worked in restaurants or massage parlors are often assumed to be prostitutes."

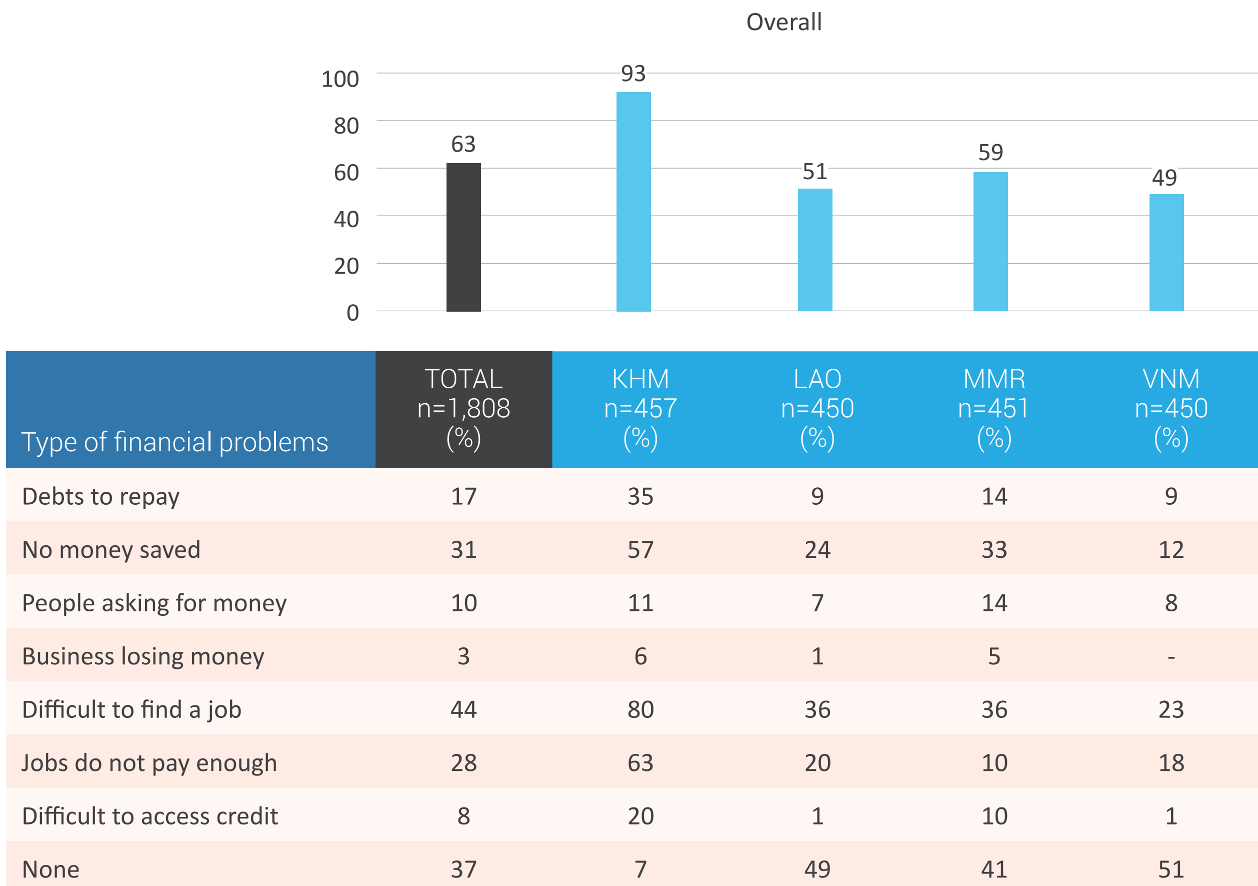
-Stakeholder from the Lao People's Democratic Republic

9.11 Financial problems

As revealed in figure 55, financial problems were experienced by a majority of return migrants (63 per cent). The most important challenge was finding a job upon return, which nearly half of migrant workers struggled with (44 per cent) and was the biggest issue in all four countries of origin. Not having any money saved (31 per cent) and the low wages for the jobs available (28 per cent) were also substantial problems faced.

Several countries of origin within the ASEAN region have not been able to generate sufficient job opportunities to employ their populations, especially for young people lacking job-related skills. Upon return, young migrants in particular often find themselves within the same position in the labour market due to skills gaps, mismatches and lack of recognition systems, leading to high-levels of unemployment and underemployment (ILO, 2014b; ILO, 2015a).

Figure 55. Financial challenges faced upon return by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Type of financial problems	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Debts to repay	17	35	9	14	9
No money saved	31	57	24	33	12
People asking for money	10	11	7	14	8
Business losing money	3	6	1	5	-
Difficult to find a job	44	80	36	36	23
Jobs do not pay enough	28	63	20	10	18
Difficult to access credit	8	20	1	10	1
None	37	7	49	41	51

Box 27

Migrant worker and stakeholder perspectives: Problems facing return migrant workers

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and migrant workers showed that unemployment, low wages, and lack of savings were common problems that many migrant workers face when returning home. In Myanmar, unstable income were also said to be a common challenge among migrant workers because many could not find a permanent job.

"It was very hard for me to find a job with a reasonable salary and I can't afford a decent standard of living."

-Female migrant worker from Viet Nam

"I don't have any savings left because I had to send it most of it back home while I was abroad and I spent of what I had left while searching for a job here. I'm still unemployed now."

-Male migrant worker from Myanmar

9.12 Reintegration services

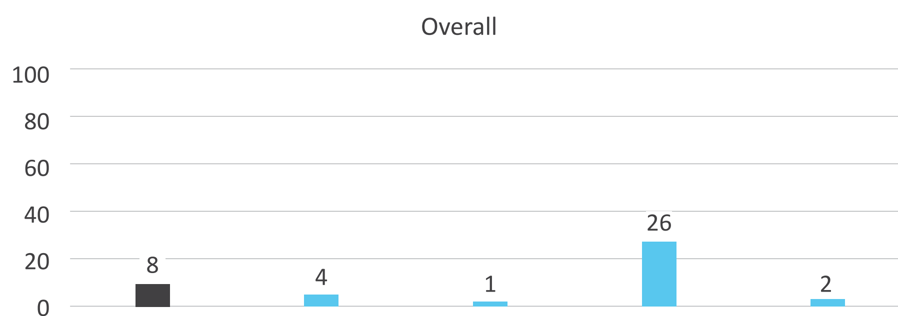
Utilization of services to assist migrant workers with a smooth transition back into life in their communities of origin was analysed during the study, as displayed in figure 56. These services appear to be all but non-existent in all of the countries surveyed, with only 8 per cent of migrants making use of them (usually in the form of family or employment services). The only exception was in Myanmar, where about one quarter of migrant workers (26 per cent) said they had accessed reintegration assistance, particularly for family services.[3]

A recent research report pointed out that most governments within the region have given lower priority to the return and reintegration of migrant workers, except for individuals who are formally identified as trafficking victims. It further recommends that the chances of a successful return and reintegration can be enhanced by increasing the availability and provision of employment and enterprise development services, counselling, and advice (ADBI, OECD, and ILO, 2016).

Within ASEAN, the Philippines is recognized as a leader in providing reintegration services to return migrant workers. The National Reintegration Center for Overseas Filipino Workers is a one-stop centre that consolidates all the Department of Labor and Employment's reintegration services for easy access. It provides a wide-range of assistance, including skills training, business development training, employment services, legal assistance, livelihood starter kits, and others (ILO, 2017c).

[3] Dedicated family services for migrants are not widespread within Myanmar, suggesting that the survey question may have been misinterpreted in some of the field research sites.

Figure 56. Accessed services to assist with reintegration by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Type of services accessed	TOTAL n=1,808 (%)	KHM n=457 (%)	LAO n=450 (%)	MMR n=451 (%)	VNM n=450 (%)
Employment services	3	4	-	6	1
Technical and vocational training	1	-	-	4	1
General educational services	-	-	-	-	-
Enterprise development training	-	-	-	-	-
Financial literacy training	-	-	-	-	-
Financial services	-	-	-	-	-
Family services	5	-	1	20	-
Medical services	1	-	-	5	-
None	92	96	99	74	98

Box 28

Stakeholder and migrant worker perspectives: Reintegration services

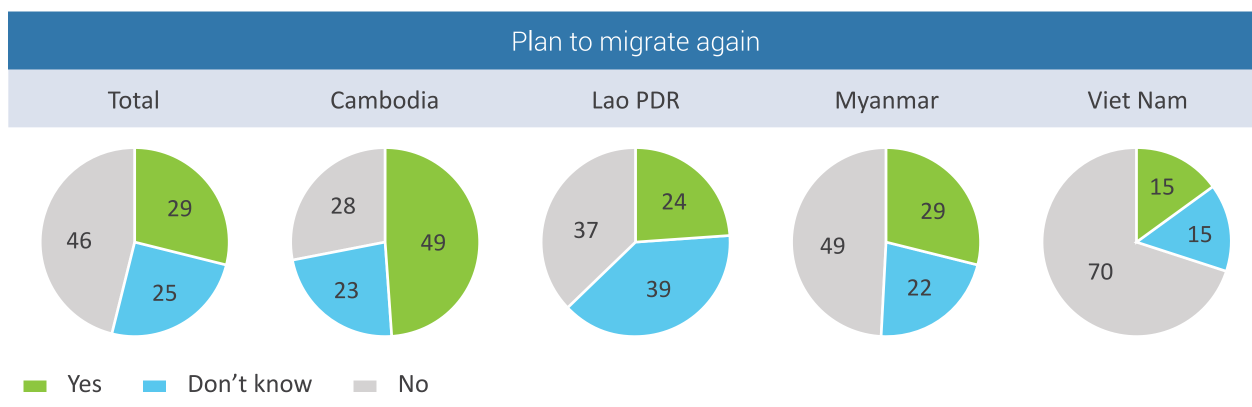
Stakeholders suggested a number of services to help migrant workers reintegrate after return, such as employment services, vocational training, enterprise development training, financial literacy training and credit services. Information from migrant worker interviews confirmed that many were interested in improving their job skills and starting businesses upon return. For those who wanted to set up their own businesses, a lack of capital and information about how to set up a business were said to be the main barriers.

9.13 Future plans to migrate

As shown in figure 57, three quarters of return migrant workers had already decided on whether they would migrate again within the next two years. Overall, more said they would not return to working abroad (46 per cent) than said they would (29 per cent). However, there were substantial differences between countries of origin, as nearly half of Cambodian migrants had decided to migrate again (49 per cent), whereas the majority of Vietnamese had not (70 per cent).

The reasons behind these responses are undoubtedly complex and highly personal for migrant workers. However, they suggest that circular migration is not viewed as desirable by many migrants within the region. The goal of their migration is most often related to improving the livelihoods of themselves and their families rather than living abroad indefinitely. IOM studies of Lao and Myanmar migrants in Thailand reached broadly similar conclusions, indicating that a large portion of migrant workers would return home if they were able to find work and earn a decent wage (IOM, 2013; IOM, 2016).

Figure 57. Plan to migrate again by country of origin (n=1,808) (%)



Box 29
Stakeholder perspectives: Circular migration

Stakeholders estimated that more than half of all return migrant workers would end up migrating for work again. Limited job opportunities in the home country and higher wages in destination countries were the main drivers for circular migration. Conversely, family obligations, finding a stable job, or having had a bad migration experience were reasons not to return abroad.

"People still face problems, even when migrating the official way."

Male migrant worker from Myanmar

10. Conclusion

10.1 Validating what we know about labour migration in the ASEAN region

The results of this study are useful in providing empirical data to confirm what were previously anecdotal understandings about labour migration within the ASEAN region. In many cases, these issues had not previously been assessed through a large-scale regional survey, and the data obtained contributes significantly to solidifying the evidence base.

Reliable information about how to migrate safely is generally unavailable to migrant workers, with only one in six (17 per cent) receiving information to support informed decision-making before going abroad. Likewise, just 14 per cent of migrant workers surveyed attended pre-departure orientation to prepare them for migration and employment in destination countries. In most cases, migrants are highly dependent on friends and family or brokers for advice about migration, as they are more trusted even if not official sources of information.

The majority of migrant workers across the four countries of origin used irregular channels (74 per cent), which were quicker (by an average of 71 days) and cheaper (by an average of US$616) than regular channels, but more frequently led to problems. Although this finding suggests that migrants have the opportunity to weigh the costs and benefits of all of the options and decide to take greater risks in exchange for ease and affordability, the reality is more complex. With limited access to information, training, and regular migration channels as well as scarce resources – all of which are even more restricted for women – migrant workers must make use of the migration channels available to them. For many, it becomes a matter of "choosing" the least worst option.

The average cost of migrating for work within the region is generally not excessive (US$430/1.6 months of wages) but there is major disparity in the expense among different migration corridors. Vietnamese migrants heading to Malaysia for employment paid US$1,166/4 months of wages, and Myanmar migrants paid US$1,034/3.6 months of wages. In comparison, Lao migrants journeying to Thailand paid just US$171/0.6 months of wages, and Cambodian migrants only paid US$211/0.8 months. High migration costs require many migrants to take out loans, and the long period needed to pay off this debt can force migrants to remain in exploitative employment situations and detract from their returns on migration.

Few migrant workers were matched with jobs for which they said they had relevant skills (12 per cent). Greater job matching was found in agricultural work (36 per cent), domestic work (21 per cent), and hospitality and food services (10 per cent), all of which employ more women than men. The implication of this finding is that greater mobility of women would be beneficial in filling labour shortages with qualified workers and that some significant opportunities are being missed due to protectionist attitudes. For example, 42 per cent of Lao migrants had relevant skills for domestic work, but the legality of migrating into the sector remains ambiguous.

Conditions in destination workplaces are highly demanding and the wages provided are not commensurate. The average migrant works long hours (10 hours/day), nearly every day (6.4 days/week) for pay that is below the minimum wage in Thailand (US$264) and Malaysia (US$286) if overtime is considered. It can be conservatively estimated that migrant workers are underpaid by an average of US$68 in Thailand and US$60 in Malaysia every month, which suggests that wage theft is a very common practice.

Enrolment in any type of social protection scheme was low among migrant workers (28 per cent overall), and even lower for women (25 per cent). Many of the eligibility requirements for social protection benefits either explicitly exclude or create significant obstacles for migrants to claim their rights, such as documentation requirements, minimum qualifying periods, and sectoral exclusions. When compounded by problems with poor compliance among employers, a large proportion of migrants are left without access to social protection. The gap is more significant among women migrants, as much of the work they do within the region are considered informal sector jobs, which are commonly disqualified from coverage (e.g. agricultural and domestic work).

During their employment, most migrant workers experienced some form of labour rights violation (59 per cent) and had very limited access to legal remedies. In Thailand, these were most commonly wage related abuses, including the withholding of payment and receiving wages below the legal minimum; while in Malaysia, coercive employment practices such as retention of legal documents and excessive overtime were more prevalent. Only around a fifth of migrant workers sought assistance for such abuses (21 per cent). In most cases, those seeking help reached out to friends or family rather than formal assistance, and only 7 per cent were able to resolve their grievances satisfactorily. The vulnerability of migrant workers to abuse is intensified by the lack of fair, efficient, and accessible means to resolve complaints, reinforcing their status as a group of workers to which a different set of rules apply.

Opportunities for mobility within destination country labour markets are very limited for migrant workers, with only about one in five migrants (21 per cent) changing their sector of work while abroad. The proportion was slightly higher for men (24 per cent) compared to women (18 per cent), and also varied by destination country, where it was higher for Thailand (24 per cent) than Malaysia (10 per cent). Because work permits are strictly tied to a specific employer in both destination countries, they allow little flexibility to migrant workers in seeking other jobs, and irregular migrants cannot freely conduct job searches.

Nearly all migrants remitted funds back to their countries of origin (93 per cent), with the average remittance amount being US$177 per month. The amount of money sent home was greater for men (US$187) than for women (US$166), but this was due to the gender-based wage gap, as both men and women remitted roughly two thirds of their income. The average cost of sending remittances was 3 per cent of the total amount but varied substantially depending on the availability and usage of formal and informal remittance channels. Migrants sending remittances formally through banks paid 6.5 per cent in fees, while those using the informal hundi or broker systems paid just 2 per cent.

Upon return to their countries of origin, a substantial portion of the migrants struggled to find employment (44 per cent), and few were able to access services to assist them with re-joining their communities (8 per cent). Although many brought back new skills from their time abroad (68 per cent), only a small share were able to apply them upon returning home (16 per cent). The challenges faced and lack of support available for return migrants to successfully reintegrate can limit their ability to contribute to the long-term social and economic development of their home countries.

10.2 Learning suggested by the research

The study also suggests new learning on labour migration experiences within ASEAN that had not previously been investigated by other research studies. Because of the difficulty in conducting inclusive research on labour migration, particularly for government agencies who are often unable to interview irregular migrants, several new insights emerged from the study.

A major wage gap exists (14 per cent) between women migrants and men migrants. The gap was largest in domestic work (73 per cent), construction (24 per cent), and agriculture (18 per cent) but was negligible for employment in manufacturing and hospitality and food services. Employment in different types of domestic work is highly segregated by gender in South-East Asia, with those jobs viewed as women's work usually receiving lower remuneration. Variances were also apparent along national lines, with women from Myanmar earning 36 per cent less than Myanmar men, and women from Cambodia earning 21 per cent less than Cambodian men. The differences were much smaller for Lao and Vietnamese women, who earned 9 per cent less than men from those countries, suggesting intersectionality in discriminatory wage setting practices.

Migration can have a significant impact on poverty reduction within the region, reducing those living below the poverty line by double digits (11 per cent) from before to after migration. The results were particularly striking in Viet Nam and Myanmar, where poverty was reduced by 17 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. While it should be noted that both countries have also experienced rapid economic growth during the time period researched, the results suggest that labour migration has significant potential to contribute to poverty alleviation in countries of origin.

The majority of migrants were employed in agriculture before migration (52 per cent) and working abroad proved more effective in facilitating industrialization of the work force in some countries than in others. Viet Nam was by far the most successful in this regard, with a total of 27 per cent of migrants shifting out of agriculture into manufacturing and other sectors upon return. Lao (9 per cent) and Myanmar migrant workers (13 per cent) also transitioned away from agricultural work but suffered higher rates of unemployment after returning home. The share of Cambodian migrants employed in agriculture actually increased by 2 per cent after returning home.

Financial inclusion of migrants is very low, with a small minority of migrant workers opening bank accounts in their countries of origin (11 per cent) or destination (22 per cent). Viet Nam was the lone exception in this regard, with 28 per cent of the Vietnamese migrants having a bank account at home and 42 per cent while abroad, which is largely due to a more formalized remittance market. The barriers that migrants face in using formal banking services continue to pose an obstacle to greater inclusion, as the documentation required often excludes irregular migrants, isolated workplaces and restricted movement make access challenging, and migrants have reported feeling unwelcome as customers in many destination country banks.

On-the-job training in destination countries is currently a more strategic modality for delivering skills trainings to migrants than during pre-departure, reaching over five times as many workers as training delivered before migration (50 per cent vs 9 per cent). Given the substantial time and money required for skills training prior to departure, and no clear guarantee of obtaining a better job afterwards, the indications are that upskilling is better provided through direct arrangements with employers in destination countries. This approach to skills training supports greater participation by migrant workers and the shift towards an employer-pays recruitment model, as well as skills training that is a close match with employer needs.

Signing a written employment contract before migrating does not reduce the likelihood of contract substitution more than having a verbal agreement (21 per cent vs 15 per cent). Though it can be assumed that this is partly due to the terms of employment likely being more extensive when agreed upon in a formal written contract, the lack of assurance they provide is still alarming. In some countries, such as Myanmar, written agreements offered substantially less of a guarantee of obtaining the working conditions promised than verbal agreements (43 per cent vs 17 per cent). As with several of the other aspects of regular migration examined, written employment contracts currently fail to deliver on their promise of fair working conditions.

Thailand has become a more financially attractive labour market for migrants in recent years, with lower migration costs (US$251 vs US$1,082) and remittance fees (2.2 per cent vs 5.1 per cent), as well as roughly similar wages to Malaysia (US$264 vs US$286). With substantial labour shortages emerging in both countries, competition for the labour provided by migrant workers is likely to increase in the coming years. Increased labour protection, higher wages and reduced fees and expenses may be necessary to continue to attract migrant workers to come to Malaysia.

In developing research methodologies to assess the situation of migrant workers within the ASEAN region, conducting research among return migrant workers in countries of origin proved an effective approach. The choice of location for collecting data allowed the researchers access to migrant workers in hard to reach sectors (including fishers and domestic workers), as well as those who had worked in an irregular legal status. It also permitted migrants to speak more freely about their experiences, without concern for repercussions. The loss in data quality due to the passage of time was very limited, as migrants appear to accurately remember a great deal about their time spent abroad.

10.3 Initial conclusions on migration outcomes

The findings of this study show that although the socio-economic benefits of labour migration have not been maximized within the ASEAN region, positive outcomes can be achieved when migrant workers are provided with opportunities to enhance their job skills, avoid debt, receive the minimum wage, and find gainful employment upon return. To support greater realization of positive results, a shift in approach to migration is required within development policies. The goal needs to be reframed as an increased number of migrant workers who have a holistically beneficial labour migration experience, rather than over-emphasizing the importance of an expanded national remittance account.

The chances of having a positive result are currently unevenly distributed, as the profile of migrant workers was found to be an important determinant of their socio-economic returns on migration. Nationality, sector of work, and destination country were the most significant demographic factors in shaping migration outcomes, though it was clear that gender is also very meaningful, particularly where policy is more restrictive towards the migration of women. Specific to the context of Myanmar, migrants from ethnic minority groups had prominently worse results than those from the Bamar majority, with minorities often having fewer safe and rewarding options available for migration.

A critical question that the research sought to answer was whether regular migration currently leads to more beneficial outcomes for migrant workers, as it is a commonly accepted practice to encourage “safe and regular migration” as a protection strategy against exploitation and abuse. The findings did not demonstrate that regular migration was essential to better outcomes, and the impact appears to be heavily dependent upon how effectively policies are implemented for specific migration corridors. It should be carefully considered whether interventions to support behaviour change of migrant workers are justified until policies are enacted and enforced that make regular migration a more clearly beneficial choice.

Labour rights protection in destination countries was the most consistently important factor in facilitating more positive outcomes for migrant workers, particularly in the form of receiving the minimum wage. This suggests that formalizing the working conditions of migrant workers who are commonly excluded from statutory minimum wage requirements (such as domestic workers, agricultural workers, entertainment workers, and fishers) is a critical step to ensuring they benefit from their migration experiences.

Lack of assurance of labour protections contributes to a situation where migration within ASEAN is often a considerable gamble for migrant workers and their family members. Migrants currently have limited ability to control whether they have a positive or negative migration experience, regardless of the decisions they make. To a great extent, improving the odds of a positive outcome requires changes to policy and practice by duty bearers – governments, employers, and recruitment agencies – rather than to the behaviour of migrant workers.

"The Government should have measures for returning migrant workers because we need jobs."

Female migrant worker from Lao People's Democratic Republic

11. Recommendations

1. **Increase access to credible information for potential migrants to support informed decision-making about going abroad for work:** Migrant workers need to be provided with accurate information in countries of origin to support them in deciding whether to migrate and how to go abroad should they choose to do so. Expanded information on labour rights and where to access support services in countries of destination is also necessary. However, "safe migration" information must avoid oversimplification and provide information that is practically useful for migrant workers. The risks involved in labour migration, regardless of using regular channels, should be clearly communicated.

2. **Develop regular migration channels that are less costly, time consuming and complex:** Although regular migration can reduce the likelihood of facing problems during the migration process, the protection benefits are currently over matched by high costs, slow processes, and confusing requirements. Countries of origin and destination with the ASEAN region must work collaboratively on simplified processes for labour migration that are more efficient and affordable for migrant workers, providing clear incentives for the use of regular channels.

3. **Shift the costs paid for recruitment from workers to employers:** Migrant workers provide a valuable service to their employers that should be paid for by the beneficiaries of that service. The substantial debt that migrant workers take on to pay for recruitment reduces their returns on migration and can even put them at risk for losing their homes and land. In-line with the international standards outlined in the ILO Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181), ILO General Principles & Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, and the IOM-led multi-stakeholder International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS), worker-borne recruitment costs should be eliminated in both countries of origin and destination.

4. **Repeal all gender-based restrictions on labour migration to provide equality of opportunity for women:** In accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Recommendation No. 26, "States parties should repeal sex-specific bans and discriminatory restrictions on women's migration on the basis of age, marital status, pregnancy or maternity status. They should lift restrictions that require women to get permission from their spouse or male guardian to obtain a passport or to travel."

5. **Ensure that women and men migrant workers are fully covered by labour and social protection laws regardless of their employment sector:** Many of the sectors in which migrant workers are employed offer limited protection for labour rights and opportunities to obtain social protection benefits, particularly for women employed in the informal economy. Critically important in guaranteeing that migrant workers receive fair wages, the minimum wage laws passed in Malaysia and Thailand must be extended to all sectors of work, including domestic workers and agricultural workers. In addition, paid maternity leave should be extended to migrant women employed in all sectors and deportation based upon pregnancy prohibited.

6. **Expand access to justice for migrant workers:** The ability of migrant workers to seek redress when faced with abuses during recruitment and employment remains very limited. Improving complaint mechanisms for migrant workers requires holistic interventions, including establishing clear legal and institutional frameworks; providing capacity building training to service providers; working collaboratively between government, trade unions, employers and NGOs; conducting effective outreach to migrants; and providing fair and responsive remedies. This should include joint and several liability clauses in legislation to address offenses such as contract substitution, so that recruitment agencies can be held responsible for working conditions in destination countries that do not adhere to the terms of their employment contracts.

7. **Apply stricter sanctions for labour rights violations committed against migrant workers:** Labour rights abuses by employers and recruitment agencies are commonplace partly because of the culture of impunity that exists in relation to migrant employment within the ASEAN region. Greater accountability through imposition of stringent penalties and publicizing such enforcement would act as strong deterrent against repeat offenses.

8. **Institutionalize tripartite and civil society consultation in the development and implementation of labour migration policies:** To support more responsive labour migration governance frameworks, inclusive social dialogue, including equitable representation of employers, workers and civil society, should be part of the process for formulating and implementing policy. Social partners and NGOs continue to be side-lined from the consultation process in many ASEAN countries, which has led to autocratic legislating by government authorities on labour migration issues.

9. **Improve the evidence base for admissions policies by conducting methodologically sound labour market needs assessments:** To ensure that admissions policies are responsive to the needs of the labour market rather than employer requests only, a stronger empirical basis is needed. Rather than continuing to implement policies which are primarily reactive in nature, there is a need to carry out valid labour market assessments to determine the current and projected need for migrant workers in specific sectors and occupations.

10. **Allow migrant workers greater flexibility to change employment:** Work permits and visas in Thailand and Malaysia are too strictly tied to one employer. The lack of flexibility in changing jobs can lead many workers to become irregular. It also increases their vulnerability to abuse by creating additional obstacles to leaving exploitative employment situations. Migrant workers should be able to exercise greater agency in deciding to change employers to help them avoid this dependency.

11. **Provide skills training that matches with employer requirements and does not create an additional burden on the time and resources of migrant workers:** Most migrant workers are currently recruited based upon the need for low-wage workers rather than their skills match with job openings. Closer matching of migrant workers' skills with employment opportunities could benefit both employers and migrants, contributing to increased productivity and better wages and working conditions. However, it is important that skills training be provided through modalities that do not add to the costs and time required for migrant workers to go abroad, such as on-the-job training programmes and paid apprenticeships. Building partnerships between employers and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions could promote national TVET systems that are more inclusive of women and men migrant workers and responsive to labour market needs.

12. **Develop and implement skills recognition systems that are responsive to the need for low and semi-skilled workers:** Within the context of the AEC, a core challenge to freer labour mobility is that the eight Mutual Recognition Arrangements developed do not address the movement of low and semi-skilled workers. Priority occupations for developing additional skills recognition agreements have been identified through regional and national tripartite consultations, including for the construction, domestic work, tourism and garment sectors. There is a need to support further development and dynamic implementation of these agreements so that more migrant workers in ASEAN can benefit.

13. **Encourage the development of affordable and migrant-friendly remittance and banking services:** Migrant workers continue to face substantial barriers and disincentives to opening bank accounts and using formal remittance services within the region. This has created a substantial shadow economy in several countries and puts migrants at risk of losing their hard-earned savings in the last mile home. Low-cost and convenient remittance and banking services, which are accessible to women and men migrants regardless of legal status, sector of work, or experience with financial services, are needed to enable migrant workers to translate their expanded resources into development.

14. **Conduct campaigns in countries of origin and destination to promote more positive attitudes towards migrant workers:** Given the expanding need for migrant workers to fill labour shortages in destination countries, the increasingly restrictive policies that have been established in Thailand and Malaysia are not responsive to the evidence available. In both cases, negative attitudes towards migrant workers are part of the reason that policies on labour migration tend to treat them as a potential threat rather than as contributors to economic and social development. Likewise, women migrants returning to countries of origin often face stigma and ostracism for challenging patriarchal gender norms by going abroad for work. Campaigns to create a more positive image of migrant workers should be implemented to increase public awareness and understanding of the contribution of migrant workers.

15. **Expand the services provided to migrant workers to assist with return and reintegration:** In most countries of origin within the region, with the notable exception of the Philippines, the assistance available to migrants upon return is limited to supporting trafficked persons. However, many of the same challenges faced in finding employment, starting an enterprise and re-joining their communities are shared by migrant workers. Programmes must be developed that support successful economic and social reintegration for the benefits of migration to be more fully realized.

16. **Incentivize the development of private sector initiatives that offer employment to migrant workers through "twinning":** Even though many migrant workers acquire language and vocational skills while abroad, they are frequently unable to apply these skills upon return. Some destination country firms that hire migrant workers, including many manufacturers in Japan and the Republic of Korea, have begun establishing operations in countries of origin so that they can continue to benefit from the skills and language abilities of their employees after return to their countries of origin. Both incentives and sufficient regulations for such arrangements should be established to expand the availability of well-paid job opportunities for return migrants.

17. **Enhance the portability of social protection benefits for migrant workers:** Developing and implementing bilateral social security agreements between countries of origin and destination would enable migrant workers to maintain their entitlements to benefits and ensure they are transferrable across borders. In addition, as both Thailand and Malaysia have ratified the Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention, 1925 (No. 19), they have committed to providing the same treatment to migrant workers who suffer personal injury due to workplace accidents as received by nationals. Immediate steps are needed to ensure that equal compensation for workplace accidents is awarded and transferred to migrant workers after return to their countries of origin.

18. **Increase assessment of the impact of labour migration policies:** The Migration Outcomes Index (MOI) developed for this study proved to be a useful tool for determining the social and financial changes facilitated by migrating for work. To support the development of more evidence-based labour migration governance in the ASEAN region, the MOI and other methodologies could be applied to assess the impact of migration policies and practices. The metrics used to measure these results should take a migrant-centred and holistic approach rather than instrumentalizing migrant workers as remittance-senders.

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Appendix I. Survey questionnaire

Baseline Survey

Final Version

<table>
<tr><td>Questionnaire Number</td><td colspan="5"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Name of Respondent</td><td colspan="2"></td><td>Mobile</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Village</td><td colspan="2"></td><td>Sangkat/ Commune</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Khan/District</td><td colspan="2"></td><td>City/Province</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Date of Interview</td><td>__ / __ / 2016</td><td>Time begin</td><td></td><td>Time ended</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Name of Interviewer</td><td colspan="3"></td><td>Interviewer ID</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">ESOMAR DECLARATION</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">I declare that the respondent, whose name and address appear above, was unknown to me until the interview. I confirm that, before returning this questionnaire, I have checked that it meets and was carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct and instructions supplied to me for this study. I understand that the information given to me during the interview must be kept confidential.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Signed by Interviewer:
..../...../....</td><td colspan="4">Signed by Supervisor:
..../...../....</td></tr>
</table>

INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I'd like to introduce myself – I am (**NAME**) from (**ORGANIZATION**).

We are conducting a study of people who have migrated for work abroad. It would be very helpful if you could share information about your most recent experience. There are no right or wrong answers, so please give us your honest opinion. Any information collected from you will be kept strictly confidential. We will not use your name, address or any other personal information by which you could be identified. Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

Do you have further questions about this survey? (**MAKE CLARIFICATION AS NEEDED**)

Do you understand and give your consent to be interviewed for the study? **IF YES CONTINUE**

SCREENING

S1 RECORD INTERVIEW LOCATION

Cambodia		**Lao PDR**		**Myanmar**		**Viet Nam**	
Banteay Meanchey	1	Savannakhet	4	Shan	7	Ha Tinh	10
Kampong Cham	2	Champasak	5	Mandalay	8	Thanh Hoa	11
Takeo	3	Khammuane	6	Kayin	9	Quang Binh	12

S2 RECORD INTERVENTION AREA OR CONTROL AREA (CODE 3, 6, 9, 12)

Intervention	1
Control	2

S3 Have you returned to your home country from working internationally within the past 2 years and not just for a vacation or for a short visit?

Yes	1	**CONTINUE**
No	2	**STOP**

S4 Did you migrate for work to Thailand or Malaysia?

Thailand	1	**CONTINUE**
Malaysia	2	
Other country	3	**STOP**

SHOW CARD

S5 Which of the following industries did you work in most? (Select one)

Domestic work	1	**CONTINUE**
Fishing	2	
Seafood processing	3	
Agriculture	4	
Manufacturing	5	
Construction	6	
Hospitality/tourism	7	
Restaurant	8	
Entertainment or sex work	9	
Other	10	**STOP**

S6 Did you do work that mostly involved routine physical or manual tasks? For example, cleaning, digging, lifting, carrying, sorting, assembling, serving food, planting or harvesting?

IF NOT CLEAR ASK THEM TO DESCRIBE THE TYPE OF WORK THEY DID

Yes	1	**CONTINUE**
No	2	**STOP**

SHOW CARD

S7 Which of the following age groups do you fall into? (Select one)

Below 18 years	1	**STOP**
18 – 20	2	**CONTINUE**
21 – 25	3	
26 – 30	4	
31 – 35	5	
36 – 40	6	
41 – 45	7	
Over 45 years	8	**STOP**

S8 RECORD GENDER

Male	1	**CHECK QUOTA**
Female	2	

PRE-MIGRATION

SHOW CARD

P1 What type of skills training did you complete before migrating? (Select all that apply)

None	1	**GO TO P3**
Foreign language training	2	**CONTINUE**
General literacy or numeracy	3	
Formal skills training (i.e. at a technical or vocational institute)	4	
Non-formal skills training (i.e. within the community)	5	
On-the-job skills training	6	
Other	7	

SHOW CARD

P2 Were your skills certified by anyone before migrating? (Select all that apply)

By recruitment agency	1
By employer	2
By technical or vocational training institute	3
By government authority	4
Other	5
No	6

P3 Did you attend pre-departure orientation before migrating? (Select one)

Yes	1	**CONTINUE**
No	2	**GO TO M1**

SHOW CARD

P4 What information from the pre-departure orientation was most useful? (Select one)

Culture and customs	1
Laws and legal obligations	2
Labour rights	3
Health and hygiene	4
Money and remittances	5
Sources of assistance	6
Other	7
None	8

MIGRATION PROCESS

M1 How many years did you work in Thailand / Malaysia?
ROUND UP TO THE NEAREST YEAR, IF 1 YEAR AND 6 MONTHS WRITE 2 YEARS

Years

SHOW CARD

M2 Which of the following channels did you use to migrate? (Select one)

Through a government agency	1
Through a licensed private recruitment agency	2
Through an unlicensed broker	3
Through friends or family	4
Independently/on your own	5
Direct recruitment by an employer	6
Other	7

M3 How long did it take before you were able to start work at your destination after deciding to migrate through this channel?
IF THEY SAY MONTHS MULTIPLY BY 30 (E.G. 2 MONTHS = 60 DAYS)

Months x 30	Days

SHOW CARD

M4 Which of the following problems did you experience when migrating through this channel, if any?
(Select all that apply)

Lack of information/misinformation	1	**CONTINUE**
Delay	2	
No legal documents	3	
Overcharging	4	
Deception	5	
Poor employment opportunities	6	
Discrimination based on gender or pregnancy	7	
Harassment or abuse	8	
Complex procedures	9	
Demand for bribes	10	
Other	11	
None	12	**GO TO M7**

SHOW CARD

M5 Did you go to anyone for assistance with your problems, if so who? (Select all that apply)

Did not seek assistance	1	**GO TO M7**
Friends or family	2	**CONTINUE**
Broker	3	
Recruitment agency	4	
Community leader	5	
Labour authorities	6	
Police	7	
NGO	8	
Trade union	9	
Other	10	

M6 Were they able to help you to resolve your problems? (Select one)

Yes	1
Somewhat	2
No	3

SHOW CARD

M7 Through which of the following channels did you obtain information about migration? (Select all that apply)

Television	1
Radio	2
Newspaper	3
Billboard or poster	4
Booklet or flyer	5
Facebook	6
Other website or application	7
Community meeting	8
Job fair	9
None	10

M8 Did you sign a written employment contract or have a verbal agreement for a job before migrating? (Select one)

Written contract	1	**CONTINUE**
Verbal agreement	2	
No	3	**GO TO C1**

SHOW CARD

M9 When you arrived in Thailand / Malaysia, was the job different to what was agreed in the employment contract or verbal agreement? (Select all that apply)

No	1
Location	2

Sector of work	3
Job duties	4
Working hours	5
Wages	6
Benefits	7
Leave	8
Living conditions	9
Other	10

COST OF MIGRATION

C1 How much do you estimate that you paid in total costs to migrate, including training, recruitment, passport, visa, travel, examinations, deposits, orientation, bribes or informal payments, etc.? (Select one currency)

DOUBLE CHECK AMOUNT

1	Cambodia (Riel)		Riel
2	Lao PDR (Kip)		Kip
3	Myanmar (Kyat)		Kyat
4	Viet Nam (Dong)		Dong
5	Thailand (Baht)		Baht
6	Malaysia (Ringgit)		Ringgit
7	United States (Dollars)		Dollars

SHOW CARD

C2 How did you get the money to pay for these costs? (Select all that apply)

Loan (s)	1	**CONTINUE**
Savings	2	**IF LOAN NOT SELECTED GO TO E1**
Wage deductions	3	
Selling or pawning assets	4	
Other	5	

SHOW CARD

C3 From what source did you obtain the largest portion of the loan? (Select one)

Private bank	1
Government bank	2
Microcredit institution	3
Friends or family	4
Money lender	5
Community fund	6
Other	7

C4 How much money did you borrow in total? (Select one currency)
DOUBLE CHECK AMOUNT

1	Cambodia (Riel)		**Riel**
2	Lao PDR (Kip)		**Kip**
3	Myanmar (Kyat)		**Kyat**
4	Viet Nam (Dong)		**Dong**
5	United States (Dollars)		**Dollars**

C5 What was the monthly interest rate on your loan?
IF NO INTEREST PUT '0'

% / Month	% / Year
Don't know	99

C6 How many months did it take to pay back the loan?
IF THEY SAY YEARS MULTIPLY BY 12

Years x 12	Months
Not finished paying back	99

SHOW CARD

C7 What collateral did you give to obtain the loan, if any? (Select one)

Land	1
House	2
Farm equipment	3
Motor vehicle	4
Gold or jewelry	5
Other	6
None	7

C8 Did you lose any or all of the collateral due to failure to repay the loan? (Select one)

Yes	1
No	2

EMPLOYMENT

E1 When you were recruited for work in Thailand / Malaysia, did you have skills relevant to the job? (Select one)

Yes	1
Somewhat	2
No	3

SHOW CARD

E2 What type of skills training did you receive while you were in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Foreign language training	1	GO TO E4
General literacy or numeracy	2	
Formal skills training (i.e. at a Technical or vocational training institute)	3	
Non-formal skills training (i.e. within the community)	4	
On-the-job skills training	5	
Other	6	
None	7	**CONTINUE**

SHOW CARD

E3 What was the main reason that you did not receive any training while working in Thailand/Malaysia? (Select one)

Did not see the benefit	1
Not enough time	2
Too expensive	3
None available	4
Employer did not allow	5
Other	6

E4 How many hours per day did you normally work in Thailand / Malaysia, including overtime?

Hours per day

E5 How many days per week did you normally work in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select one)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Days per week

E6 What was your monthly income when working in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select one currency)

IF THEY ONLY KNOW PER WEEK MULTIPLY BY 4

IF THEY ONLY KNOW PER DAY MULTIPLY BY E5 AND 4

		Daily	**Weekly**	**Monthly**	
1	Thailand (Baht)	x (E5x4)	x 4		Baht
2	Malaysia (Ringgit)	x (E5x4)	x 4		Ringgit

SHOW CARD

E7 Which of the following workers' rights were provided to you while employed in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Paid annual leave	1
Paid holidays	2
Paid sick leave	3
One-day off per week	4
Paid maternity leave	5
Minimum wage (Thailand: THB300 / Malaysia: RM900 per Day)	6

Overtime pay	7
Severance pay	8
Other	9
None	10

SHOW CARD

E8 Were you enrolled in any government or private sector benefit schemes while working in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Social security	1	**CONTINUE**
Workers' compensation	2	
Government health insurance	3	
Private health insurance	4	
Education or training	5	
Other	6	
No	7	**GO TO E10**

SHOW CARD

E9 What benefits did you use? (Select all that apply)

Workers' compensation benefits	1
injury or illness benefits (non-work related)	2
Maternity benefits	3
Disability benefits	4
Death benefits	5
Unemployment benefits	6
Old-age benefits	7
Child support benefits	8
Pension benefits	9
Government health insurance benefits	10
Private health insurance benefits	11
Education or training benefits	12
Other	13
None	14

SHOW CARD PICTURE

E10 What documents did you have for the majority of the time that you were working in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select one)

THAILAND	
Passport, visa and work permit (MOU)	1
Temporary passport/certificate of identity, visa and work permit (NV)	2
Registration card ('pink card' or Tor Ror 38/1)	3
MALAYSIA	

Passport, visa and visit pass for temporary employment	4
Visit pass for temporary employment (6P)	5
THAILAND OR MALAYSIA	
Passport and visa only	6
Other	7
None	8

E11a During your stay in Thailand / Malaysia, did you ever work without legal permission?

Yes	1	E11b ASK: How many months?	Months
No	2	CONTINUE	

E12 Did you ever make an informal payment to a government official due to not having legal permission to stay or work in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select one)

Yes	1
No	2

SHOW CARD

E13 Did you experience any of the following while working in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Wages withheld	1	**CONTINUE**
Wages below legal minimum	2	
Excessive overtime (over 12 hours)	3	
Retention of identity documents	4	
Illegal wage deductions	5	
Restriction of movement	6	
Harassment or abuse	7	
Discrimination based on gender	8	
Termination due to pregnancy	9	
None	10	**GO TO E16**

SHOW CARD

E14 Did you go to anyone for assistance with your problem(s)? (Select all that apply)

No	1	**GO TO E16**
Friends or family	2	**CONTINUE**
Employer or manager	3	
Embassy or consulate	4	
Recruitment agency or broker	5	
Community leader	6	
Labour authorities	7	
Police	8	
NGO	9	
Trade union	10	
Other	11	

E15 Were they able to help you to resolve your problem? (Select one)

Yes	1
Somewhat	2
No	3

SHOW CARD

E16 Did you ever do any other type of work in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select one)
ANSWER MUST NOT BE THE SAME AS IN S5

No	1
Domestic work	2
Fishing	3
Seafood processing	4
Agriculture	5
Manufacturing	6
Construction	7
Hospitality/tourism	8
Restaurant	9
Entertainment or sex work	10
Other	11

SHOW CARD

E17 Did you join any union or association while working in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Trade union	1
Migrant worker association	2
Women's group	3
Religious group	4
Other group or association	5
None	6

E18 How much money did you normally send home each month? (Select one currency)
IF LESS FREQUENT THAN MONTHLY, WRITE IN AMOUNT AND HOW OFTEN

		Amount	How often, every ...	Monthly	
1	Thailand (Baht)		Month		Baht
2	Malaysian (Ringgit)		Month		Ringgit
3	United States (Dollars)				Dollars
4	None			99	GO TO E22

SHOW CARD

E19 Which of the following channels did you normally use to send money home? (Select one)

Bank	1	CONTINUE
Money transfer organization (e.g. Western Union, MoneyGram, etc.)	2	
Hundi or broker system	3	
Hand carry by others (e.g. friends, family or colleagues)	4	
Other channel	5	
Hand carry by self	6	**GO TO E21**

E20 How much did you pay in fees each time to send money home? (Select one currency)

1	Thailand (Baht)		Baht
2	Malaysia (Ringgit)		Ringgit
3	United States (Dollars)		Dollars
4	Don't know	99	

SHOW CARD

E21 What was the majority of the money you sent home used for? (Select up to three)

Buying farm land, livestock or equipment	1
Children's' education	2
Starting or improving a business	3
Donation to temple or other community organization	4
Savings	5
Building a house	6
Paying household expenses	7
Purchasing consumer products	8
Supporting extended family members	9
Paying back debts	10
Other	11
Don't know	12

SHOW CARD

E22 In which countries did you have a bank account while working in Thailand / Malaysia?

	Yes	No
E22a In home country	1	2
E22b In destination country	1	2

RETURN

SHOW CARD

R1 What was the main reason you returned home? (Select one)

Deported	1
Exploitation or abuse	2
End of visa or work permit	3
Lost job	4
Saved enough money	5
Work opportunities at home	6
Family obligations	7
Homesick	8
To give birth	9
Other	10
Don’t know	11

SHOW CARD

R2 Which skills did you develop / improve from working in Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Leadership skills	1	**CONTINUE**
Social skills/confidence	2	
Foreign language proficiency	3	
General literacy or numeracy	4	
Financial literacy	5	
Vocational skills	6	
Business skills	7	
None	8	**GO TO R4**

R3 Have you been able to use any of the skills you learned in Thailand / Malaysia after coming home? (Select one)

Yes	1
Somewhat	2
No	3

SHOW CARD

R4a What is your current work situation? (Select one)

R4b What was your work situation before migrating? (Select one)

	R4a	R4b
Work for an employer (i.e. wage worker)	1	1
Self-employed (e.g. farmer, street vendor, handyman)	2	2
Business owner	3	3
Unemployed (i.e. currently without work but seeking employment)	4	4

Unpaid work for family (e.g. work at home, family business or family farm without pay)	5	5
Student	6	6
Other	7	7

SHOW CARD

R5a In which sector are you currently working? (Select one)

R5b In which sector were you working before migrating? (Select one)

	R5a	R5b
Domestic work	1	1
Fishing	2	2
Seafood processing	3	3
Agriculture	4	4
Manufacturing	5	5
Construction	6	6
Hospitality/tourism	7	7
Restaurant	8	8
Entertainment or sex work	9	9
Other	10	10
None	11	11

SHOW CARD

R6a What is the skill level of your current job? (Select one)

R6b What was the skill level of your job before migrating? (Select one)

	R6a	R6b
Low-skilled (e.g. general labourer such as a cleaner or farmhand)	1	1
Semi-skilled (e.g. equipment operator such as sewer or bus driver)	2	2
Medium-skilled (e.g. technician or line manager)	3	3
High-skilled (e.g. engineer, teacher, medical practitioner)	4	4
Unemployed	5	5

R7a What is your average monthly income currently? (Select one currency)
NOTE: IF THEY DON'T KNOW ASK HOW MUCH PER WEEK OR PER DAY

		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	
1	Cambodia (Riel)	x 24	x 4		**Riel**
2	Lao PDR (Kip)	x 24	x 4		**Kip**
3	Myanmar (Kyat)	x 24	x 4		**Kyat**
4	Viet Nam (Dong)	x 24	x 4		**Dong**
5	United States (Dollars)	x 24	x 4		**Dollars**

R7b What was your average monthly income before migrating to Thailand / Malaysia? (Select one currency)
NOTE: IF THEY DON'T KNOW ASK HOW MUCH PER WEEK OR PER DAY

		Daily	Weekly	Monthly	
1	Cambodia (Riel)	x 24	x 4		**Riel**
2	Lao PDR (Kip)	x 24	x 4		**Kip**
3	Myanmar (Kyat)	x 24	x 4		**Kyat**
4	Viet Nam (Dong)	x 24	x 4		**Dong**
5	United States (Dollars)	x 24	x 4		**Dollars**

SHOW CARD

R8a Which of the following assets do you currently own? (Select all that apply)

R8b Which of the following assets did you own before migrating? (Select all that apply)

	R8a	R8b
House	1	1
Business	2	2
Farm land	3	3
Livestock	4	4
Motorbike	5	5
Car or truck	6	6
Cooking stove	7	7
Refrigerator	8	8
Television	9	9
Air conditioner	10	10
Washing machine	11	11
Mobile phone	12	12
Gold or jewelry	13	13

R9a How much money do you currently have saved? (Select one currency)

1	Cambodia (Riel)		**Riel**
2	Lao PDR (Kip)		**Kip**
3	Myanmar (Kyat)		**Kyat**
4	Viet Nam (Dong)		**Dong**
5	United States (Dollars)		**Dollars**

R9b Do you have more or less savings now than before you migrated?

Less	1
No change	2
More	3

SHOW CARD

R10 Have you taken any leadership role in your community since returning home? (Select all that apply)

Community council member	1
Community chief	2
Leader of community-based organization	3
Leader of women's group	4
Leader of religious group	5
Leader of business association	6
Other	7
No	8

SHOW CARD

R11 Do you have more control over any of the following household decisions since returning from Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Finances	1
Purchases	2
Business or employment	3
Migration	4
Education	5
Health care	6
Leisure	7
Political affiliation	8
None	9

SHOW CARD

R12 Have you faced any of the following problems since returning from Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Disconnection from community	1
Disconnection/disagreements with family	2
Gossip or stigma	3
Harassment or abuse	4
Anxiety or depression	5
Boredom	6
Drug or alcohol abuse	7
Divorce or separation	8
Disability	9
None	10

SHOW CARD

R13 Have you faced any of the following financial challenges since returning from Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Debts to repay	1
No money saved	2
Family or friends asking for money	3
Business losing money or failed	4
Difficult to find a job	5
Jobs do not pay enough	6
Difficult to access credit	7
None	8

SHOW CARD

R14 Have you accessed any of the following services to help you reintegrating back into your community since returning from Thailand / Malaysia? (Select all that apply)

Employment services	1
Technical and vocational training	2
General educational services	3
Enterprise development training	4
Financial literacy training	5
Financial services for investment of savings	6
Family services	7
Medical services	8
None	9

SHOW CARD

R15 Do you plan to migrate for work again within the next two years? (Select one)

Yes	1
No	2
Don’t know	3

DEMOGRAPHICS

SHOW CARD

D1 What is your ethnicity? (Select one)

Cambodia		Lao PDR		Myanmar		Viet Nam	
Khmer	1	Lao	1	Shan	1	Viet	1
Cham	2	Khmu	2	Dawei	2	Tay	2
Viet	3	Hmong	3	Mon	3	Thai	3
Other	4	Other	4	Bamar	4	Muong	4
				Chin	5	Hoa	5

				Rakhine	6	Nung	6
				Kayin	7	Other	7
				Lahu	8		
				Akhar	9		
				Other	10		

SHOW CARD

D2 What is the highest level of formal education you have completed? (Select one)

No formal education	1
Primary school	2
Secondary school	3
Technical or vocational institute	4
University	5

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION

Appendix II. List of stakeholders interviewed

Cambodia	
1	Association of Cambodian Recruitment Agencies
2	Cambodian Labour Confederation
3	Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Associations
4	Provincial Department of Labour and Vocational Training, Kampong Cham
5	Legal Support for Children and Women
6	Department of Employment and Manpower
7	Migrant Resource Centre, Banteay Meanchey
8	National Employment Agency
9	Phnom Srey Organzation for Development
Lao People's Democratic Republic	
10	Association for the Development of Women and Legal Education
11	Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
12	Champanakone Labour Co., Ltd
13	Inter Labour Co., Ltd.
14	Provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare, Champasak
15	Provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare, Khammuane
16	Lao Federation of Trade Unions, Savannakhet
17	Department of Skill Development and Employment
18	UN Women
Myanmar	
19	Burmese Women's Union
20	Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar
21	Department of Labour, Immigration and Population, Mandalay
22	Kayin State Development Public Company
23	Labour Exchange Office, Kayin
24	Mawk Kon Local Development Organization
25	Myanmar Worker Management Services Co., LTD.
26	Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation
27	88 Generation Peace and Open Society

Viet Nam	
28	Center for Population and Human Resource
29	Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, Ha Tinh
30	Department of Overseas Labour
31	Employment Services Centre, Bac Ninh
32	Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Quang Binh
33	Department of Labour Invalids and Social Affairs, Thanh Hoa
34	Viet Nam Association of Manpower Supply
35	Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour
36	Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Risks and rewards: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia

Labour migration has never featured more prominently within South-East Asia than it does today. However, the realities experienced by migrant workers are often hidden from view due to the temporary and irregular nature of much of the migration occurring within the region. As a result, there remains a dearth of reliable data that can be utilized for the development of evidence-based policy and programming.

To inform their interventions, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration collaborated on a large-scale regional survey of over 1,800 migrant workers. The findings challenge some of the commonly held assumptions about the end result of labour migration in South-East Asia and how best to ensure a safe and rewarding experience for migrant workers. Positive outcomes can be achieved if migrant workers are able to avoid burdensome debts, benefit from labour rights protection, enhance their job skills and find gainful employment upon return. Lack of assurance of obtaining these conditions contributes to a situation where labour migration is often a considerable gamble for migrant workers and their family members.

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