CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION:
THE CASE OF MON STATE, MYANMAR

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Causes and Consequences of International Migration: The Case of Mon State, Myanmar

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Any faults in substance or analysis rest with the authors.
# Table Of Contents

- Executive Summary ................................................. 1
- Introduction .......................................................... 3
- Dynamics Of Labour Migration In Asean ...................... 4
- Dynamics Of Labour Migration In Myanmar .................. 5
- Case Study: Mon State ................................................. 8
- Characteristics Of Mon Migration ............................... 11
- Causes Of Migration .................................................. 13
- Process Of Migration .................................................. 15
- Consequences Of Migration ......................................... 17
- Conclusion .............................................................. 25
- Policy Implications .................................................... 27
- References ............................................................... 29
Table Of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Total Number of Migrants Abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2: Myanmar Migrants to Thailand Through MoU Process (2014-16)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3: Remittance Inflows (2013-16)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4: Mon State</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5: Household Members Living Abroad from Mon State by Country and Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6: Descriptive Characteristic of Migrants Abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7: Gender Background of Migrants by Destination Countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8: Former Conventional Household Members Living Abroad by Country of Residence District of Reporting Household and Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9: Reason for Migration</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10: Cost of Migration of Selected Countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11: Legal Status of Migration by Selected Countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12: Average Remittances from Destination Countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13: Average Amount of Remittances by Years Migrated</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14: Average Amount of Remittances by Levels of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15: Average Income and Expenditure Status Households</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16: Land Status of Migrant and non-Migrant Household</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17: Learned Skills by the Return Migrants</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
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</table>
Executive Summary

This report is based on the Mon State Rural Household Survey (MSRHS) that was conducted by the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) in collaboration with Michigan State University and International Food Policy Research Institute between April and September of 2015. Mon State has the highest out-migration in Myanmar with 21 per cent of the population moving out of the country, primarily to neighbouring Thailand. This study surveyed 1,680 households from 10 townships and examined the causes, patterns and consequences of migration. In addition to this survey, a sample from the 2014 Population and Housing Census and other quantitative and qualitative data on Mon State were used in this report in order to provide additional insights on migration patterns and consequences. The results of the analysis suggest that labour migration has both negative and positive consequences for the migrants and their families.

The report is divided into two sections; the first section reviews migration within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region and aims to understand the migration dynamics in Myanmar. The significance of labour mobility is intrinsically linked to its contribution to the development of the country of origin through remittances that may often constitute a large share of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This report provides an insight on how the government strives to manage migration effectively through labour policies and international Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with other countries within the region.

The second part of the report introduces Mon State as a specific case study closely examined by CESD. This section gives a contextual overview for the reasons Mon State was selected for this migration study and the framework and methodology employed. The framework of the study is organised around the four following questions:

- **Who migrates?** What are the individual and community characteristics of the people who migrate abroad from Mon State? Some of the analysed characteristics include age, gender, educational qualifications, and socio-economic profiles, including land ownership.

- **What drives migration?** What are the push and pull factors that motivate people to migrate? Are people from Mon State lured to migrate because of improved living conditions, higher wages, and access to services abroad or are they forced to migrate due to poverty, drop in agricultural competitiveness and lack of economic alternatives?

- **What is the process of migration?** What informal and formal channels of migration are being utilized? Is there a relation between these channels and the cost of migration? How long does it take to migrate to another country? How do the workers receive information about migration channels? What are the risks involved?

- **What are the consequences of migration?** What are impacts of labour mobility on migrants and their families in Myanmar? Can remittances be seen as the main positive impact and what are the other benefits? Can deterioration of socio-economic development in Mon State be attributed to the out-flow of the labour force?
The report describes the framework of the analysis of the data that was used to answer the questions above. The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

(1) Migrant Characteristics: For the purposes of this report, a labour migrant is defined as a non-seasonal worker intending to stay more than 12 months away from the place of origin. However, return migrants were also interviewed to gain a more holistic perspective on the migration patterns. The analysis revealed that the age, gender, and education level were the most influential factors that determine who migrates. According to the collected data, the average age of migrants was 24 years. The majority of migrants have completed at least primary school with the average of 6.3 schooling years for women and 5.8 years for men.

(2) Causes of Migration: The causes of migration are classified into two groups known as the push and pull factors. The push factors include lack of job opportunities, poverty, natural disasters and conflict, whereas pull factor include higher wages, following family members already abroad, and better living standards in the destination country. According to the Myanmar Labour Force Survey (2016), 77 per cent of people migrate to other countries in search of employment or business opportunities and 19.8 per cent move to take up jobs they have already secured. As consistent with the national data, respondents from Mon State reported economic factors such as job seeking and higher wages as the main reason for migration.

(3) The Process of Migration: A majority of migrants in Mon State migrated to Thailand because of its geographical proximity and cultural and religious similarities between Thai and Mon people. It was also found that the migration cost was central to determining whether a migrant used formal or informal channels to migrate. The average cost of migration for documented migrants to Thailand is a little less than MMK 400,000 (USD$300), whereas undocumented migrants only spend about MMK 250,000 (USD$188). Therefore, migrants were more likely to use the informal channels because of its affordability. Another theme discussed in this section is the strength of social networks that facilitate the exchange of migration experiences between friends and relatives.

(4) Consequences of Migration: Migration often has a number of social and economic impacts experienced by both migrants and members of their families. Social impacts that were mentioned in the course of the study include the migrant’s lack of motivation to pursue higher education, drug addiction and destabilisation of the family unit. The economic impacts are centred around the contribution of remittances to the migrant household’s income and expenditure, as well as the benefits of skill transfer when migrants return to their hometowns. The data indicated that a migrant from Mon state remitted on average MMK 791,504.60 (USD$595) per year and the income level of migrant households is 24 per cent higher than that of the non-migrant households.

This report will provide a better understanding of the significance of migration and the mechanisms that need to be established. It will also help shape the policy recommendations which focus on migration governance and address how to effectively manage the migration process and reintegration of return migrants in Myanmar.
Introduction

Migration in Myanmar has become one of the leading influencers of socio-economic development at the local and national level. Over the past three to four decades, migration flows have brought both benefits and challenges in both rural areas and urban areas. The movement of migrants from rural areas to the metropolis areas within Myanmar and across the international border has been motivated by the pursuit for economic opportunities resulting in the emergence of a labour migrant population. Furthermore, this labour mobility has contributed to the growth of some industries within the country as well as its neighbouring countries like Thailand and Malaysia.

In the coming years, labour migration is expected to become an even-larger engine of economic development as the physical connectivity between countries increases. This would inevitably entail major shifts in public policy choices around poverty reduction, revitalising agriculture, job creation, gender dynamics, information management and urbanisation. To this end, examining and understanding migration trends and their impact on the population is becoming more critical than ever when studying urbanisation, industrial growth, household characteristics, and demographic changes. In other words, it is becoming increasingly important to examine the factors that drive the movement of labour along with the consequences experienced by the migrants and their community, both positive and negative.

In order to understand the labour migration dynamics, this study focuses on the causes, process and consequences of migration in the southern ethnic region of Myanmar, Mon State. This state was selected for the study due to the high share of international migrants in the population and availability of migration data from the Mon State Rural Household Survey (MSRHS) that was conducted by the Centre for Economic and Social Development in collaboration with Michigan State University and International Food Policy Research Institute. Moreover, Mon State strategically shares a border with Thailand, thus in terms of geographic proximity, it is important to understand the patterns and channels used by Mon migrants. The findings of this case study, shall provide an insight on migration patterns and inform policy makers on what migration mechanisms to implement and how to predict future trends. Therefore, this report aims to highlight the significance of migration in Myanmar as well as provide policy recommendations aimed at strengthening migration governance in Myanmar.
In the past decade, ASEAN has reported an average annual economic growth of 5.1 per cent compared to the 3.1 per cent growth in the global economy. Much of this growth can be attributed to significant foreign investment inflows, growth of labour-intensive industries, expansion of consumer markets, and a growing labour force. Despite this progress, poverty and rising economic and social disparities remain significant challenges. A large section of the region’s population is employed in low skilled jobs, with roughly 179 million workers employed in vulnerable jobs; moreover, 92 million live in poverty despite being employed.

According to data published by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), intra-ASEAN migration has increased from 1.5 million to 6.5 million people between 1990 and 2013. Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore have emerged as the top migration hubs, where demand for migrant workers continues to increase due to labour shortages fuelled by ageing population and growth of labour-intensive jobs in service and manufacturing sectors. Advanced East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea also continue to attract migrants from the region. Among ASEAN’s top migrant-source countries, Indonesia and the Philippines send the highest number of workers abroad each year, followed by Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR). Low and medium skilled workers constitute the majority of the migrant workforce and a large number of them migrate through informal channels. International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that there were 1,445,000 unregistered migrants in Thailand from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar between 2009 and 2010, compared to just 79,000 regular migrants in the same time period. The Ministry of Home Affairs (2015) in Malaysia reported that income disparities, poverty, and demographic changes have been key components of driving labour migration between ASEAN member states, where a large proportion of the migrant workforce is employed in low and medium-skilled jobs.

While migrant-source countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR are expected to benefit from the increased remittances, the extent of these benefits will largely depend on both origin and destination countries’ ability to establish regular migration channels, improve transfer of financial remittances, and protect the labour migrants from exploitation and trafficking.

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1. Vulnerable work refers to when a worker is in a less formal form of employment, with inadequate working conditions and lack of social protection (ILO & ADB, 2015, p.9-12)
Dynamics Of Migration In Myanmar

Nearly 10 per cent of Myanmar’s population is currently employed abroad, with up to 77 per cent of those migrating to countries within ASEAN. Figure 1 below, is taken from the Myanmar Population and Housing Census (2014) that indicates the number of migrants by age group and country of destination. The highest total number of migrants travel to Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia.

Figure 1: Total Number of Migrants Abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of residence</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>per cent</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,021,910</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,418,472</td>
<td>303,996</td>
<td>79,659</td>
<td>92,263</td>
<td>7,597</td>
<td>14,592</td>
<td>17,975</td>
<td>37,577</td>
<td>49,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>33,775</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>27,949</td>
<td>2,355</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>1,131</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>803</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 9</td>
<td>22,169</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>17,693</td>
<td>1,198</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>1,090</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 14</td>
<td>37,216</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>30,053</td>
<td>1,417</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>2,511</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,057</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 19</td>
<td>229,407</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>181,336</td>
<td>19,605</td>
<td>4,527</td>
<td>17,920</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>2,209</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>2,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 24</td>
<td>441,206</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>313,731</td>
<td>69,889</td>
<td>14,451</td>
<td>24,744</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>3,040</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>3,670</td>
<td>7,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 29</td>
<td>441,427</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>299,241</td>
<td>78,958</td>
<td>19,388</td>
<td>17,690</td>
<td>1,689</td>
<td>4,379</td>
<td>3,041</td>
<td>6,661</td>
<td>10,380</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 - 34</td>
<td>343,138</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>231,003</td>
<td>59,940</td>
<td>17,017</td>
<td>11,331</td>
<td>1,468</td>
<td>3,333</td>
<td>2,485</td>
<td>5,168</td>
<td>9,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 39</td>
<td>229,236</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>156,887</td>
<td>37,618</td>
<td>10,424</td>
<td>6,974</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>1,878</td>
<td>1,759</td>
<td>5,866</td>
<td>6,855</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 - 44</td>
<td>129,353</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>87,571</td>
<td>19,849</td>
<td>5,942</td>
<td>3,979</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1,423</td>
<td>4,103</td>
<td>4,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 - 49</td>
<td>64,429</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>42,667</td>
<td>8,586</td>
<td>3,144</td>
<td>2,332</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>2,527</td>
<td>3,104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census
Government Policies and International Partnerships on Migration

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP) is the apex policy organisation governing labour migration in Myanmar. Over the past decade, the Ministry has introduced policies, laws, and Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with migrant destination countries to ensure safe and legal international migration, facilitate data collection, and improve the socio-economic status of migrants and their families in Myanmar. One of the earliest laws on migration governance was the Law Relating to Overseas Employment (State Peace and Development Council Law No 3/99) passed in 1999 which guaranteed that migrants had access to rights and privileges in accordance with labour Laws in their destination countries. The next piece of legislation was the ‘Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law’ enacted in 2005 to take stringent legal action against those who facilitate human trafficking. Furthermore, the Ministry’s commitment to supporting migration is reflected in the 5-year “National Plan of Action for the Management of International Labour Migration for 2013-2017” prepared in 2013. Currently, MoLIP is drafting the Second Five Year National Plan of Action for 2018-2022 in collaboration with international and local stakeholders to further enhance the safety of labour migration. Other governmental efforts included the reform of the Overseas Employment Supervisory Committee, an organ that addresses migration administration, security issues, and facilitates data collection. Unfortunately, there is still significant evidence suggesting that thousands of Myanmar migrants enter foreign countries illegally every year and many continue to be victims of trafficking.

Previously, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security set up Migration Resource Centres (MRCs) in various parts of the country. The purpose of these offices is to eliminate cases of human trafficking, inform migrants about safe migration practices, and offer advice on the migration process. Furthermore, MOLIP issued licenses to 259 overseas employment agencies that helped send 696,451 workers abroad between 1990 and 2017. There is a total of 12 MRCs across the country, most of them are located in Yangon and there are only four agency branch offices in Mon State. Out of all these recruiting agencies, 96 of them primarily focus on assisting workers in finding employment in Thailand. In order to facilitate safe migration, MOLIP requires migrant workers to obtain an Overseas Worker Identification Card and undergo post-arrival training in their destination countries.

Labor attaches have also been stationed in Thailand, South Korea, and Malaysia to provide migrants with the necessary support upon their arrival to these destinations. Therefore, these policies are highly relevant when studying the migration landscape of top migrant source states like Mon State and top destination countries like Thailand and Malaysia.

The first formally recognised MoU between Myanmar and a migrant destination country was signed in 2003 with Thailand. Since then, two additional methods were adopted to legalise Myanmar migrants to be employed in Thailand: (I) a government program to recruit workers directly from Myanmar and (II) a nationality verification program that requires migrant workers to present their identity proofs at government registration centres throughout Thailand. Upon approval migrant workers receive a legal employment visa valid for two years. Between 2014 and 2016, the number of migrants who moved from Myanmar to Thailand with the assistance of the MoU has increased three-fold. Moreover, the gender gap has reduced in the past three years as shown in Figure 2 from 8,043 female migrants in 2014 to nearly


\[ \text{MOLIP, 2017} \]

\[ \text{Interview with MOLIP official in Mon State (2016)} \]
45,000 female migrants. The latest bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Myanmar and Thailand in 2017 addresses issues related to migrant admission procedures, irregular (undocumented) migration as discussed above and repatriation of migrants, among other topics. 7

In addition to Thailand, Myanmar signed a MoU with South Korea in 2008 and another one in 2010 which facilitated the placement of workers in specific sectors given the provision that they passed their language proficiency examination and possessed the required skills. In 2013 and 2018 Myanmar signed bilateral agreements with Japan International Training Cooperation Organization (JITCO) to send Myanmar workers and interns to Japan. Lastly, in 2015, the Malaysian Government issued a statement reporting that it was planning to sign a MoU with Myanmar in order to safeguard the rights and interests of Myanmar workers in Malaysia. 8

A significant proportion of Myanmar’s population has been working abroad for decades resulting in substantial economic contribution from remittances. As shown in the Figure 3, Myanmar citizens officially remitted over US$ 3.3 billion in 2016, which constituted 5.4 per cent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, evidence suggests that this figure underestimates the value of total remittance flows into Myanmar, since a large number of migrants are forced to remit money using unofficial channels due to the absence of well-developed cash transfer systems or their unofficial status. Until 2011, only state owned banks (Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB) and Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank (MICB) had the right to handle foreign currency transactions. This led to an increased popularity of informal remittance channels (e.g. “hundi” 9 ). According to Lin (2009), almost 100 per cent of Myanmar migrants in Malaysia used informal remittance system for international money transfer.

In late 2011, the Government of Myanmar allowed private banks to engage in international money transactions and lifted restrictions on holding foreign currencies by citizens for certain amounts. In an attempt to formalise remittance channels, the government also allowed local private banks to partner with foreign banks and international money transfer agencies like Western Union for remittance services. The government also exempted foreign workers from the 10 per cent of income tax starting in January 2012. Despite these efforts, the role of informal remittance system remains significant for migrants working in abroad.
Case Study: Mon State

Mon State

Mon state is located on the western coast of South-East Myanmar, with Bago region to the north, Kayin State to the east, Tanintharyi region and Thailand to the south, and Andaman Sea to the west. Mon state is made up of 10 townships, and Mawlaymine is the capital and an important trade and transportation hub. According to the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Mon state had a total population of 2,054,393 people, of which 48 per cent were men and 52 per cent women and with an average of 4.6 household members. Mon State accounts for 4 per cent of Myanmar’s population and most of its residents live in rural areas. Furthermore, 9 per cent of residents in Mon State originate from other ethnic groups and states. Mon State has a literacy rate of 86 per cent, which is higher than the national average. Rubber plantation and rice cultivation are the main economic activities of Mon State; while the vast majority of the

Figure 4: Mon State

Figure 5: Household Members Living Abroad from Mon State by Country and Sex

Source: 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census

8 The Malay Online – Malaysia Vows to do More to Protect Myanmar Workers http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/malaysia-vows-to-do-more-to-protect-myanmar-workers
9 Hundi system refers to “an informal exchange in which paying someone in one location allows a payment to be made by an agent in a distant location and the difference settled between the agents later on which was developed in India” (Kyaw, 2014). The transaction costs are often cheaper than formalized channels used for transferring money.
population depends on agriculture. Low profitability of agriculture has been an important driver of migration in rural areas. The majority of the migrants leaving Myanmar belong to the Mon ethnic minority group and are residents of Mon State. This State is also one of the transit points for migrants from elsewhere in Myanmar traveling to Thailand or Malaysia. Moreover, Mon State hosts internal migrants from other parts of Myanmar especially from Central Dry Zone and Delta area. Most of them arrive in Mon State to work on rubber plantations as a replacement of native labour that has migrated abroad. However, even these workers eventually migrate overseas after obtaining a few years of experience.

Figure 6: Former Conventional Household Members Living Abroad by Country of Residence District of Reporting Household and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Residence</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MON</td>
<td>426,586</td>
<td>385,487</td>
<td>32,620</td>
<td>4,342</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>1,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>245,564</td>
<td>214,432</td>
<td>25,109</td>
<td>3,236</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>181,022</td>
<td>171,055</td>
<td>7,511</td>
<td>1,106</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAWLAMYINE</td>
<td>294,231</td>
<td>264,453</td>
<td>23,966</td>
<td>3,082</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>1,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>170,355</td>
<td>147,581</td>
<td>18,467</td>
<td>2,412</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>123,876</td>
<td>116,872</td>
<td>5,499</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THATON</td>
<td>132,355</td>
<td>121,034</td>
<td>8,654</td>
<td>8,654</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>171</td>
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<td>648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>75,209</td>
<td>66,851</td>
<td>6,642</td>
<td>6,642</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57,146</td>
<td>54,183</td>
<td>2,012</td>
<td>2,012</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Mon State Volume 3-J

Methodology

The primary data used for this study is from the Mon State Rural Household Survey (MSRHS) that was conducted by the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) in collaboration with Michigan State University and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) between April and September 2015. The aim of the survey was to study agriculture and socioeconomic characteristics of the rural households of the Mon State as a whole. A stratified two-stage sample design was used for the survey. The sampling frame for this survey was based on the preliminary data and maps from the 2014 Population and Housing Census of Myanmar. There were 140 enumeration areas (EAs) and 1,680 households. This study specifically used information in the MSRHS from the migration section which included seasonal and non-seasonal migration, future and return migration, as well as data on remittance. Furthermore, the CESD team did additional field interviews in 2016 with the support of the International Development Research Institute (IDRC) to strengthen the qualitative analysis for this study.
Analytical Framework

Our analytical framework involves three key components of Mon State migrants: the factors that drive labour migration from Mon State, the migration process, and the consequences of migration. We examine the pull and push factors that have been driving migration from Mon State to foreign destinations, primarily within ASEAN. There is also a focus on the regular and irregular channels migrants use and the cost of migration. Additionally, it analyses the consequences of migration, both positive and negative, on individuals, households and communities in the region. Using this framework, the key objective is to provide an assessment of how and to what extent migration takes place and how labour mobility impacts the livelihoods of migrant families.

Research Questions

Based on this framework, our research study is organised around four questions:

- Who migrates? What are the individual and community characteristics of people who migrate abroad from Mon State? Key characteristics studied include age, gender, educational qualifications and socio-economic profiles, including land ownership.

- What drives migration? What motivates people to migrate? What are the push and pull factors that prompt people to migrate? Are people from Mon State lured to migrate because of improved living conditions, higher wages, and access to services abroad or are they forced to migrate due to poverty, drop in agricultural competitiveness and lack of economic alternatives?

- What is the process of migration? What informal and formal channels of migration are used? Is there a relation between the channels of migration and the migration costs? How long does it take to migrate to another country? How do the workers receive information on migration channels? What are the risks involved?

- What are the consequences of migration? What are the positive and negative impacts of labour mobility on migrants themselves and their families in Myanmar? Are remittances the main positive impact, and if not, what are the other factors? Has migration resulted in long-running consequences such as the deterioration of socio-economic development in Mon State?

The above mentioned research questions will be examined and analysed with the assistance of survey results and other quantitative and qualitative data on Mon State that provide key insights on migration patterns, driving factors and its consequences.

Migration patterns can be analysed through the demographic characteristics (age and sex) and socio-economic conditions (level of education). Most international labour migrants from Mon State are characterized as non-seasonal migrants, and are defined as household members intending to stay more than 12 months away from their place of origin. The average age of migrants was 24 years. According to the Myanmar Census for 2014, the proportion of females employed in rural Mon state was 41.8 per cent, which was higher among females aged 15–64, while the males employed was proportionally higher at 82.2 per cent. Over 80 per cent of migrants were between ages 15 – 34 years, which is the most economically active population (Figure 7).
About 5 per cent of the migrant population is under 15 years, which can be attributed to the fact that this group of people follow their family members and also possibly work as care takers of children (nannies) and housekeepers, especially in Thailand.  

As shown in Figure 7, 55.4 per cent out of 1,680 households interviewed reported having male migrants while 44.6 per cent had female migrants. Figure 8 shows that the overall proportion of male migrants is higher than female, but the gender ratio differs depending on the destination. For example, in Thailand, the proportions of male and female migrants are almost equal with 54 per cent of male and 46 per cent of female workers. At the same time, in Malaysia, there is a great disparity between the number of male and female migrants with only 20 per cent female workers. We can speculate that Malaysia is a less attractive destination for women due to significant differences in cultural practices and religious beliefs. Similarly, labour migration to Singapore is dominated by men, which can largely be attributed to the legal ban issued by the Myanmar government that forbids women to work as domestic workers in Singapore.

The average schooling years were 5.8 years for male and 6.3 years for female migrants, indicating that a large number of migrants completed at least primary school. Literature describes that education attainment increases the chance to access job opportunities abroad making it a significant factor influencing migration patterns. In general, students complete middle school in Myanmar at around 14-15 years of age. Our study found that, while the majority of migrants completed primary and middle school, only less than 15 per cent of migrants completed high school or higher levels of education. Furthermore, about 5 per cent of migrants completed only informal education such as monastic education. Over 50 per cent of household members from both migrant and non-migrant households had at least primary school level of education. Our results showed that migration had a slightly positive impact on accessibility of formal education system. However, the percentage of population who completed middle education and above is higher in non-migrant households. Based on interviews conducted, this result also suggests that household members from migrant households had less motivation to complete education beyond high school as they see completion of higher education as an “unimportant” option for creating better livelihood status. This indicates that migration has a slightly negative impact on the perception of higher education. It would be interesting to do further research into how education levels and dropout rates differ in migrant households in comparison to non-migrant households. We also found that education levels affect the selection of the destination country. Migrants, who have graduated from primary or middle school, primarily prefer to migrate to Thailand or Malaysia whereas more educated migrants migrate to Singapore. Therefore, the findings of this study highlighted how labour migrants from Mon State are characterised by their age, gender and level of education. Furthermore, the gender and the level of education can sometimes determine which country of destination migrants select.

11 Interview: Mon State Interviews (2016)
13 Interview: Mon State Interviews (2016)
Causes Of Migration

The causes of migration can broadly be categorised into two groups: the push and pull factors. These factors may include both economic (such as poverty, better job opportunities in destination country) and non-economic reasons (such as following family-members abroad, conflicts in state/region of origin). According to the Myanmar Labour Force Survey (2015), 77 per cent of people migrate to other countries to search for employment and 19.8 per cent move to take up jobs they have already secured. Responses of migrant households from Mon State indicated economic factors as the most common motivation for migration, which is consistent with the findings of the nation-wide survey. Wages in Mon State were recorded to be between MMK 4000 (approx. US$3) and MMK 6000 (approx. US$4.5)\(^\text{14}\) whereas, minimum wages in Thailand are approximately US$9 in 2017. This reflects that wages are also a motivating factor for migrants to migrate to Thailand.

Nevertheless, the wages in Mon State are sufficient to attract workers from other Myanmar regions, especially from central Myanmar and the Delta Region, which allows Mon State to partially offset the labour shortages generated by the out-migration of its native labour force. This highlights the importance of the pull factors, such as higher wages and abundant economic opportunities abroad, causing migration out of Mon State. On the other hand, a drop in farming income, absence of non-agricultural jobs and poor living conditions due to poverty and conflict have been critical “push factors”. As such, economic reasons related to employment opportunities account for an overwhelming majority of the push and pull reasons that drive labour migration, as seen in the rest of ASEAN. Other pull factors include improved transportation and technological advancements in destination countries, while push factors include both insufficient and unreliable labour opportunities in rural areas and reduced access to essential services such as education, healthcare and finance. A household head who has five family members in Thailand and now lives in Paing Kamar Village, Mudon Township expressed the following:

\(^{14}\) Revitalized Agriculture for Balanced Growth and Resilient Livelihoods: Toward a Rural Development Strategy for Mon State, Centre for Economic and Social Development and Michigan State University, 2016.
“The main reason for migration is the family’s poor economic conditions and the desire to escape from poverty. I [household head] worked as a carpenter and some of my household members worked on the farm. However, the income was not sufficient to sustain the family. We did not borrow any money to fund the migration costs from others because we don’t have collateral to get loan. I [household head] saved money to finance the migration of my eldest son to migrate. After that, the eldest son in Thailand saved money in order to finance the migration cost for the rest of his family members who were also able to migrate as well. Now, all five family members are working in the same factory in Thailand.”

![Figure 10: Cost of Migration of Selected Countries](image)

A household head from Kaut Payan Village from Mudon Township also shared his experience:

“Lack of job opportunities in our village is the main reason my daughter migrated. My eldest daughter has been working in Thailand for ten years and the youngest daughter followed about two years ago. Before migrating to Thailand, they worked as housekeepers in Mudon Township however, they were not willing to continue working. Currently, both are working in the construction sectors and their income is much higher than it used to be when they worked here.”

To summarize, abundant job opportunities and higher wages in neighbouring countries are the primary reason why migrants leave their homes.
Process Of Migration

The process of migration explains the factors that influence how the migrants travel to their destinations, including the cost of migration, access to formal and informal migration channels, township of origin, and prevalence of social networks. The survey results show that the majority of the migrant population from Mon State move to Thailand while, other popular destinations are Malaysia and Singapore. Thailand attracts a large number of Myanmar workers by its geographical proximity and a strong religious and cultural connection between Mon and Thai people. Additionally, the cost of migration to Thailand is significantly cheaper compared to Malaysia and Singapore (See Figure 8).

Although Thailand is the most prevalent destination for Mon State migrants, there are sub-townships where other destinations play a more significant role. For example, the share of migrants from La Mine sub-township to Thailand is significantly lower than in other regions. This can be attributed to the historic ties between La Mine and Singapore and Malaysia. During the socialist era, La Mine was an important hub for informal trade between Myanmar and Singapore and Malaysia which led to the development of strong infrastructure between these destinations. After the significant decline of informal trade, the existing infrastructure has since been used to create a reliable migration channel that has generated remittances to compensate for the loss of revenue caused by the decline of the informal trade. This highlights the importance of the historical background in determining migration channels and destinations. This example illustrates the importance of the historical ties between Myanmar and destination countries in determining the migration destination.

![Figure 11: Legal Status of Migration by Selected Countries](image)

15 Mon State Interviews: Nyaung Tone Village (2016)
Access to the information plays an important role in determining the migration destination. In other words, migrants prefer to live and work in a place where they can have an access to a strong social network that can be helpful when settling into a new place. Creation of migrant settlements influences subsequent migration patterns by attracting more migrants from the origin communities. Our data revealed that the information obtained from friends and family members who already work abroad, as well as from returnee migrants, plays a vital role in making migration decisions for potential migrants. This indicates the strength of social networks. One family described how the migration of their son was facilitated by a relative:

“Our son migrated to Thailand ten years ago using informal channels. His uncle is the one who called him to work there. We only gave him 20,000 MMKs (USD$15) even though his migration cost was about 7 lakh (USD$526), and then his uncle lent him the rest which he then paid off when he started working.”  

On the other hand, the survey results suggest that recruitment agencies and brokers also have some little influence (only 2.3 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively) in providing needed information to migrants. The role of brokers was also brought up during the course of the interviews by one of the returnee migrants from Nyaung Tone Village of Mudon Township:

“I returned to my village four months ago after staying in Thailand for three years. My nieces in Thailand gave me information about employment opportunities and the migration process to Thailand. When I migrated to Thailand, I crossed the border using informal channels with the assistance of a broker. Initially, my nieces helped me to get a job at a rubber plantation, and then I applied for a passport and work permit through the broker after working in Thailand for over a month. After working as a rubber tapping labourer for a year, I then changed jobs and started working at a factory in the furniture industry with once again the assistance of the broker. Each time I had to give the broker 20,000 MMKs (USD$15) for job searching fees.”

The choice of the destination country for migration also depends on the expected earning level in the destination. Convenience of migration channel, distance between the origin and the destination, and social proximity are also taken into account. As shown in Figure 11, the majority of migrants from Mon State utilized the informal channels to migrate to Thailand while more migrants to Malaysia used the formal channels. This indicates that the informal channels between Myanmar and Thailand are well established and easy to access for migrants in comparison to Malaysia. On the other hand, some key stakeholders from civil society organizations (CSOs) responded that migrants were often found entering Malaysia on a tourist visa or work permit, and then started working illegally when their permit expires. Thus, this indicates how migrants navigate both the costs and access to informal and formal channels of migration.

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16 Mon State Interview: Nyaung Tone Village Interview EA 136 UHID 63, date 2016
17 Fafchamps and Shilp (2011)
18 Mon State Interview 2016
Consequences Of Migration

As highlighted before, the majority of people from Mon State migrate abroad primarily in search of better economic opportunities. The question now is whether migrating abroad actually helps improve the income levels and livelihoods of their families. We analysed the average amount of remittances sent based on gender, the amount of time spent abroad and the channels utilized for sending their remittance back home. The second step of our analysis addressed how remittances contributed to households’ income and assets by comparing these indicators with those of non-migrants’ households.

Figure 12: Average Amount of Remittances by Years Migrated

Figure 13: Average Remittances Sent by Destination Countries and Gender
Remittances

Remittance is the flow of capital resources earned by migrants from the place of destination to their place of origin. It usually serves as an instrument for income redistribution, poverty reduction and economic growth. Findings from this study indicate that the majority of migrant families have economically benefitted from migration, as 77 per cent of migrant families in Mon State received money-transfer from household members abroad within the last 12 months. The data also indicates that a migrant from Mon State remitted an average MMK 791,504.60 (USD$595) per year and over 50 per cent of migrants from Mon engaged in remittance within last 12 months.

The migrant’s gender, level of education, and the duration of time spent abroad affected the amount of remittances sent back home. As shown in Figure 13, among the migrants who moved to Malaysia, men remitted higher amounts of money than women. However, the situation is the opposite for the migrants who moved to Thailand. This may be due to the nature of work performed by migrants and “earning levels” in the destination country which are then segregated by gender dynamics. For instance, according to the Department of Statistics of Malaysia (2014), female employees earn 5.8 per cent less than male employees. Similarly, the destination country also influences the amount remitted. For instance, the average amount of remittance per migrant from Singapore is significantly higher than those from Thailand and Malaysia.

There was also considerable difference in the average amounts remitted depending on the duration of experience abroad. As shown in Figure 12, migrants who have less than one year of experience abroad remitted less money in comparison to those who had more than one year of experience abroad. This can be attributed to the fact that migrants take about a year to fully settle into their country of destination or repay any debts related to their migration. Therefore, they are less likely to remit high amounts of money in their first year. On the other hand, the longer the duration of stay (3-6 years) in a foreign country the weaker the migrants’ attachment to their communities of origin which leads to the decrease in motivation to send back remittances. Figure 12 also illustrates how the amount of remittances steadily increases again between 10 to 15 years. This situation was also reflected in the words of different participants from Katae and Nyaung Tone Villages, in Mudon and Kyat Ma Yaw Townships during interviews:

My eldest son was able to send remittances only after working in Malaysia for one year because he had to repay the debt he incurred from the migration costs to brokers. Currently he is sending about one lakh (USD$75) per two months.

Our son could only send remittances after working there [Thailand] for three years. In the past, he sent one lakh (USD$75) per month regularly. However, in the last five months, he only sent one lakh (USD$75).

In the initial first year our son remitted money…however, after he got married in Thailand he did not send us money in the past four years.

20https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column&theme&menu_id=U3VPmidoYUxzVzFaYmNkWXZteGduZz09&bu1_id=RSQ0R9y9uFjicU0z9zcUzTZZOz9
21 Mon State Interview: Katae Village, Kyakmaraw Township (Interview 005, 2016)
22 Mon State Interview: Nyaung Tone Village, Mudon Township (Interview, EA 136 UHHID 63, date 2016)
23 Mon State Interview: Nyaung Tone Village (Interview 01, date 2016)
Literature suggests that those migrants who stay abroad longer remit less because of the reduced attachment to their family and community of origin (Lucas and Stark, 1985). However, a study published by Lin (2009) suggested that there is no relationship between the amount remitted and the length of stay in Malaysia among Mon migrants. Findings of our study suggest that the overall time spent abroad and the amount of remittance will often vary throughout the duration of their migration.

Another important aspect of remittances is concerned with the types of channels that the migrants use to remit money back to their families in their villages or townships of origin (Figure 14). The financial sector of Myanmar is still developing and the availability of banking services in rural areas is very limited. There were 25 private banks in Mon State in 2014 and only some of these banks provided remittance services for migrants at the time. However, most of the banks are located in Mawlamyine, the capital city of Mon State. Existing cross-border banking services are not designed to support or encourage migrants’ remittances that usually consist of small amounts per transaction. For example, transferring money from Thailand to Myanmar requires a fixed fee of 200 Thai Baht (USD$9) per transaction of up to a 100,000 Thai Baht (USD$3,000). Our data showed that the average amount of each migrant’s remittance per month is about 1,441 Thai Baht (USD$44). This means that the average migrant has to pay a 14 per cent transaction fee to remit their money from Thailand to urban areas of Mon State, such as Mawlamyine.

On the other hand, sending money through informal channels, such as ‘hundi’, is easier because it allows migrant families that live in rural areas to save on the transportation costs, which would be required for a trip to the city to visit a bank. This study found that 65 per cent of the migrant families in Mon State received remittances from household members abroad through the ‘hundi’ informal channel, while only 12 per cent received migrant remittance through formal banks. Others received remittances from the migrants themselves (i.e. 11 per cent), friends or relatives (i.e. 10 per cent) and other channels (2 per cent).

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24 Mon State government
As mentioned above, some of the migrants are undocumented, which prevents them from using the official financial services. Some of the participants who were interviewed at Nyaung Tone Township reinforced this idea:

*My son transfers money from Banks in Myawaddy [border town of Myanmar and Thailand] to a hundi agent in the village. We do not have experience withdrawing money from a bank ourselves.*\(^{26}\)

*My eldest daughter sent the remittance after about one year. When she sent the remittances, she phoned us [parents] and remitted through Hundi. The transfer charge was 2000 MMKs (USD$1.50).*\(^{27}\)

Therefore, this indicates that constraints like high transaction fees and inaccessibility of the formal financial services made migrants less likely to utilize formal channels, thus increasing the demand for the informal "hundi" - system.

**Income & Expenditures**

The data gathered on income and expenditure is important for estimating the extent to which remittance contribute to poverty alleviation and livelihood improvement of migrant households. Some literature argues that migration has a negative effect on the supply of household labour which reduces the household income level (Wouters and Taylor, 2006). Thus, we must understand whether migrant remittances are sufficient to offset the potential decrease in the household income due to the reduced labour force. In this study, the migrant household income level was estimated to be 24 per cent higher than that of non-migrant households. However, the expenditure level of non-migrant households was slightly higher. It is important to note that our calculation of expenditure level excluded the expenses related to asset investments such as buying land and gold. However, Figure 16 shows that land ownership for both general and farming land is positively correlated with migration. Once again, Lin’s (2009) study in Mon State also found that a significant portion of expenditure by migrant household goes to buying land/house and gold. However, further research will be needed to evaluate the productivity of this investment. The qualitative interviews from Nyaung Tone Village further revealed the pattern of use of the expenditures by the migrant households:

*We use our remittance for purchasing land, also purchasing a house and then we also bought some land to plant coconut trees and banana plants.*\(^{28}\)

*We sometimes buy gold for saving and in the last three years we also bought two little boats using remittances.*\(^{29}\)

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26 Mon State Interview (2016)
27 Mon State Interview (2016)
28 Mon State Interview (2016)
29 Mon State Interview (2016)
Figure 15: Average Income and Expenditure Status of Households

Figure 16: Land Status of Migrant and Non Migrant Household
Although the result above provides a valuable insight about the economic impact of migration, we must be careful when attributing the entire 24% increase in the household income to migration alone. Further research will be needed to identify potential factors that may correlate with the household’s ability to send a member abroad and underlie the higher income. For example, it is likely that a household that originally had a higher income has an easier access to migration channels and thus is more likely to have a migrant member. At the same time, past income is known to have a strong positive influence on the present income suggesting that the migration status of the household might be a consequence of the combination of factors that lead to higher income rather than the determining factor.

Social and Economic Implications of Migration

In regards to social implications of migration, the study found that households with migrants were less motivated to pursue higher levels of education. The challenge with this perception is that it creates a re-occurring problem of low skilled workers because they do not attain higher education. Another issue was expressed by community members who voiced their concerns about the high consumption of amphetamine among teenagers. Another consequence that arises as a result informal migration is the danger of being exploited in destination countries and becoming victims of human trafficking. Some reports which study the risks of trafficking during migration explain how these migrant workers are often subject to abuses by human traffickers, police and government officials and disgruntled employers due to their undocumented status. 30

Therefore, it is important to recognize that, despite the apparent economic benefits, migration often leads to negative social consequences. It is reflected in interviews with participants from Nyaung Tone Village:

*Some of the high school and university students in this village are not interested in education anymore as they just want to migrate.* 31

*The youths from this village use narcotics in Thailand. When they come back to the village some of them are sent to the mental hospital.* 32

*Two guys were arrested by police a week ago near my shop. I had advised them not to go to the area where police are checking for drug users and they did not listen to me. Currently, these guys are attending University in Mawlamyine and their parents are working in Thailand. It looks like they don’t have a strong motivation to be educated despite the fact that their parents are fully funding their cost of education. Their grandparents are the ones who look after them. Since there is a generation gap between grandparents and grandchildren, it is difficult for grandparents to have knowledge and follow what is happening among the youths and the young people find it difficult to share their feelings. As a result, those guys did not focus on their education.* 33

30UNESCAP (2015)
31 Mon State Interview: Nyaung Tone Village (Interview 006, date 2016)
32 Mon State Interview: Nyaung Tone Village (Interview EA 124 UHHID 033, date 2016)
33 Mon State Interview: Kyae Chan village in Paung Township 2017
Other than migration negatively affecting the social condition of the youth, there was also a case described by a participant interviewed that explained how migration had affected the whole family:

Some of the families permanently separate when they migrate and there was a case whereby a family ended up separated in this village. The head of the household went to Thailand and got married to a new wife and did not remit to his old family. His own son cannot go to university because there is not enough money. So his old wife also went to Thailand to look for a job. His daughter also ended up leaving high school and following her mother. When the head of the household came back to the village this year, he does not even pay attention on his old family but instead spends most of his time on the phone with his new wife.\(^{34}\)

There were also some sentiments that were expressed by Mon State Regional Member of Parliament about how migration has caused a shortage of labour in his area:

\textit{Mon State is a dual migration state.}\(^{35}\) Many people from Mon State migrate to other countries, especially to Thailand, and a lot of people from Ayeyarwaddy region and Central Myanmar come here [Mon State] to work, however, we are currently facing labour shortage.\(^{36}\)

Therefore, it is important to recognize the adverse social effects of migration experienced by the household and community levels despite its economic contribution. In addition, the labour shortage that Mon State is experiencing can also be attributed to out-flow of the high volume of migrants to the international destinations.

**Return Migration**

Return migration is known to generate economic activity in the developing countries.\(^{37}\) It allows returnee-migrants who have saved money abroad (i.e. 32 per cent) to ease credit/financial burdens while their accumulated money-resource assist them in setting up own business in the countries of origin. According to our study, most migrants have returned home due to personal and family reasons (i.e.19 per cent) while the other reasons for returning home include the poor working conditions (i.e. 21 per cent) and incapability to work (i.e. 8 per cent). However, only six per cent of respondents expressed that they returned back to their community of origin because of job opportunities. The following example was provided by a participant during an interview:

\textit{Some of the return migrants do not want to go back to Thailand and instead work in this village as masons and carpenters. There are many job opportunities for them in this village because villagers in Mon State want to repair their houses when they get remittances.}^{38}

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\(^{34}\) Mon State Interview (2016)

\(^{35}\) Dual migration state: it performs 2 functions relating to migration of both producing and receiving migrants. It is producing/releasing migrants to abroad for inferior economic opportunities in the region; it is also the state which performs as receipt-area for migrants from other parts of Myanmar (i.e. inter-state migration) due to relatively superior wage-earning opportunities.

\(^{36}\) Mon State Interview: Regional MP, Mon State Parliament 2016

\(^{37}\) Schiff and Ozden (2007)

\(^{38}\) Mon State Interview (2016)
One participant recounted that his health condition and his wife’s pregnancy were the primary reasons why he returned home. Therefore, it can be said that economic and job prospects in areas of origins are not the major pull factors for migrants returning home. This indicates that there is still a problem of creation of job opportunities in originating-areas of migrants and most of them will inevitably continue to migrate.

Although Myanmar has been facing a “brain drain” due to unfavourable economic and political situations, nowadays it is also encountering a “brain gain” after recent development initiatives within the country. The return of low-skilled migrants who worked in low skilled jobs in developed countries can make a contribution in their community of origin. According to our survey data, 49 per cent of return migrants responded that they gained certain skills in the destination country. Among the various abilities they gained are language skills, skills in rubber tapping, and handicrafts or cooking, which are usually classified as semi-skilled. The following was also expressed by an interviewee:

**We can use our experiences from working in Thailand when working on our own rubber plantations. The tapping methods and tools which are used in Thailand are better and different from those used in Myanmar. We bought some tools in Thailand since these cannot be bought here. Therefore, we work on our own rubber plantation by using those methods and do not hire any workers. However, we want to share our working experiences with others.**

This demonstrates that migrants are willing to share and utilize the skills they gained abroad for the betterment of their local communities. Another important consideration is concerned with the ability of the return migrants to use their experiences in the home market. According to our data, only 29 per cent of migrants are able to apply those skills in the economic activities in their community of origin, while the rest felt that their skills did not match the requirements of the home labour market and business environment. A villager from Kaw Pa Yan village, Kyaikmaraw Township expressed the following:

**The availability of job opportunities in the village of origin depends on the type of work and skills migrants gained previously in their destination countries. Currently, there are job opportunities as a carpenter and a mason because demand for these jobs is very high both in this village and nearby villages. In addition, if they had worked in rubber plantation in Thailand, they can work as a rubber tapper. Rubber tapping method in Thailand is better than the current practices in Mon State.**

Therefore, the findings above show that it can be difficult to create an environment where return migrants could successfully utilize the knowledge and skills they obtained abroad to develop their community. This is often times based on the lack of employment opportunities meaning more efforts need to be made to fostering circular migration and creating an enabling economic environment.
Conclusion

This report explored four central aspects of migration in Mon State to develop a better understanding of benefits and issues surrounding migration in that area and formulate policy recommendations that could facilitate efficient and safe movement of labour across the border. We began by considering demographic characteristics of migrants such as gender, age, and level of education. The data showed a narrow gender gap in the total migrant population that varies significantly depending on the destination. Although the overall contribution of female migrants is almost as large as men’s, migration to some countries is associated with obstacles that prevent female workers from realizing their full economic potential. Such obstacles include legal restrictions, safety-related concerns, and the shortage of opportunities in the traditionally female sectors. 80 per cent of Mon State migrants are between 15–34 years old, which is the most economically active age group. About 50 per cent of the migrants completed at least primary school. Although the level of education and migration status were slightly positively correlated, the data showed that migrants were less likely to pursue higher education than non-migrants. This finding suggests that the pursuit of employment opportunities abroad is seen as an alternative to higher education as a way for achieving professional success, which eventually may result in a lower skilled labour force. Education also played a key role in determining the destination country. Employment opportunities in Singapore tend to attract highly educated workers, whereas those with lower levels of education tend to migrate to Malaysia or Thailand.

In order to create a favourable migration environment one must understand the causes that underlie the workers’ movement. Our data revealed that the overwhelming majority of the migrants moved abroad to seek employment or accept a job offer highlighting the economic nature of the migration motivation of Mon State workers. We considered the various ways in which migration was being facilitated in order to identify potential causes of inefficiency of the labour movement. We found that the cheap cost of informal channels attracted the majority of migrants despite the associated risks. Lower cost and geographical proximity explained why the majority of migrants moved to neighbouring Thailand as opposed to Malaysia or Singapore. Participants emphasized the importance of social networks and information provided by other migrants in making migration decisions about the destination and type of migration channel.

The economic consequences of migration were analysed by examining impact of remittances on migrant households, as well as the relationship between the amount of remittances and the migrants’ demographic characteristics. The data indicated that a migrant from Mon state remitted on average MMK 791,504.60 per year. The relationship between the migrants’ gender and the amount remitted varied depending on the destination country. Nevertheless, our data highlights the significance of the contribution of female migrants to the Mon State’s economy indicating the need to further empower women to participate in the economy. The prevalence of the informal remittance channels reveals the inadequacy of the international financial services and calls for improvement in the area. The income level of migrant households was found to be 24 per cent higher than non-migrants households. The last discussion dealt with both social and economic impacts of migration on families and communities within Mon State. One of the major impacts relates to the perception of education among the youth who have become less motivated to pursue higher levels of education because they can always migrate abroad and start earning their own wages. Another consequence was the high drug consumption rate among
the youth in various communities in Mon State. Furthermore, there was a sentiment raised on how migration was reducing aggregate labour supply of Mon state, as more people moved abroad and less labour was available.

Lastly, the data indicated that return migrants primarily returned based on social reasons and less for economic opportunities, indicating that there were still insufficient job opportunities for them at home. This situation is therefore creating a repeated cycle of migration and encouraging the migrants to maintain existing migration-status. Furthermore, the interviews highlighted that return migrants are facing challenges in practically applying the knowledge and skills they have acquired while working abroad for development.

Therefore, based on the findings of this case study conducted in Mon State, it provides a clear picture and understanding on the characteristics of people who migrate, the motivating factors to do so, the actual process they go through and socioeconomic outcomes of migration. By understanding the migration context in Mon State, policy makers and relevant stakeholders can implement more informed and relevant migration policies at both local and national level.
Policy Implications

Based on the study which assessed the migration patterns and its consequences in Mon State, the policy implications shall focus on certain key findings presented with recommended policy actions to be taken in order to overcome the observed challenges. These policy recommendations are divided into five specific areas of migration. Firstly, the overall governance of migration shall be addressed in order to assess the role of the local and national government in strengthening migration governance in Mon State as well as other states and regions of Myanmar. The second part shall examine the pre-migration conditions in order for migrants to have a more positive experience in destination nations. Third recommendation shall address the actual migration process itself including measures to reduce migration costs, to manage irregular channels and protect migrants. The fourth area focuses on remittance and its direct contribution to the development of the country. Lastly, post migration is the last area that looks at how to maximize the benefits from experiences gained by return migrants and foster circular migration.

Governance

Migration governance will focus on improving the access to migration services for migrants by improving the services provided by the Migration Resource Centre in Mawlamyine while also establishing migration service centres along the migration route toward Thailand especially in border towns. There is a need to have better coordination and collaboration mechanisms within country and with destination countries. Regarding in-country level policy, there must be more communication and co-ordination between Union and state level/Local governments while strengthening the meaningful participation of NGOs/CSOs in both Mon State and destination countries. Furthermore, there is a need to revise and strengthen existing bilateral agreements, MOUs \(^{40}\) and the establishment of joint institutional agreements between migrants sending and receiving countries. Finally, the existing information asymmetries between employers and migrants in the migration process must be reduced with adequate provision of job-related information to potential migrants.

Pre Migration

The aim of pre-migration policy is to increase migration awareness among migrants and encourage skills development in order for migrants to have a more positive experience in host-nations. Completion of high school or higher level of education must be encouraged so that potential migrants have a higher probability of accessing higher-skilled and better-paying jobs, thus granting them access to more diverse markets abroad.

\(^{40}\) MOUs: Memorandum of Understanding between 2 nations such as Myanmar and Thailand
Migration Process

As indicated in the results of the Mon State case-study, migrants and their families usually end up in immense debt because of high migration costs. Steps need to be taken to make formal channels more affordable and appealing for migrants particularly to increase information on formal channels among social networks. In addition, there needs to be a continuation towards strengthening existing migration institutions such as MRCs.

Remittance and Development

Throughout the study, multiple participants usually referenced the ‘hundi’ system as the most preferred channel for receiving remittances from their relatives. Therefore, adequate attention must be given to informal channels. The advancement of technology can play a significant role in facilitating the money-transfer transactions made between migrants and their families. Innovative solutions like mobile money transfer as demonstrated by Wave Money, has maximized the rise of technology and affordability of mobile phones. This form of technology needs to be user-friendly and easily accessible by migrant family members even in the most remote parts of the country.

Post Migration

Strategies and incentives to foster circular migration and encourage return migrants to relocate back to their home country, particularly their originating states or regions need to be implemented. However, this can only be possible with considerable efforts by all stakeholders (i.e. especially government and private-sector players) dedicated to enhancing job creation in their respective states/regions. Ultimately, migration topics are required to be included at state/regional development plans with adequate public discussion/consultation in order for migration governance as a whole to be facilitated effectively.
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