

Capitalising Human Mobility for Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Development in Myanmar (CHIME)

Priya Deshingkar, Julie Litchfield and Wen-Ching Ting



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Publisher: International Organization for Migration
No. 50-B, Thiri Mingalar, 2nd Street, Ward 8
Kamayut Township, Yangon
Myanmar
Tel.: +95 9 7323
Fax: +95 1 532279
Email: iomyangon@iom.int
Website: www.iom.int

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L i v e l i h o o d s a n d F o o d S e c u r i t y F u n d



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Travellers make their way to Amarapura, Mandalay. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

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Fishing near Myaung Mya, Ayeyarwaddy Region. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

ARCM	Asian Research Centre for Migration
CHIME	Capitalizing Human Mobility for Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Development in Myanmar
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GDP	gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LIFT	Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund
MPHC	Myanmar Population and Housing Census
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
MMK	Myanmar kyat
MIMU	Myanmar Information Management Unit
MOLES	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MYR	Malaysian ringgit
NGO	non-governmental organization
PSF	Peace Support Fund
QSEM	Qualitative Social and Economic Monitoring of Livelihoods in Myanmar
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
THB	Thai baht
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USD	United States dollar

Executive summary

Over the past decade, Myanmar has experienced a marked increase in migration, coinciding with a period of rapid economic growth.¹ Internal and international migrants already represent 25 per cent of Myanmar's total population. These migrants are primarily low-skilled and from poor rural households seeking to improve the long-term prospects for themselves and their families. Their migration is driven by interconnected structural and social factors, including rural poverty, lack of viable employment opportunities, earning differences between origin and destination, aspirations for modern work and/or a modern lifestyle, the desire to break away from chronic indebtedness, and environmental changes and conflict.

While migration is a crucial part of development, its ability to reduce poverty at the household level is contingent upon the effective management of the multiple risks and hardships faced by migrant households. Over the long term, the benefits of migration can offset hardships and downward slides into poverty by increasing the earnings of migrants and opening up new opportunities to them and their families. However, there is a need for policymaking to better align with and support the long-term aspirations of migrants and their families.

The “Capitalising Human Mobility for Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Development for Myanmar” (CHIME) study aims to address the knowledge gap on labour migration and its relationship with poverty and development in four areas in Myanmar: Ayeyarwady Region, Mandalay Region, Rakhine State and Shan State. CHIME employed a mixed-methods design, including a quantitative household survey and qualitative in-depth interviews, collected in two rounds in 2017. The quantitative samples were intended to be representative of rural households in each of the four identified, and the findings are regionally representative for Ayeyarwady and Mandalay regions. The study cannot and does claim to be representative of Rakhine and Shan States due to various limitations to accessing some of the villages.²

The CHIME project was implemented by a consortium composed of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the University of Sussex, Metta Development Foundation, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Financial support was provided by the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT). The findings of the study are summarized in the sections that follow.

Migration patterns and characteristics of migrants

The household survey identified growing levels of out-migration from rural households in Ayeyarwady and Mandalay Regions, and Rakhine and Shan States, with approximately a quarter of all households surveyed having at least one migrant.

Migrant destinations were many and varied across the surveyed regions. Majority (74%) of migrants during the study period were internal and migrated within Myanmar, although migrants from Rakhine were migrating both internally and internationally in almost equal numbers. Men were nearly three times as likely to migrate internationally than women, while almost equal numbers of women and men were found to be migrating internally. Thailand, Malaysia and China were the most popular international destinations, although there were regional variations in the diversity and share of migrants in destinations. Most internal migrants moved either within their state or region of origin, except for migrants from Ayeyarwady, the majority of whom migrated to Yangon Region, the second most popular destination for internal migrants from all other surveyed states or regions.

¹ Myanmar Department of Population (DOP), The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: The Union Report – Census Report Volume 2 (DOP, Nay Pyi Taw, 2015); DOP, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Population Dynamics. Census Report Volume 4-E (DOP, Nay Pyi Taw, 2016); United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), “International Migrant Stock: By destination and origin”, dataset, available from: www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml UN DESA (accessed 28 May 2018; and World Bank, Livelihoods and Social Change in Rural Myanmar: QSEM Series Round Five Report (World Bank, Yangon, 2016).

² In Rakhine, the study covered 91 per cent of randomly sampled villages. In Shan, the study was able to cover only 41 per cent of the sampled villages, which were concentrated in Taunggyi District, and Keng Tung and Tachikeik Townships.

The study also found that there was a low incidence of return and that there were ten times as many current migrants than return migrants, highlighting a trend towards strong net out-migration from rural Myanmar in recent years. The survey data on returns showed that most returnees were returning from internal destinations and most internal returnees, if not all, were returning from locations within their own region/state. Nevertheless, returnee data showed the persistence of traditional seasonal migration patterns – particularly in Mandalay, where the majority of returnees were located. Personal reasons were most frequently cited by return migrants in the other surveyed areas.

Drivers of migration

The most oft-cited reason for migration among both men and women was to seek improvement in employment or income. Almost 50 per cent of all household responses included work- and income-related motives for migrating, while 14 per cent of responses included family-related motives. Again, both men and women cited family reasons, including marriage and reuniting with a family member at destination. The appeal of new lifestyles in urban areas was also a reason given by 10 per cent of respondents.

The study highlights the enormous significance of social drivers and how closely they are intertwined with economic drivers, including a desire to change work sectors or employment circumstances, specifically, away from the repetitive and physically-demanding work often found in rural areas. Phrases commonly heard during the qualitative interviews were a desire to “not to work under the sun” or “in the mud” and aspirations to “wear fashionable clothes and hairstyles.” Changing the social status of the family left behind was also a driver for migration because getting into initial debt to finance migration – and later receiving remittances – is perceived to be more respectable than borrowing from a local moneylender.

Enabling factors of migration

While there were multiple reasons for men and women to choose to migrate, the ability to migrate is significantly dependent on access to information, the presence and action of facilitators of migration, and available migration financing options. Many respondents reported more than one source of information. Family, relatives and friends at home and at destination were common sources of information about migration, much of which related to the job search, reflecting the importance of migrant networks in Myanmar.

Almost a third of men and a quarter of women in the study reportedly used brokers or recruitment agencies to migrate internationally. The proportion was even higher among migrants from Mandalay and, to a lesser extent, Rakhine. There were various ways in which brokers facilitated migration. Common scenarios included family members having already identified the destination that the migrant should travel and what occupation to hold, but needing the help of a broker to facilitate the process. Other scenarios saw migrants completely dependent on brokers for everything – from arranging travel and lodging to eventual job placement. Some brokers also covered upfront costs of workers’ migration, recouping them through wages migrants received at destination. These costs, in particular, placed irregular migrants in precarious situations where they had little means of redress in case of deception and exploitation.

In contrast, few internal migrants migrated with the help of brokers and recruitment agencies. Instead, they took advantage of personal networks at origin and destination. The survey found very few incidents of migration without any form of facilitation.

Costs and financing of migration

The upfront costs associated with international migration are significantly higher than those associated with internal migration. The reported figures show that the mean cost of international migration was MMK 1,403,371 and MMK 157,733 for internal migration. Family and relatives are the most important sources of migration financing: 38 per cent of international migrants and 56 per cent of

internal migrants relied on family and relatives in their places of origin, with others relying on family and relatives at destination to a lesser extent. International migrants were proportionately more likely to use loans – from relatives, friends and brokers – than internal migrants, reflecting the higher costs of migrating across national borders. When migrants borrowed money to finance their international migration, families were the most common source of loans, followed by friends and brokers. Loans played hardly any role in financing internal migration.

Employment patterns

Migration allows members of rural households to move from unstable employment (casual work) or unemployment into stable (regularly paid) employment. The survey found that majority of the population covered in the study were not in employment prior to migration. The percentage who were economically active prior to migration varied from region to region: 56, 37 and 35 per cent of migrants from Mandalay, Rakhine and Ayeyarwady, respectively, were economically active prior to migration. About half of people who were economically inactive were in school before migrating; others were engaged in unpaid family businesses or unable to find work.

At destination, a majority of migrants moved into regularly paid employment, with only 7 to 13 per cent of migrants from Ayeyarwady, Mandalay and Shan holding casual and/or irregularly paid jobs. The figure rose to 26 per cent of both internal and international migrants from Rakhine.

Migration contributes significantly to sectoral mobility. While around 62 per cent of all migrants were employed in agriculture, fisheries and forestry prior to migrating, only 13 per cent continued to work in this sector at destination, while the rest were in a variety of other employment sectors, including general services, accommodation and food services, and manufacturing. There were differences in sectors employing mostly internal migrants versus international migrants, and those in which female or male migrant workers were predominant.

Remittance patterns

Around 69 per cent of economically active international migrants sent remittances home in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared to 66 per cent of economically active internal migrants. Overall, women were just as likely as men to remit.

International migrants from Rakhine were much less likely to remit than international migrants from other surveyed regions. This may be linked to the aforementioned fact that they were more likely to be in casual and precarious work than international migrants from other regions.

A majority of international migrants used banks and other formal financial institutions to send money to Myanmar. This finding contrasts with those of other studies, which found informal international remittance transfers, commonly known as *hundi*, to be highly prevalent. This may be explained in terms of limited availability of *hundi* infrastructure in the regions where the study was conducted.

The survey also found that only 41 per cent of internal migrants remitted money through formal remittance channels, with roughly half using informal means, such as sending money through friends and relatives, or giving it directly to their families during visits. No respondents reported receiving remittances via mobile phone transfer, which may reflect limitations in the penetration of technology and services in the surveyed areas.

Migration and household welfare

The relationship between migration and household welfare outcomes is complex. The survey data did not find evidence of any association between changes in poverty rankings and a household having migrants (or, in cases where they do, the destination of those migrants). This is not very surprising since there are many channels through which migration may affect the welfare of the origin households. Migration is risky and benefits for the origin household, which are not guaranteed, may take time to accrue.

The study nonetheless produced limited evidence of migration positively impacting the welfare of households left behind. Having an international migrant sending remittances back home was associated with improvements in subjective poverty and asset ownership, whilst households with an internal migrant who sent remittances did not appear to be better-off than households not receiving remittances.

The study also showed that remittances were used for a variety of purposes. The most common use of remittances was the purchase of food, which was one of the three main uses of remittances for more than half of migrant-sending households, especially those with internal migrants. Asset purchase was another common use of international remittances in Mandalay and Rakhine, although much less so for internal migrant remittances; education, however, was found to be a common use of internal remittances. In Mandalay and Ayeyarwady, but much less so in Rakhine, remittances were also used for agricultural production.

Gender relations and opportunities for women

Gender norms appear to be shifting due to migration, as well as wider changes in society. While it is difficult to say whether migration has resulted in a transformation in gender roles or the division of labour and assets within households, it is clear that migration has opened up new opportunities for women. Young female migrants' opportunities are not only work-related. Younger generations of women migrating to cities have new opportunities for employment in factories and services, albeit ones that often require migrants to tolerate precarious and/or dangerous working conditions. However, through migration, young female migrants also experience new opportunities for education, personal growth, dressing and lifestyle. Meanwhile, at home, their social status within the family also changes.

Spatial dynamics of livelihood strategies and stretched families

The study paints a picture of multilocal or stretched families³ where migrants and family members are not only working towards shared goals for the household as a unit, but also pursuing individual strategies for self-development. This is especially the case for younger generations who may aspire to move away from traditional occupations.

Striking in the accounts of migrants and their families was how migrant siblings supported each other and other members of the family, as this goes beyond the support dynamics between parents and migrant children that is often assumed in household models of migration and remittances. Equally striking were expressions of filial piety⁴ and obligations of children towards their parents, where migration was a way of supporting them in times of difficulty or old age.

Impacts on community life

Migration appears to be having both positive and negative impacts at the community level. On the one hand, the study found migrants investing in community infrastructure and contributing to social occasions and events at origin. In some cases, migrants had also set up low-interest loan facilities for villagers who wished to start businesses or were helping to fund those with medical needs.

On the other hand, some interviews showed how the migration of adult males had adversely impacted social events and village life. In some cases, tasks previously performed by adult males were transferred to young boys; in others, women took up traditionally male roles and responsibilities. Whether this had structural impacts on women's social status or other aspects of their well-being are not clear and would need to be investigated further.

A small number of interviewed members of migrant-sending households mentioned difficulties arising from labour shortages in agricultural work. However, from the perspective of families left behind, the

³ Various terms have been used to describe families/households split across locations, including transnational families and stretched families.

⁴ Defined as the important virtue and primary duty of respect, obedience, and care for one's parents and elderly family members. This concept has been invoked to understand relations between migrants and their families in the migration literature recently.

xv impact of migration on the labour allocation for social events appeared to be of greater concern, as it had increased the labour burden of the remaining villagers.

Stages of the migration cycle

The impacts of migration in the short term are almost always a combination of labour depletion and heavy expenditure. This often comes at a time when the family has already suffered setbacks: shocks such as serious illness or the injury of a breadwinner, as well as heavy debts undertaken to cover, for example, education costs, can trigger migration in the first place. For the migrants themselves, the initial period is fraught with uncertainty and risk.

These initial disadvantages, costs and risks are gradually replaced with more prosperity for the migrant and his/her family. The significance of sibling and filial piety-based social capital in managing risks and providing support to lift other family members out of poverty is evident. Taking into account the changes that occur in migrants' experiences over a long period of time, the study suggests it is important to understand how impacts and outcomes occur at various stages of the migration cycle.



Street life in Kyaukpadaung, Mandalay Region. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo





INTRODUCTION

Ethnically diverse and rich in natural resources, Myanmar is the second largest country in South-East Asia. It was the world's largest exporter of rice in the mid-twentieth century, but suffered from economic stagnation, political isolation and extended ethnic conflicts in the following decades. Over the past decade, Myanmar has experienced a marked increase in migration, coinciding with a period of rapid economic growth (Myanmar, Department of Population (DOP), 2015a, 2016b; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2017; World Bank, 2016a). Notwithstanding these challenges, the country has undergone an unprecedented transformation since a process of democratic reform started in 2011. This transformation has brought with it a wide range of foreign aid and loans for social and economic development, and direct investments from other countries. At the same time, migration within and from Myanmar has significantly increased.

Together, internal and international migrants represent 25 per cent of Myanmar's total population. In 2014, almost 9.4 million of the country's 51.5 million population were internal migrants, according to the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census (MPHC, hereinafter, "the Census").¹ The Census further found that 45 per cent of internal migrants moved within their region or state of origin, while 55 per cent moved to a different region or state (DOP, 2016b:21). The Ministry of Labour Immigration and Population estimates that 4.25 million Myanmar migrants live abroad, of whom 70 per cent are in Thailand.² Internal migration has long been a part of Myanmar's demographic landscape. However, rural-to-urban migration has been increasing in recent years as the country's economy diversifies away from agriculture and towards other sectors, such as industry and services. A similar pattern of increased mobility following periods of development has been observed in other countries in the region, including Viet Nam.³

Myanmar's migrants are primarily poor, low-skilled individuals seeking to improve long-term prospects for themselves and their families. Past projects supported by the Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) have shown that interconnected structural and social factors, including rural poverty, lack of viable employment opportunities, income gaps between countries, environmental risks, climatic shocks and conflicts, are key drivers of migration.⁴ While migration is a crucial part of development, its ability to reduce poverty at the household level is contingent upon the effective management of the multiple risks and hardships faced by migrant households. Migration from rural areas to cities or industrial zones within Myanmar can be highly risky in the absence of low-cost housing, accessible services and social protection. In the long term, the benefits of migration can offset hardships and downward slides into poverty by increasing the earnings of migrants and opening up new opportunities for them and their families. However, there is a need for policy to better align with and support their long-term aspirations.

Purpose of the study

This report presents the findings of the research component of the project, "Capitalising Human Mobility for Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Development for Myanmar" (CHIME). Funded by LIFT, the CHIME project was implemented by a consortium composed of Myanmar's Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, the University of Sussex, Metta Development Foundation and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The CHIME study aims to address the lack of research regarding migration and its impacts on development in four geographic areas of Myanmar: Ayeyarwardy Region, Mandalay Region, Rakhine State and Shan State. It was designed to generate evidence on contemporary labour migration patterns and impacts in these four geographic focus areas at the individual, household and community levels.

¹ The previous national census took place in 1983 and recorded a total population of about 35.3 million.

² The Ministry of Labour Immigration and Population considered the census figures as an underestimation of migration and provided a new estimate of 4.25 million Myanmar migrants abroad through backward projection methods (DOP, 2016b).

³ This regional trend has been reported by P.L. Martin and J.E. Taylor (1996:43–62).

⁴ The CHIME study uses the term "migrant" to encompass a variety of statuses, including regular and irregular, forced and voluntary, and trafficked or enslaved, in recognition of the fact that migrants may move in and out of these statuses.

The study explores both the dynamics of labour migration, as well as the links between labour migration, livelihood strategies, poverty and development in Myanmar over time. The research was designed to address four sets of questions:

- (a) What are the migration-related behavioural patterns of migrants and migrant-sending households throughout the entire cycle of migration? How does migration impact on people's perceptions, attitudes and actions as regards their livelihood strategies? What are its disincentivizing effects, if any, on these strategies? How do factors at the household level (e.g. assets, education, gender relations and individual attributes), meso-level (recruitment networks and social networks) and the macro- or contextual level (agroclimatic conditions, markets, policies, history of migration and cultural norms) shape migration patterns and outcomes?
- (b) What are the migration-related intra-family dynamics in terms of gender roles, cultural expectations around the division of labour, resource allocation, education and marriage? What support can be provided to migrant-sending households to address issues of inequity and inequality?
- (c) What are the impacts of migration at the community level? How have community members collectively dealt with these impacts? What support can be provided at the community level towards collective discussions and actions on the consequences of migration? What is the link between migration and structural inequalities within the community? Is there a way for migration to be strategically used to address these inequalities?
- (d) What are the development impacts of migration on migrants and migrant-sending households? What factors shape the patterns of remittance-sending and -spending (including investments), and how do these differ by migrant destination, occupation, class, education, gender and ethnicity? Under what situations does migration become an impediment to development? What elements of development are most likely and which ones are least likely to be enhanced? What are the ways in which policy and support can be enhanced to increase the developmental impacts of migration and address its negative consequences?

These questions prompt a socially embedded and spatial analysis of the decision to migrate that shows how migration is linked to material and social aspirations and illustrates its outcomes. The study explores how the impacts of migration go beyond material dimensions and extends to the sociocultural aspects of the lives and livelihoods of rural people. It also sheds light on how migration brings opportunities for migrants and the families they left behind, but at the same time enumerates the risks involved at its various stages, including debt bondage in the financing of migration, expensive and exploitative migration brokerage, irregular migration, and precarious living and working conditions, including low pay, labour exploitation and the lack of social security in the destination country.

The findings of the study will be used as evidence in communicating with and supporting stakeholders in developing narratives, policies and actions to increase the role of migration in development. Workshops with stakeholders will invite discussions around likely migration scenarios in the four identified geographic areas in relation to regional and national development prospects. Utilizing the study as a communication tool, the CHIME project will assess not only the relevance of integrating mobility perspectives in the various areas of work of development policymakers and practitioners in Myanmar, but also these professionals' interest levels in doing so.

Methodology

CHIME provides a disaggregated picture of who migrates, for what reasons and under what circumstances, to show how social and cultural norms intersect with the migration decision, the employment sectors that migrants enter, the role of intermediaries (including migration brokers), remittance-sending patterns, and the social and economic impacts of migration on migrant-sending households. These insights were made possible by a unique mixed-methods design, including a quantitative household survey and qualitative, in-depth interviews collected in two rounds: the first

between January and March 2017 and the second between May and July 2017. By collecting data in two separate rounds, the CHIME project aimed to capture richer details on the seasonal variations of migration patterns and behaviour, as well as on living standards.

Quantitative household survey

The household survey covered 3,116 households in total.⁵ These households were randomly selected from rural “enumerated areas” randomly sampled by the Department of Population using the master sampling frame. Household and community questionnaires were used to capture both internal and international migration patterns and determinants of decision-making in migration, as well as how these relate to a range of living standards and welfare outcomes: from subjective poverty and food security, to income and asset ownership.

A household questionnaire collected data on individual members of the household, including age, gender and civil status, educational attainment, poverty and food security, labour force status and activity, experiences with migration, migration decision-making, remittances, living standards, and key indicators of development.

A community questionnaire was used to collect broader information about the participating villages – usually from village officials. This questionnaire collected data on the village’s physical infrastructure, villagers’ past experiences with migration, broad economic activities within the village, and past shocks such as floods and droughts.

Qualitative, “in-depth” interviews

The qualitative interviews, conducted with 192 migrant-sending households, provided a deeper understanding of the ways in which migration fits into rural livelihood strategies, what drives it and what its impacts are on migrants and their families. The interviews also provided insights into the ways that families allocate resources and labour, the risks and dynamics involved at different points of the migration experience, and migration outcomes over time. The in-depth interviews complemented data from the quantitative surveys by providing multiple viewpoints from research subjects expressed in their own language and vocabulary, and in their social and cultural contexts.

The qualitative fieldwork also provided researchers the opportunity to observe aspects of migration that could not be quantified, such as social and gender relations, power dynamics, feelings and aspirations, and to obtain information on difficult and sensitive topics that required trust to be built between researchers and respondents.

The study regions and states

The regions and states covered by the study – namely, Ayeyarwady Region, Mandalay Region, Rakhine State and Shan State – were selected to capture a wide range of migration patterns, considering the diverse geographic, agroecological and climatic conditions among them. The combined population of these regions and states accounts for 41.5 per cent of the national population: Ayeyarwady has 6.18 million people (12% of the national population), followed by Mandalay, with around 6.6 million (12%), Shan with 5.82 million (11.3%), and Rakhine with 3.89 million (6.2%).⁶ Among these regions and states, Ayeyarwady has 86 per cent of its population living in rural areas, followed by Rakhine (83%), Shan (76%) and Mandalay (65%).

⁵ See Appendix Table A1 for details of the household survey sample.

⁶ This figure for Rakhine State’s population is composed of both the enumerated population and the estimated population (1,090,000); on the other hand, the analysis in the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census (MPHC) Thematic Report on Migration and Urbanization: Census Report Volume 4-D mainly covers the enumerated population, because Rakhine State was only partially enumerated (around 34 per cent was not enumerated) in the Census: Some populations in three areas of the country were not enumerated. This included an estimate of 1,090,000 persons residing in Rakhine State, 69,800 persons living in Kayin State and 46,600 persons living in Kachin State (see Department of Population (2015) for the reasons that these populations were not enumerated). In total, therefore, it is estimated that 1,206,400 persons [nationwide] were not enumerated in the Census.

Three urban areas – Yangon, Mandalay and Tachileik – were also chosen as sites for conducting in-depth interviews with rural–urban migrants to capture the lived experiences of migrants in the cities.

Ayeyarwady Region (“delta zone”)

Lying between the Bay of Bengal to the west and the Andaman Sea to the east, Ayeyarwady Region shares internal borders with Rakhine State, Bago Region and Yangon Region. The region is commonly known as the “delta zone” due to its location within the Ayeyarwady River delta. It is the third most densely populated region in Myanmar and is mainly populated by people of the Bamar and Kayin ethnicities, with a small minority of Rakhine in the west. Several rivers and streams run through most of the region, while mountains mark its borders with Rakhine State and Bago Region.

Ayeyarwady Region is the “rice bowl” of Myanmar, but the effects of climate change – including water drainage, salt intrusion and flooding – make its communities increasingly vulnerable (World Bank, 2016). Apart from rice, other crops grown in the region include maize and jute. Extensive coastal areas, rivers, lakes and reservoirs make the fishing industry an important producer of food, income and employment, even as fishing communities have also been severely affected by cyclones and climate change (FAO, 2018). According to the Census, a significant proportion of migrants from Ayeyarwady Region (162,704 males and 187,759 females) had moved to Yangon and far outnumbered migrants from other regions and states (DOP, 2016a:36–37).

Mandalay Region (“dry zone”)

Mandalay Region is located in the central part of Myanmar, sharing borders with Sagaing, Bago and Magway Regions, Shan and Kayin States, and Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory. The western and central parts of the region make up a large part of Myanmar’s so-called “dry zone,” with its relatively low rainfall and prolonged dry spells compared with the rest of the country. The main livelihood activities are crop production, including of rice, oilseeds (e.g. sesame and sunflower) and pulses (e.g. chickpeas and pigeon peas). Livestock-rearing is a widespread livelihood activity.

Mandalay Region is the third largest region or state in terms of population, after Yangon and Ayeyarwady. It is the second most densely populated region or state in Myanmar. Majority of people in the region are ethnic Bamar. An important contributor to Myanmar’s economy, Mandalay Region’s economic growth is driven by agriculture, forestry, industry, mining and tourism, and has attracted both international and internal migrants. The region has a large Chinese immigrant population (Shannon and Farrelly, 2014). According to the Census, Mandalay is also an important migrant-sending region, especially for internal migrants. Roughly half (48%) of Myanmar’s internal migrants who come from Mandalay migrate within the region, 14 per cent to Yangon and 13 per cent to Shan. Mandalay has a slightly positive net migration rate, which means that there are slightly more people moving in than people moving out of the region.

Rakhine State (“coastal zone”)

Situated on Myanmar’s western coast, Rakhine State forms part of Myanmar’s international border with Bangladesh and has internal borders with Chin State and Magway, Bago and Ayeyarwady Regions. The state has high levels of poverty, weak infrastructure and few employment opportunities. The rural population depends on fishing, aquaculture and subsistence farming (Oliver and Aung, 2014). Poverty in Rakhine State is exacerbated by natural disasters and prolonged displacement resulting from communal violence.

Buddhist Rakhine are the majority ethnic group in the state, while a significant Muslim minority are likely to make up most of the uncounted/unenumerated 1.09 million people in the Census of 2014.⁷ According to the Census, Rakhine State has a negative net migration rate, with more people moving out of Rakhine State than people moving in.

⁷ The total population of Rakhine State included 2,098,807 people who were enumerated and the estimated 1,090,000 people who were not enumerated in the Census (DOP, 2015b).

Shan State (“upland zone”)

Shan State, which lies in the eastern part of Myanmar, is the country’s largest region or state in terms of land area, occupying almost a quarter of the country’s total territory. Due to its large size, it is commonly divided into three areas, namely, Northern Shan, Eastern Shan and Southern Shan, whose principal cities are Lashio, Kungtung and Taunggyi, respectively. Shan State is bordered by China to the north-east, Lao People’s Democratic Republic to the east and Thailand to the south-east; Kachin State to the north and Sagaing Region to the north-west; Mandalay Region and Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory to the west; and Kayah State and Kayah State to the south. Shan State is one of Myanmar’s most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions or states (UNDP, 2015) and includes five of the country’s six ethnic minority self-administered areas.

Both subsistence and cash cropping are prominent features of Shan State’s agricultural economy. Common crops include rice, pigeon peas, sunflowers, potatoes, beans, chillies, fruits, vegetables and tea (MIMU and PSF, 2016:58). The state has historically been an important source of timber and metals and, as part of the Golden Triangle, has been a major producer of opium and methamphetamines. Despite its richness in natural resources, Shan State’s rural population experiences relatively high rates of poverty and malnutrition (UNDP, 2013). According to the Census, geographic and cultural proximity have made both Thailand and China the top destinations for international migrants from Shan State, particularly those from areas along international borders that have strong cultural, historical and economic connections with these neighbouring countries (MIMU and PSF, 2016:33). The Census also shows that Shan State has a positive net migration rate.

Internal urban destinations

The Census reveals that roughly 30 per cent of Myanmar’s population lives in urban areas. Half of the urban population is concentrated in three large cities, namely, Yangon (5.2 million), Mandalay (1.2 million) and Nay Pyi Taw (1.16 million) (DOP, 2016b:xii). As the largest city in Myanmar, Yangon is the major destination for internal migrants, especially from the neighbouring Ayeyarwady and Bago Regions (DOP, 2016a:26), and represents approximately 35 per cent of the total urban population (DOP, 2016a:6). After Yangon, Mandalay – with its four industrial zones – is the second most important centre of industrial development (DOP, 2016b:22), attracting large numbers of migrant workers from other states and regions, particularly, Sagaing and Magway Regions, and Shan State (DOP, 2016a:35). Certain towns, including Tachileik in Shan State, also attract large numbers of migrants due to the presence of booming cross-border economic zones (DOP, 2016a:5 and 34).

Where CHIME adds value

There have been several major studies on the migration situation in Myanmar. Prominent among these are the ongoing World Bank’s Qualitative Social and Economic Monitoring of Livelihoods (QSEM) Series,⁸ which has been tracking economic and social transitions in Myanmar since 2012, covering multiple regions in each round. The studies show radical transformations in a country characterized by increasing livelihood diversification and migration, devolution of governance systems, and increasing availability of credit facilities and changes in labour dynamics in rural areas, with wages and terms of employment shifting in favour of workers. They show that migration is not merely a household coping strategy, but an activity that is increasingly being undertaken to build capital or diversify household income. Changes in migration patterns are analysed in terms of the assessment of economic risks, opportunities and returns. The QSEM Series also notes that the benefits of these positive changes are not shared equally by all and some, including women, the landless and youth, continue to experience barriers to social inclusion.

⁸ The World Bank Qualitative Social and Economic Monitoring Of Livelihood (QSEM) Series comprise of the following: Round One Report (2012), Round Two Report (2013), Round Three Report (2013), Round Four Report (2014), Round Five Report: “Livelihoods and social change in rural Myanmar” (2016), and a thematic study, “A country on the move: Domestic migration in two regions of Myanmar” (2016).

The research findings presented in this report corroborate previous studies on migration and development in many ways, and add value in the form of significant insights into the following themes: social exclusion and how it intersects with migration; migration brokerage and precarious work; the social drivers of migration; investment in education among the extremely poor; filial piety and “stretched” families (i.e. families who are stretched geographically); the spatial dynamics of livelihood strategies, of which migration is a critical part; and, finally, the temporalities or the effects of migration over time. These key themes are introduced very briefly below and although the report is not rigidly structured around them, they are evident throughout.

Social exclusion and migration

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines social exclusion as “a state of poverty in which individuals cannot access the living conditions which would enable them both to satisfy their essential needs (food, education and health, etc.) and participate in the development of the society in which they live.”⁹ The CHIME study seeks to deepen the understanding of lived experiences of social exclusion in rural and urban areas and sheds light on strategies employed to cope with such exclusion, including migration.

Migration brokerage and precarious work

Brokerage is ever-present in migrant labour markets and has been interpreted as occupying the “middle space” between migrants and the State, helping migrants navigate complex immigration regimes, acting as an extension of the State, which seeks to outsource border control and collude with employers to cheapen and commoditize migrant labour. It is increasingly recognized that an understanding of contemporary migration is not complete without an understanding of the mediating structures that facilitate and constrain it. The CHIME study yields insights into hitherto undocumented phenomena, including migration brokerage, precarious work, and the drivers and impacts of these.

Social drivers of migration

The CHIME study highlights the enormous significance of social drivers of migration and how closely they are intertwined with economic drivers, including a desire to change one’s status of work, specifically, away from repetitive and physically-demanding work often found in rural areas. Other major studies on migration, such as the Young Lives Project,¹⁰ which tracks migrants’ aspirations, have also noted the importance of such factors. Sentiments that commonly crop up during fieldwork were a desire to “not work under the sun” or “in the mud” and aspirations to wear “fashionable” clothes and hairstyles. Changing the social status of one’s family is also a driver of migration, and going into initial debt to finance migration, to be able to send remittances home, is perceived as more respectable than staying and having to borrow repeatedly from a local moneylender to help make ends meet.

Education

While the relationship between migration and education have been well researched, the literature is mainly concerned with showing that migrants are, on average, better educated than the populations that they come from. It also shows that migration may be undertaken to support the education of the migrant himself/herself and/or other members of the family. Particularly striking in the Myanmar context are the huge sacrifices made by extremely poor families to invest in education. The interviews yield compelling evidence that siblings support each other’s migration through personal sacrifices – for example, by younger siblings temporarily pulling out of school to release funds for the eldest to migrate; the eldest, working abroad, then cut backs on his/her own consumption to be able to send

⁹ ILO, in: UNESCO, “Exclusion”, webpage (New York, UNESCO, 2017). Available from www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/exclusion

¹⁰ Young Lives Project is a research project coordinated by a team at the UK Department of International Development and the University of Oxford. The study has been studying childhood poverty by tracing 12,000 children in four countries, namely, Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam since 2000, and collecting data about those children’s material and social environments, as well as their perspectives and aspirations for their lives and the future.

money home to ensure that the younger siblings can go back to school. These sacrifices indicate a strong belief in the potential of education to deliver positive outcomes for the family. This contrasts with the disillusionment with education among the extremely poor seen in parts of the world where there is high unemployment among educated youth – as such, simply having an education is perceived as not enough to secure a good job, as personal connections, for example, are also essential.

Spatial dynamics of livelihood strategies and “stretched” families

The research paints a picture of multilocal or “stretched” families¹¹ where migrants and family members are not only working towards shared goals for the household as a unit, but also pursuing individual strategies for self-development, especially in the case of younger generations, who may aspire to move away from traditional occupations.

Sibling relationships and filial piety

Expressions of filial piety¹² and obligations of children to their parents – with migration as a way of supporting parents in times of difficulty or old age – are commonplace in the interviews. Striking in the accounts of migrants and the families they have left behind is how migrants also support their siblings and other family members back home, going beyond the support given to parents by their migrant children that is often assumed in so-called “household models” of migration and remittances. In other words, the cultural context in Myanmar challenges analytical frameworks based on Western notions of family and reciprocity, which rarely include filial piety and mutual support between siblings.

Temporalities in migration

The impacts of migration in the short term are almost always a combination of: (a) for the migrant-sending country, labour force depletion and heavy expenditure on border control; and, (b) for the migrant-sending family, heavy expenditure on migration brokers, official documents and travel costs. Migration is often undertaken at a time when the family has already suffered a financial setback: a shock such as a serious illness or injury of a breadwinner, or a heavy debt incurred for the education of a child can trigger migration. For the migrant himself/herself, the initial period is fraught with uncertainty and risk, due both to the practices that brokers engage in to evade border control and the unwelcoming nature of Myanmar’s urban areas and destination countries, which are keen to import cheap labour but are unable to provide decent jobs and secure living conditions.

These initial disadvantages, costs and risks are gradually replaced with more prosperity for migrants and his/her family – debts may be repaid, the family’s food security improves, siblings are educated, elderly parents are cared for and the social standing of the family rises. The significance of sibling-based and filial piety-based social capital in managing risks and providing support to lift other family members out of poverty is evident. International migrants with more skills and/or in destinations with better-paying jobs in China, Malaysia and Thailand, and internal migrants engaged in skilled factory work in the city can effect these changes for the wider family faster. For those trapped in poorly paid jobs at the bottom of production chains or rural enterprise, change may be slow or imperceptible. However, even such migration arguably prevents further downward slides into poverty by reducing the demand for food and other resources among the family left behind.

Gender

While it is difficult to say on the basis of cross-sectional research whether migration has resulted in a transformation of gender roles or changes in the division of labour and assets within households, it is clear that migration opens up opportunities for women. Interviews from Ayeyarwady Region

¹¹ Various terms have been used to describe families/households split across geographic locations, including “transnational families” and “stretched families.”

¹² Filial piety is defined as the important virtue and primary duty of respect, obedience and care for one’s parents and elderly family members. This concept has been invoked to understand relations between migrants and their families in recent migration literature.

suggest that women's migration may be overtaking the migration of men. This phenomenon may be due to industrial zones in the capital city, Yangon, having created plenty of job opportunities for women whose families are struggling to manage financially by working their land or engaging in rural employment. Young females from Ayeyarwady Region are more likely to work in the garment and textile industries, where jobs are regarded as safe and decent by their families. Women and girls who have worked in the cities may enjoin their sisters or peers from their villages to work in the same factories. Through their social networks, more young females are enabled to migrate out of their villages to the cities.

Report summary, by chapter

Chapter 1 draws on the quantitative research (i.e. the household survey) to show migration patterns and interregional similarities and differences among the four study areas and considers how migration dynamics vary according to area of origin and destination category (local versus international). The chapter is divided into three parts: section 1 provides an overview of migration patterns identified by the study; section 2 considers the demographic characteristics of migrants and their households; and section 3 examines the employment status and types of work undertaken by migrants both prior to migration and at destination.

Chapter 2 delves into the findings of both the household survey and the in-depth interviews to explore the drivers and enablers of migration. The chapter is divided into two sections: the first outlines the household survey findings on the frequently cited reasons behind the decision to migrate and, to capture the deeper realities of these migration motivations, elaborates on the survey findings through the presentation of case studies from the in-depth interviews. The second part offers insights into the factors that enable migration, including how people obtain and use relevant migration-related information and how households finance migration. It discusses the costs related to migration and how the ability of would-be migrants and their families to cover these costs influences where they migrate and how.

Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the findings of the household survey on the remittance-sending behaviour of migrants, as reported by sending households, and examines the potential impact of migration on household welfare. The chapter is divided into five parts: parts 1 and 2 outline CHIME study findings relating to remittance-sending incidence and remittance amounts, while part 3 presents data on the means or methods by which migrants transfer remittances and shows significant differences between internal and international remittances. The chapter closes with an analysis of the data relating to remittance use and discusses some of the complexities involved in understanding the relationship between remittances and household welfare.

Chapter 4 offers a detailed analysis of precarity and the temporalities of migration by drawing on the richly textured accounts contained in the in-depth interviews. It finds that precarity exists at all stages of migration and in everyday life, but also that many migrants benefit both economically and socially from migration. The chapter examines migration experiences in the short term, followed



Harvest time near Nyaung U, Mandalay Region.
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by longer-term impacts and changes over time. By providing more detailed information on the changes experienced by migrants and their households over time, the CHIME study makes a case for an understanding of migration impacts and outcomes throughout the entire migration cycle – or, in other words, through a “temporality lens.”

The report ends with a summary of the main findings of the CHIME study, organized around key themes. These revisit the regionally specific nature of migration trends in Myanmar which, taken together, show that both positive and negative interactions between migration and development can take place, especially insofar as development includes not only economic growth, but also improvements in quality of life. Understanding the nature of migration and the context in which it takes place are vital, and it is important that policymakers intervene to harness migration’s beneficial effects and mitigate its negative consequences.



Selling vegetables on the streets of Lashio, Shan State.
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CHAPTER I

Migration trends: who, where and what type of work



Making traditional lacquer ware at a workshop in Nyaung U, Mandalay Region. © Menta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

The introduction outlined the study's aim to explore the state of labour migration in Myanmar and its linkages with livelihood strategies, poverty alleviation and development in general. Chapter I lays the foundations for this endeavour by establishing the complex dynamics of migration in and from Myanmar, as captured in the household survey. The chapter considers how these dynamics vary according to area of origin and destination category (local versus international).

Section I provides an overview of migration patterns identified by the study. The findings show that one in four surveyed households has a migrant, and that almost three quarters of migration is internal. There is a low incidence of return, highlighting a trend towards strong net out-migration from rural Myanmar in recent

years. Nevertheless, data on return migrants (or, simply, “returnees”) shows the persistence of traditional seasonal migration patterns, particularly in Mandalay Region, where majority of returnees are located.

Section 2 considers the demographic characteristics of migrants and their households. The findings indicate that migrants are generally young (usually in their 20s) and 60 per cent male. The nuanced relationship between land ownership and migration is discussed, and the correlation between education and migration is sketched.

Section 3 examines the employment status and types of work undertaken by migrants both prior to migration and after reaching their destinations. More than half of the migrants captured in the survey were not in paid work prior to migration, which suggests that a lack of economic opportunities is a strong driver of migration. Overall, migrants are employed in more diverse sectors at their destinations – yet there is also a tendency for migrants to remain in their pre-migration employment sector. A general trend that holds among migrants from across the different areas of origin is that the ability to find stable employment at their respective destinations.

While this chapter outlines discernible patterns concerning migration within and from Myanmar, it also demonstrates the complexities of the country’s migration dynamics. To begin to address these complexities, Chapter 2 goes further to explore the drivers and enablers of migration.

1.1. Patterns of migration

1.1.1. Volume of out-migration

Out-migration from the surveyed regions and states is prevalent and widespread. Approximately a quarter of the households surveyed have at least one current migrant. However, different patterns emerge at the regional level. For example, more than a third of households in Mandalay Region have a member who is currently a migrant (Table 1) – higher than the national figure. In Ayeyarwady, the figure is around a fifth of households.¹ Of the households surveyed in round 2 of the data collection, almost 8 per cent had a member who had become a migrant in the intervening months since round 1 was conducted.

The survey data provides some evidence of returns. The most significant result was in Mandalay, where around 10 per cent of households indicated having a returnee household member within the past 12 months. Returns were less common in other locations, as discussed further in Section 1.4.

Table 1: Households with current and return migrants by surveyed region/state

Households with migrants	Ayeyarwady (N = 860)	Mandalay (N = 840)	Rakhine (N = 779) ^a	Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas) ^b (N = 319)
Number of households with current migrants ^c	163	303	199	72
Percentage of households with current migrants (%)	19	36	26	22
Number of households with return migrants ^d	29	84	22	15
Percentage of households with return migrants (%)	3	10	4	5

¹ Note that the percentage of Ayeyarwady households with migrants reported here is similar to the 20 per cent estimated by the World Bank QSEM studies.

Note: Refer to Table A1 in the Appendix for a breakdown of the sample per by region/state and by data collection round.

^a A total of 519 Rakhine households were interviewed in both rounds of data collection; the total N = 776 excludes the additional 260 Rakhine households that were interviewed in late round 1 (but not in round 2). (See further details of the households covered in the two data collection rounds in the Appendix section.)

^b In Shan State, access to randomly sampled villages was hugely restricted due to security reasons. Most of the household data from Shan State was obtained from households in Taunggyi District in Southern Shan, and some from Kentung and Tachileik Townships in Eastern Shan. The data should, thus, not be interpreted to represent the entire Shan State.

^c There were 260 Rakhine households later added in round 1 that were not included in round 2. (See further details of the households covered in the two data collection rounds in the Appendix section.)

^d The survey collected the data of migrants who had returned to their households within the last ten years. Questions on return migrants were only asked during data collection round 2, which, for Rakhine, excluded 260 households that were only interviewed in round 1.

1.1.2. Migration destinations

People migrate to a range of destinations depending on several factors, but especially region or state of origin, and gender. In the survey, the vast majority (74%) of all migrants moved to internal destinations (Table 2). This prominence of internal migration is likewise observed at the individual regional/state level, except in the case of Rakhine State, where results show an almost even split between internal and international migration. The vast majority of migrant women moved to internal destinations (87%). Men (35%) were more likely than women (13%) to move to international destinations, but still preferred internal destinations overall (65%).

Table 2: Proportions of internal and international migrants by gender and region/state of origin

Destination category	Region/State of origin														
	Ayeyarwady			Mandalay			Rakhine			Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas)			All		
	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All
Internal (%)	84	94	89	72	89	78	39	74	51	88	84	86	65	87	74
International (%)	16	6	11	28	11	22	61	26	49	12	16	14	35	13	26

Note: M is for Male, F is for Female

The qualitative, in-depth interviews add to this picture by showing that migration routes, durations and destinations are constantly subject to change. Some migrants alternate between internal and international migration. In other words, migration can morph into each other, creating a complex landscape of mobility.

Internal destinations

Overall, internal migrants most commonly move within their region or state of origin. Migrants from Mandalay Region, Rakhine State and Shan State, specifically, are most likely to move within their respective regions or states of origin and most likely to move to Yangon Region next. In contrast, migrants from Ayeyarwady are the only group most likely to move outside their region or state of origin (and, specifically, to Yangon Region), and are most likely to move within Ayeyarwady next. The popularity of Yangon as a destination for migrants from Ayeyarwady is likely influenced by the geographical proximity of the two regions, which share a border. Individuals from townships close to big cities such as Mandalay and Yangon are less likely than people from faraway townships to migrate, possibly because diverse economic opportunities are already available to those who live close to the cities.

Yangon is the most popular destination for migrants captured in this study, with 36 per cent of all internal migrants reporting to have moved to Yangon (Table 3). This suggests that the popularity of Yangon as a migrant destination (as highlighted in the 2014 QSEM report)² is now well established. In Yangon, migrants are mostly absorbed in Hlaing Thar Yar, Shwe Pyi Thar and other industrial zones.

² Summary findings are available on the World Bank QSEM homepage: www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar/brief/qualitative-social-and-economic-monitoring-of-livelihoods-qsem-series

Another interesting point to note is that Kachin State was the third major destination of internal migrants from Rakhine State, which is rather unexpected both because of the distance between the two states and because Kachin State is generally not a popular migrant destination within Myanmar.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of internal migrants by origin and destination

Destination region/state	Region/State of origin			
	Ayeyarwady (%)	Mandalay (%)	Rakhine (%)	Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas) (%)
Ayeyarwady	23	1	1	0
Mandalay	3	43	1	7
Rakhine	0	1	46	0
Shan	0	9	1	66
Yangon	65	28	36	13
Kachin	0	5	11	0
Others	9	13	4	14
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

Note: Not all columns actually total 100 per cent due to rounding.

The survey results suggest that would-be internal migrants make decisions about destinations based on both: (a) proximity and (b) the perceived availability of economic opportunities. However, some destination choices cannot be explained by these factors – either alone or at all. This includes the overrepresentation of migrants from Rakhine State in China and Kachin State (Table 4; Rakhine, despite being far from China, has a considerable number of migrants there). Migrants' decisions about migration destinations are also shaped by word-of-mouth communication through social networks and, in the case of international migration, labour intermediaries. (Word-of-mouth communication and other enablers of migration are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.)

In Focus: Diversity of migration destinations in the four surveyed villages in Mandalay Region

Each of the four villages near Mandalay where in-depth interviews took place reported a different major destination. Migrant destinations reported in the four surveyed villages varied due to the peculiar influences exerted by their respective geographic locations, the associated availability of economic opportunities and the existence of established links between the villages and specific destinations.

- Village 1 has a relatively large proportion of international migrants in destinations such as China, Malaysia, Republic of Korea and Thailand. Migrants are usually recruited via intermediaries, who may be brokers or experienced migrants who have previously worked in these countries. Individuals from this village also migrate to a range of internal destinations, including the cities of Yangon, Bagan and Mandalay, and Shan and Kachin States. Many of the current migrants have prior internal migration experience.
- In village 2, the primary migration destination is China. Migration is enabled by social networks, as opposed to migration brokers, as there is an established history of migration between these locations. Other individuals would commute for daily wage labour and schooling because of the proximity of village 2 to Mandalay.
- There is very little international migration from village 3 because internal migration (i.e. to other parts of Myanmar) is facilitated and sufficiently lucrative. Social networks help create streams of rural–urban migration to Yangon and Bago, where migrants from this village have established about 80 teashops. The teashop owners recruit young workers from the village, which influences the choice of destination of individuals from the community who intend to migrate. Additionally, young women have started migrating for garment production and

other work in Yangon, while older women continue to commute by local train to nearby villages on a daily basis. The older women are engaged in the weeding or clearing of farms – traditionally been female occupations – along with caring responsibilities at home.

- (d) Migration from village 4 is relatively uncommon; when it does take place, it mainly involves migration to the cities of Mandalay and Yangon, and, to a lesser extent, Thailand and Malaysia. Some seasonal rural–rural migration to the mountainous areas surrounding the village has been noted. Economic opportunities in these areas involve wood-cutting and charcoal-making, which are paid better than local casual work.

International destinations

The major international destinations for migrants from Myanmar are neighbouring countries in East and South-East Asia. Thailand hosts the greatest percentage of international migrants from Myanmar, where roughly 2.3 million Myanmar migrants constitute about 76 per cent of Thailand's migrant workforce (IOM and ACRM, 2013:1). The second most popular international destination is Malaysia, which hosts over 600,000 Myanmar migrants according to the estimate in the Census. In contrast, the most popular international destination for migrants captured in the CHIME survey is Malaysia, followed by Thailand (Table 4). Overall, however, the survey results echo the established prominence of these two destinations, which, together, host more than 80 per cent of Myanmar migrants abroad.

Table 4: Destinations of international migrants by region/state of origin

Destination country	Region/State of origin				
	Ayeyarwady	Mandalay	Rakhine	Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas)	All
Bangladesh	0	0	4	0	4
China	1	7	16	0	24
Malaysia	2	69	58	0	129
Republic of Korea	1	11	2	0	14
Singapore	4	0	1	0	5
Thailand	16	18	61	17	112
Others	2	3	5	0	10
Total	26	108	147	17	297

China and Singapore also host considerable numbers (4.6% and 3.9% of all Myanmar migrants abroad, respectively) of Myanmar migrants (ILO, 2015:2; IOM, 2016:2). Two thirds of Myanmar migrants in China captured in the survey are from Rakhine State, which is particularly noteworthy considering the distance between them. However, the small size of the Shan State survey sample – and the fact that the sample did not cover the northern part of the state – means that the study cannot make generalizations about which region or state of origin of Myanmar migrants in China is the most represented. According to the Census, the greatest number of Myanmar migrants in China come from Shan State (42,490), followed by migrants from Mandalay Region (8,239), Rakhine State (7,833) and Kachin State (6,137). In contrast to the Census data, all international migrants from Shan State captured in the CHIME survey migrated to Thailand. This discrepancy may be due to the research team's lack of access, owing to security concerns, to northern Shan State, where much of the migration from the state to China comes from.

1.1.3. Duration of stay

The Census found that more than two thirds of Myanmar migrants living abroad migrated within the past five years of the census year. Correspondingly, CHIME survey data shows that 80 per cent of the migrants (both internal and international) in the sample migrated within the past five years of the CHIME study. The survey data suggests that international migrants were likely to have left their region or state of origin more than a year prior, whereas majority of internal migrants moved within the past year. A possible reason for the lower percentage of international migration from Myanmar within a year prior to the survey was Myanmar's year-long ban on deploying workers to Malaysia. The ban came into effect in December 2016 and was lifted in January 2018 and was in place at the time that survey data was collected. The available data does not shed light on whether Myanmar migrants tend to stay in one migration destination or move around multiple destinations during their time abroad.

1.1.4. Return migration

The number of returnees within the past ten years (= 164; see Table 5), as reflected in the survey, is low compared to the total number of current migrants surveyed (= 1,555).

Table 5: Return migrant population by region/state of origin and gender

Return migrant type	Region/State of origin										
	Mandalay		Rakhine		Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas)		Ayeyarwady		All		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M and F
International returnees (n (%))	23 (34)	3 (12)	7 (50)	2 (20)	0	0	0	0	30 (29)	5 (8)	35 (21)
Internal returnees (n (%))	44 (66)	22 (88)	7 (50)	8 (80)	6 (100)	10 (100)	18 (100)	14 (100)	75 (71)	54 (92)	129 (79)
Total (n (%))	67 (100)	25 (100%)	14 (100)	10 (100)	6 (100)	10 (100)	18 (100)	14 (100)	105 (100)	59 (100)	164 (100)

The survey data on returns shows that most returnees are returning from internal destinations, and that most, if not all, internal returnees are returning from within their own respective regions. The greatest numbers of returnees are from Mandalay and Ayeyarwady Regions, where returns are influenced by the seasonal nature of the agricultural economic opportunities that migrants pursued. However, migrants from these regions give different reasons for return in the survey. Ayeyarwady returnees, for example, speak about returning due to homesickness. In contrast, returnees to Mandalay – who are generally much older than Ayeyarwady returnees – say they return when the agricultural season has ended. Triangulating these findings with the in-depth interviews in Mandalay suggest that this may indicate that older migrants are migrating for more traditional forms of agricultural work, whereas younger migrants are taking up a wider variety of jobs – short-term farm and non-farm work in urban areas and neighbouring countries.

The seasonal migration patterns more commonly observed among migrants from Mandalay Region are apparent in the frequency of their migration in the last five years preceding the study. Whereas higher percentages of migrants from Rakhine and Ayeyarwady Regions indicated being first-time migrants (82% and 80%, respectively), only 65 per cent of migrants from Mandalay reported being such, and 23 per cent reported having migrated two to four times. The remaining 12 per cent of migrants from Mandalay migrated five times or more in the five years prior, suggesting a seasonal, circular and highly

17 mobile nature of the livelihood practices among them. Interestingly, migrants with multiple migration experiences are represented not only in the agricultural sector among internal migrants, but are seen in different employment sectors, among both internal and international migrants, and among both males and females. This suggests that through seasonal and circular migration practices, migrants spin out of the routine of seasonal agricultural migration, ending up in other employment sectors and sometimes abroad, where they would establish less seasonal and longer-term migration.

1.2. Demographic characteristics of migrants and their households

1.2.1. Gender, age and household composition

Around 59 per cent of the migrants identified by the survey are male. However, the gender composition of migrants varies substantially across the surveyed regions and states of origin. In Shan State, for example, female migrants outnumber male migrants. In Ayeyarwady Region, there are similar volumes of male and female migration overall, with only a slightly higher percentage of female internal migration than male internal migration.³

Table 6: Migrants by destination category, region/state of origin, and gender

Destination	Region/State of origin									
	Ayeyarwady		Mandalay		Rakhine		Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas)		All	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
International (n (%))	19 (73)	7 (27)	87 (81)	21 (19)	122 (83)	25 (17)	6 (35)	11 (65)	234 (79)	64 (21)
Internal (n (%))	101 (47)	115 (53)	220 (57)	169 (43)	78 (52)	73 (48)	43 (43)	58 (57)	442 (52)	415 (48)
All destinations	120 (50)	122 (50)	307 (62)	190 (38)	200 (67)	98 (33)	49 (42)	69 (58)	676 (59)	479 (41)

The proportion of female international migration is substantially lower than male international migration in all areas of origin, except Shan State. However, there is not a huge difference between the proportions of female internal migration and male internal migration in individual regions or states of origin. Women are overwhelmingly internal migrants – only 21 per cent have migrated outside of Myanmar. This finding is significant given the dominance of international migration in the policy discourse on labour migration in South-East Asia.

There is a strong correlation between youth and male gender and the decision to migrate. The survey found that migrants are young – generally in their twenties – compared to the wider population. They are likely to be leaving parents behind, but less likely to have already started their own families. Correspondingly, the survey suggests that heads of households are less likely to migrate than their younger relatives, such as sons, daughters and grandchildren. These age-related patterns of migration are consistent across the surveyed areas of origin and with the study's findings regarding the average age of migrants at the time of migration and their reasons for migrating (i.e. that work is the primary reason for migrating). The in-depth interviews built on these findings by outlining the various types of migration observed within each household. Multiple siblings might migrate for different types of work but are working towards fulfilling shared family goals.

³ These results contrast with the 2016 World Bank study of the Ayeyarwady and Magway Regions, in which only a third of surveyed migrants from Ayeyarwady Region were women.

1.2.2. Land ownership

The relationship between land and migration is nuanced. Migrants from rural areas come from households that own agricultural land of varying sizes. Both land ownership and landlessness correlate with migration, but these patterns vary across the surveyed regions and states of origin.

- (a) In Mandalay Region, households with agricultural land are more likely to produce internal migrants, whereas landless households are more likely to produce international migrants.
- (b) In Rakhine State, households with small agricultural landholdings migrate more actively, both internally and internationally, than either landless households or households possessing large landholdings. This may suggest that households with more land are not subjected to the same migration drivers as small farmers. For example, large landholders have less reason to migrate because they can make a comfortable living in their region or state of origin. Alternatively, it could be that households with more land find it difficult to replace family labour with hired labour, and so household members are required to stay and work on the family's land rather than pursue work elsewhere. Individuals from landless families, in contrast, may not have the financial means to migrate.
- (c) In Ayeyarwady Region, migration incidence is low among households with large agricultural landholdings. Members of such households are less likely to migrate than members of households with small landholdings or households that are landless altogether. This apparent higher mobility among individuals from landless or small farming households may explain the concerns around agricultural labour supply in this region. The ability of individuals from poorer households to migrate is also linked to the proximity of Ayeyarwady to Yangon, which makes the cost of migration via this route relatively low.

1.2.3. Education

The CHIME survey suggests that migrants tend to have a relatively high level of education compared to those who do not migrate. Overall, the survey found that individuals who have completed primary education were more than twice as likely to migrate, either internally or internationally, compared to individuals who have not. This pattern is consistent across the surveyed areas of origin. Migrants (both internal and international) from Mandalay Region, for example, are typically individuals who have completed middle school. In the same region, non-migrants typically have completed primary education at most. These findings are in line with existing evidence that migration aspirations tend to be more common among individuals with higher levels of education. Additionally, the survey results indicate that migrants recognize the importance of some secondary education for successful migration.

Interesting patterns also emerge in comparing levels of education among internal and international migrants. International migrants are more likely than internal migrants to have either at least some middle or high school education. This trend is most prominent in Mandalay and Ayeyarwady Regions. However, individuals with the highest level of education (i.e. higher education) are far more likely to migrate internally than to migrate internationally or remain at home.

1.3. Work sector and mobility

1.3.1. Economic activity prior to migration

Levels of employment across work sectors are similar across the surveyed regions and states of origin: About 62 per cent of individuals who were in work within one year prior to migration were employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (fishing and fish processing), while the remaining 38 per cent were spread across a range of other sectors. About half of those who were not in work prior to migration were in school, corroborating the established link between education and migration. Migrants who did unpaid family work prior to migration are overwhelmingly female, and there is a particularly high

number of such workers from Ayeyarwady Region. A smaller percentage of migrants (15%) were out of work prior to migration because they could not find work, although this figure is much higher (28%) in Rakhine State (Table 7).

Table 7: Occupational status of migrants prior to migration

Occupational status prior to migration		Region/State of origin			
		Ayeyarwady (n)	Mandalay (n)	Rakhine (n)	Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas) (n)
In paid work	Work sector				
	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	49	173	63	24
	Other services	18	34	13	6
	Construction	3	23	7	1
	Manufacturing	4	15	2	0
	Wholesale and retail	3	6	2	0
	Transportation	0	5	1	3
	Hospitality	4	3	0	2
	Education	1	5	1	1
	Mining and quarrying	0	6	1	0
	Others	2	10	4	0
	Subtotal	84	280	94	37
Not in paid work	Reason for not being in paid work				
	In school	78	99	65	59
	Engaged in unpaid labour at home (domestic work), on the family farm or in the family firm	64	32	37	14
	Looked for work but could not find any	10	39	44	2
	Too young/old to be in the labour force	0	11	9	2
	Other reasons	6	36	4	4
	Subtotal	158	217	159	81
	Total	242	497	253	118

More than half of the migrants captured in the survey were not in paid work prior to migration, which suggests that unemployment⁴ increases the probability of migrating. As such, it appears that a lack of economic opportunities – particularly for individuals who have at least complete primary education or higher – is a driver of migration to both internal and international destinations. Having any job at all reduces the probability that an individual will migrate.

Individuals in manufacturing are more likely to migrate than those who are in agriculture – and when they do, they tend to go abroad rather than stay in Myanmar. The in-depth interviews suggest that this could be because they are underemployed in agriculture or have been doing non-farm work in an internal destination before migrating overseas, where they look for work in manufacturing and processing facilities.

⁴ In this study, unpaid family workers are classified as unemployed, along with other subgroups of respondents “not in paid work” (see Table 7), consistent with definitions set forth by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOL). (See, for instance: MOL, Annual Labour Force Survey 2017 (MOL, Nay Pyi Taw, 2017).)

Farm workers in Myaung Mya, Ayeyarwaddy Region. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

1.3.2. Sectoral mobility through migration

Overall, migrants are employed in more diverse sectors at destination than prior to migration. The sector employing the largest percentage of migrants is “Other services,” which includes all service sectors (e.g. utilities, transport and storage) other than food and accommodation, although the share is a mere 20 per cent. The second largest employment sectors are accommodation/hospitality and food services, and manufacturing. Although the share of Myanmar migrants working in agriculture, forestry and fisheries at destination is significantly lower prior to migration, the sector remains important for migrants, especially for those from Mandalay.

Table 8: Percentage distribution of migrant employment sector at destination⁵

Employment sector	International			Internal			All destinations		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	All (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	All (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	All (%)
Accommodation/hospitality and food services	10	31	14	12	16	14	11	18	14
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	10	9	10	16	12	14	14	11	13
Construction	22	6	19	14	2	8	17	3	12
Manufacturing	19	17	18	6	18	12	12	18	14
Non-accommodation/non-food services	22	20	21	17	23	20	19	22	20
Others ^a	17	17	17	34	29	32	27	27	27

Note: Due to rounding of individual percentages, columns do not always total 100 per cent.

^a These other sectors were not always specified by respondents during the survey.

Female workers are concentrated in the services and manufacturing sectors, particularly in international destinations. In contrast, male migrants tend to engage in physical labour in sectors such as construction and agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Manufacturing is the third most common employment sector for male international migrants, yet it is not a significant employment sector for male internal migrants. This could be because the types of manufacturing work available in international destinations differ from the traditionally female-dominated manufacturing work available in Myanmar (e.g. garments manufacturing).

Overall, there is a tendency for migrants to remain in the same employment sector after migration (Table 9). Migrants who worked in agriculture, forestry and fisheries prior to migration are least likely to do so (26%), followed by those who worked in other service sectors (39%), construction (58%) and manufacturing (75%). However, different patterns emerged for individual regions and states of origin.

⁵ The data in this table includes only migrants whose employment sectors after migration were reported.

Table 9: Cross-sector movement of migrants economically active before migration⁶

At destination Before migration	Accommodation/hospitality and food services	Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	Construction	Manufacturing	Non-accommodation/Non-food services	Others ^a	Total
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	43	74	41	28	47	49	282
Non-accommodation/non-food services	7	5	7	5	25	15	64
Construction	0	2	19	4	5	3	33
Accommodation/hospitality and food services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manufacturing	1	0	0	15	2	2	20
Others	7	0	2	5	4	32	50
Total	58	81	69	57	83	101	449

Note: ^a These “other” work sectors were not always specified by respondents during the survey.

Some 65 per cent of internal migrants from Mandalay Region were employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries prior to migration. However, only 30 per cent of them were employed in these same sectors at destination, with many migrating within just Mandalay itself. Despite many shifting to other work sectors when they migrate, agriculture remains a more important sector of employment for internal migrants from Mandalay than from the other surveyed areas of origin, which typically host far fewer internal migrants employed in the agricultural sector. Both male and female migrants engage in agriculture.

Both internal and international migrants from Rakhine State who worked in agriculture prior to migration tend to pursue work in other sectors at destination. Around half of internal migrants from Rakhine State were employed in agriculture prior to migration, but only six per cent continue to work in this sector at destination. Similarly, the employment of international migrants in agriculture was 70 per cent prior to migration but drops to 10 per cent at destination. Construction (23%) and accommodation/hospitality and food services (19%) are the principal sectors of employment for migrants at international destinations. Among internal migrants, males are most actively employed in mining and quarrying (24%), while women are most likely to work in non-accommodation and non-food services (30%).

The pattern of decline in the proportion of agricultural work done by migrants at destination continued in Ayeyarwady. The rate of employment in agriculture prior to migration was 54 per cent, which drops to 9 per cent at destination. Internal migrants are most likely to work in manufacturing (20%) and non-accommodation and non-food services (17%).

1.3.3. Regularity of employment

Majority of migrants moved into regular employment at destination (Table 10). This pattern is generally consistent across the surveyed areas of origin, with some variation. For example, migrants from Ayeyarwady are more likely to have regular employment at destination than migrants from the other regions or states of origin. In contrast, migrants from Rakhine State are less likely than migrants from other areas of origin to be in regular employment.

⁶ The data in this table includes only migrants whose employment sectors before and after migration were reported. While a few migrants reported working in food services or accommodation prior to migration, none of them reported their work sector at destination.

More international migrants (79%) are able to secure regular employment than internal migrants (69%) (Table 10). The rate of irregular employment at destination is very low for international migrants from Mandalay and Ayeyarwady (1% and 4%, respectively). In stark contrast, 33 per cent of international migrants from Rakhine State are in irregular employment at destination. There is also a relatively high rate of irregular employment for internal migrants from Rakhine State (20%). Another interesting pattern is that the vast majority (81%) of migrants in irregular employment are men.

Table 10: Percentage distribution of migrants by employment status at destination, by region/state of origin

Employment status at destination	Region/State of origin			
	Ayeyarwady (%)	Mandalay (%)	Rakhine (%)	Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas) (%)
Regular employee	82	70	68	62
Irregular employee	12	7	26	13
Own account worker	3	10	3	9
Co-operator of household business	1	2	0	4
Employer	0	2	1	0
Others	2	10	2	13

Note: Due to rounding of individual percentages, columns do not always total 100 per cent.

Importantly, most migrants who were in irregular employment prior to migration moved into regular employment at destination. This pattern is reflected at the regional level, in the case of Mandalay (56%), Ayeyarwady (66%) and Shan State (67%). However, migrants from Rakhine State are less likely than migrants from the other areas of origin to transition from irregular to regular employment at destination (43%), and they are also most likely to take up other forms of employment (such as performance-based ones).

Table 11: Percentage distribution of migrants who were in irregular employment prior to migration, by employment status at destination

Destination region/state	Employment status at destination		
	Regular employment (%)	Irregular employment (%)	Others (%)
Ayeyarwady	66	29	5
Mandalay	56	27	18
Rakhine	43	36	21
Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas)	67	33	0

Note: Due to rounding of individual percentages, columns do not always total 100 per cent.

Crossing a flooded waterway in Nyaung U, Mandalay Region. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo



CHAPTER 2



School children enjoy the rain in Pin Long, Shan State. © Metta Development Foundation 2017 Ko Oo

Drivers and enablers of migration

Having outlined the patterns of migration in Chapter 1, this chapter presents CHIME findings relating to the drivers and enablers of migration. It explores the enormous significance of social drivers of migration and how closely they are intertwined with economic drivers, including a desire to find work away from “grinding drudgery” in rural areas.

The first part of the chapter outlines the household survey findings on frequently cited

reasons shaping migrants' decisions to migrate. In order to capture the complex reality of people's migration motivations and gain a deeper understanding of how migrant families' juggle priorities, worries and aspirations, this chapter elaborates on the survey findings through the presentation of qualitative findings, including several case studies. These case studies indicate that the triggers for migration operate at different levels, be they individual, family/household, village/community, or the wider regional and national levels.

The second part of the chapter offers insights into the factors that enable migration, i.e. the factors that facilitate and make migration possible, including how people obtain and use relevant information to enable their migration. Based on findings from both the household survey and in-depth interviews, this section examines a number of factors that facilitate the movement of people and analyses their impacts. Finally, we discuss the costs related to migration and how the ability of the migrants and their families to cover these costs influences where migrants head to and how. This section also determines the approximate costs for both internal and international migration, and how these costs are being financed.

2.1. Drivers of migration

The survey results suggest that the most common reason for migrating, by far, is the desire for an improvement in employment (and, therefore, income), or secure livelihood opportunities. More than half the total number of responses to the question on the main reasons for migration indicated so. Not only was this the most popular response overall, it was also the most popular response among both men and women, and in all surveyed regions and states, except for Shan State. Importantly, migrants are driven by the prospect of finding a better job and higher income at destination, rather than a need to leave due to a shortage of work in their regions or states of origin. Only in Rakhine State did a sizeable proportion (33%) of migrants report a lack of work at origin.

Table 12: Main reasons for migrating by region or state of origin and gender

Reason for migrating	Ayeyarwady		Mandalay		Rakhine		Southern and Eastern Shan (limited areas)		All surveyed regions or states		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	All
Better work/income	96	99	244	120	166	68	15	32	521	319	840
Family-related reasons	15	24	60	58	40	16	11	22	126	120	246
Desire to live in the city	7	18	61	35	20	13	7	19	95	85	180
Education	19	20	17	32	24	20	23	24	83	96	179
Livelihood losses	7	3	29	16	12	3	0	0	48	22	70
Accustomed to life at destination	4	5	9	12	6	1	2	5	21	23	44
Security reasons	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	3	5	3	8
Flee disaster	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	3	2	5
Others	7	4	57	38	17	15	9	9	90	66	156
Total	155	173	478	312	289	137	70	114	992	736	1,728

Note: Respondents were asked to provide up to three main reasons for migration. As such, the numbers in the "Total" column may exceed the number of migrants in the sample.

Other commonly cited reasons – albeit far less so than better work or income prospects – were “family reasons,” a desire to live in the city and education. Family reasons, including reunification

with a family member at destination and marriage, were commonly cited for both male and female migrants. Such forms of chain migration¹ are commonly used by migrants as part of a strategy to reduce the risks of migration; in this study, they were most prevalent in cases of internal migration. Intra-family disputes were rarely mentioned, which is perhaps not surprising, given that responses were provided by the households rather than the migrants themselves. The desire to live in the city reflects aspirations for modern standards of living. Less common but still notable were livelihood losses, which usually referred to business losses rather than harvest losses or price declines.

The in-depth interviews complement the quantitative survey data by providing detailed qualitative insights regarding the main economic and social reasons for migration, and how these reasons overlap and interweave. The triggers for migration, as illuminated by the in-depth interviews, can be divided into four groups: (a) aspirations for a better life; (b) chronic poverty and debt; (c) indecent and unfair working conditions in rural areas; and (d) shocks and changes. While these triggers are explained separately below, the interviews suggest that, in most cases, they link and combine, creating a cumulative impact that drives migration at varying levels: individual, family/household, village/community, region/state and country.

2.1.1. Aspirations for a better life

One group of drivers include aspirations for a better life, a modern lifestyle and education, as well as opportunities to prove one's worth and find personal and professional fulfilment. In the in-depth interviews, both young and old discussed aspirations for a different, more modern lifestyle – the young for themselves, and older generations for their children, who they hope would escape a life of physically demanding work under the sun. In this context, migration aspirations are formed by future-oriented evaluation and imagination and are informed by comparisons of a wide range of occupations, lifestyles (i.e. agricultural versus modern), places (i.e. urban versus rural), social statuses and social values.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the survey found that migrants are, on average, younger and better educated than the general populations in their regions or states of origin. The in-depth interviews add to this picture by providing further detail regarding the role of education and remittances as drivers of migration, which, in turn, can help realize aspirations for a better life for both the migrant and his/her family members. In some cases, migrants were motivated by better career prospects and the chance to further their own education and. In other cases, decisions to migrate were motivated by a desire to be able to provide remittances to households experiencing extreme deprivation and poverty, thereby enabling younger siblings or children to get an education they otherwise would not be able to access. This pattern demonstrates a strong sense of filial piety and duty towards parents and siblings (a consistent theme in the interviews) and offers compelling evidence of the huge sacrifices made by extremely poor families to invest in their children's education, while siblings also supported each other's education or migration through personal sacrifices. These sacrifices were informed by a belief that investing in education would result in higher incomes, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty and debt, and facilitating upward social mobility.

Case study 1: Aspirations for educated children to have a better life away from the rural village

A 62-year-old woman in Ayeyarwady, with two sons working in Yangon, mentions the reason her sons migrated to Yangon. Her eldest son was able to complete school up to the tenth grade, so she and her husband want their son to seek a better future away from their village. They expect to rely on their children financially in the future.

¹ Chain migration can be defined as a "movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants" (MacDonald and MacDonald, 1964). The term – although neutral and represents a valid sociological construct – has become politically loaded in recent times.

“He told us that he was going to Yangon, as he couldn’t do much here. He couldn’t work under the sun here. They could end up like us, struggling day by day. Some people have told us that our sons didn’t have a strong family bond with us, yet I understand they went to build a better future. How could I not let them go?”

Case study 2: A mother’s pride in her daughter’s modern work environment

A 46-year-old mother with three daughters working at factories in Yangon shares how proud she feels that they are living an urban lifestyle and supporting the family financially. She describes the difference between her daughters’ urban life and the parents’ rural life, even though she has never visited them to see how they actually live.

“They can live there smartly and neatly. Here, we have to work in the muddy fields to earn ourselves a meal. There, they can find a meal [by walking around in] their slippers, flapping as they go. Their slippers are flapping! Here, we have to struggle in the mud.”

Case study 3: Investing in education as a family strategy despite extreme poverty

A 56-year-old Rakhine man has four children and works as a fisherman. The two older children, a son and a daughter, are migrants in Malaysia and Thailand. The third child, a daughter, dropped out of school and now sews clothes to support the family. The youngest child, also a daughter, is taking a distance-learning course at a university and works as a tailor. The father’s work is variable and delivers unpredictable earnings.

“I don’t earn a lot of money from fishing. During this time, the money I earn can’t adequately cover my household’s food expenses. I sometimes have to borrow money at an interest from others.”

The son initially worked with his father as a fisherman, but later decided to migrate because of debt and poverty. The son used money sent by his sister, who was a migrant working in Thailand, to pay a broker to help him move to Malaysia. It took a year before he was settled in his job and earning enough to remit money home. The family spends the remittances mainly on the education of the youngest daughter. According to the father, the son completely agrees with the allocation of money for his sister’s education. The son is happy to make the sacrifice, even if it means delaying marriage, the father said. Education is clearly a priority in this family because they continue to mobilize money to educate their youngest daughter despite their precarious circumstances. From the father’s perspective, education is the route to a better life.

2.1.2. Chronic poverty and debt

That poverty was an important cause for migration came as no surprise, as households from lower economic strata that took part in the household survey were purposively chosen for the in-depth interviews. These qualitative interviews provided more detail on the nature of poverty and social exclusions, their different manifestations and how they are linked to migration.

In the in-depth interviews, debt was mentioned by 136 out of 192 interviewees as a major constraining factor for the household, and migration was often regarded as the only way of releasing the family from debt. Debts were incurred for a variety of reasons: to cope during the lean season, when employment is scarce; cover education and health expenses; and fund migration. Some interviews revealed families borrowing money from multiple sources, including relatives, employers, microfinance institutions, government loans and private money lenders, and attempted to repay their debts through a variety of means.

Many interviewees reported how they had been living “hand to mouth” and struggling to cope with day-to-day expenses. A number of cases also showed how the decision for children to migrate was taken by the family as a whole as a way of mobilizing resources to manage extreme poverty. In the in-depth interviews, many respondents said they started working when they were teenagers or even younger, which is a typical scenario for youth from poorer families in many parts of the world. Some parents received an advance on their wages, effectively bonding the children to their employers. While it is not possible to indicate whether all children were treated well in such cases, one of the interviews with a female respondent was instructive of how migration is sometimes viewed as a duty towards one’s parents, as a way of easing their troubles.

Case study 4: Interlocking disadvantages

A case from Mandalay clearly shows how interlocking disadvantages can compound poverty, resulting in chronic indebtedness, and demonstrates the link with migration in such circumstances. It also shows why families prefer migration over of rural credit schemes as a means to mobilize money.

The respondent is a 47-year-old man with five children. His family has been chronically indebted since he suffered from cardiovascular disease a few years ago. In the past, he made a living by climbing toddy palm trees, working with his wife. He describes how the job was tiresome and that their lives “*were just buried under these palm trees and there was nothing we could do to change it. We couldn’t even go when our mother and father passed away because we couldn’t hire other people to work this job.*” They were able to make a living through palm work as there was a good market for it. However, things took a turn for the worse when he fell sick, due to unaffordable medical treatment. They sold their land to pay for his medical treatment and also had to borrow money at an interest.

In order to help the family overcome their situation, the respondent’s eldest daughter decided to work in Yangon. Both parents were very sad to let her go. He says, “*I cried and cried in bed, saying I couldn’t let my girl go and work there alone.*” Now the respondent’s health situation has improved but he still cannot do strenuous physical work. He is trying to work in brick-making to pay for his medicines, but the medicines cost much more than he can earn. His wife often travels with a group of women from her village by train to nearby villages to weed sesame and beanfields.

2.1.3. Indecent and bonded labour in rural areas

The system of issuing wage advances in exchange is prevalent in the rural areas of some of the surveyed regions. The poor take wage advances, in cash or in kind (e.g. rice), during the lean season in exchange for guaranteeing the lender their labour during peak season planting or harvesting activities. This system provides a certain degree of security for their survival. However, this highly uneven relationship leads to exploitative working conditions. Trapped in a cycle of bonded labour, their desperation exploited by others, respondents revealed the extremely difficult conditions faced by poor and landless villagers. Migration is seen as a key means for the poor to break the cycle of bonded labour and to release themselves from chronic indebtedness.

Consistent with rural employment in developing countries globally, some female respondents noted that they receive lower wages than men. In Myanmar, as elsewhere, there are sharp, culturally determined gender differences in the remuneration for male and female labour for equivalent jobs. These are based on stereotypes of what women and girls are capable of, and what it is socially acceptable for them to be doing. “Women’s work” is typically regarded as lighter by employers (who are often men) and, therefore, deserving of lower wages, even if it is equally or more physically

demanding and highly skilled. These gendered inequalities are seen in labour markets at both origin and destination.

Case study 5: From debt and dishonour to peace of mind

Requesting for wage advances for future work in agricultural fields during the peak season is a common practice in rural Myanmar. Workers are usually trapped in an endless cycle of debt where, because there is no work in the lean season, they take advance payments from “patrons” (i.e. employers) to meet their daily expenses.

The case of a 52-year-old mother of eight from Ayeyarwady illustrates this problem. The woman owes several people money and has had to sell portions of her land to pay back her debts. Apart from monetary debts, she also owes some farmers labour during the peak season, which she has promised against borrowings. She describes how those people she owes labour to came to argue with her during an arduous and difficult period in her life:

“People came from here and there to ask money from us, and I don’t even want to talk about how much I cried. I had to apologize to this person and that person. We were in so much trouble because all of these people wouldn’t give us a pass. People came from this farm and that farm to fight with me, so I was crying a lot. We were in debt for about 12 acres, so when the crops were ripe, people came and called us to harvest their farms and blamed us for not being able to render work for them, but we were already in the middle of harvesting another farm. Everything turned out to be okay when two of my daughters went to work in Yangon. We didn’t have to worry about transplanting rice or harvesting anymore. Our mind is at peace now, but before I was almost going crazy. I have to let my other children go to school despite our difficulties, because if they are not educated they will get in trouble. That’s why we have to think of ways to send them to school.”

2.1.4. Shocks and changes

Many interviewees described how sudden negative changes in their circumstances (i.e. “shocks”) or slowly accumulated ones triggered their migration. A number of respondents explained their struggle to cover the medical expenses for family members’ illnesses or accidents, and how these resulted in financial setbacks and deeper debt. There were also reported livelihood losses due to erratic weather conditions and disasters, such as floods and drought, insect infestation and fluctuating crop prices, as well as changes in policies that restrict their access to natural resources. The respondents also cited fewer work opportunities in farms due to mechanization or farmers shifting towards less labour-intensive agricultural methods in order to save money. Failing school exams and/or not being able to continue to higher education were also mentioned as triggers for youth to migrate.

Case study 6: Migration induced by multiple shocks

Another example shows how a family gradually slid into deeper poverty and how that triggered migration. The respondent is a 48-year-old man in Ayeyarwady who has daughters working in Yangon. The family owns six acres of farmland, but 3.5 acres have been mortgaged to pay for his mother’s medical treatment and his daughter’s education, leaving only 2.5 acres for cultivation. The land is of inconsistent productivity, and the family has been living from hand to mouth. A further setback came earlier in the year when the crop was attacked by insects. He compares his income of this year to the previous year:

“Last year, I would say I earned 4 to 8 lakhs [1 lakh = MMK 100,000] from both beans and rice. We mostly plant green gram since it is hard for the crops to be destroyed by insects. It is

worse this year since the crops are failing. The crops are not producing in our district, as with the whole country. Last year, we made about 25 to 30 baskets, and this year there would be only 4 to 8 baskets.

During this time his mother is seriously ill. The family is prioritizing her medical treatment and has sought help from their daughter's teacher so that she could continue her studies without paying the fees. Even though the teacher agreed for her to continue studying, their daughter eventually decided to drop out of school after failing her grade 10 exams, because she was concerned about her grandmother's health and the financial burden of her education on her family.

"We had to spend more money for her grandma's health condition and we also had to spend money for her education at the same time, so my daughter told me that she would like to quit school. I told her just to continue her schooling, and that, together, we could face whatever may come. She went to school the next day and she was not into it anymore, since she was feeling bad after seeing her grandmother. Her grandmother would have died at the time if we didn't have her treated, so we had to prioritize her. My daughter asked me to use the money I had intended for her school fees on her grandmother's treatment instead."

2.2. Enablers of migration

Following the discussion of the main factors that trigger migration at different levels, this section offers deeper insights into the factors that enable migration (i.e. the factors that facilitate and make migration possible), including how people obtain and use relevant information and finance their migration. Based on findings from both the quantitative and qualitative rounds of data collection, this section provides a closer look into a number of factors which facilitate the movement of people and analyses their impacts.

To understand how migration is facilitated, the household survey asked three questions, in order to find out: (a) from whom the migrants received information about migration, (b) what kinds of information they sought and (c) who helped them in the migration process. The chapter discusses the main source of information and the differences between patterns observed among international and internal migrants. It also explores differences in how male and female migrants obtain migration information. Secondly, it shows whose help is sought and how this differs depending on migrants' sex, and how enabling factors are linked to migration destinations.

The final section draws on the findings of the qualitative interview to examine how channels that bring migrants opportunities can come with potential risks, uncertainty and vulnerability, particularly for those in informal labour markets and/or engaged in irregular international migration. This section draws on six case studies from the in-depth interviews and highlights how these factors shape their migratory experiences.

2.2.1. Sources of information about migration

Migrants typically gather information about the likely costs, opportunities and risks involved in migration before making the decision to migrate. Many respondents report having more than one source of information. Family, relatives and friends at origin and at destination are common sources of information about migration, reflecting the importance of migrant networks emerging in Myanmar.

Table 13 also shows the role of family and friends in aiding the migration decision, particularly in the case of internal migrants. Female migrants rely more on families and relatives for information, whereas a greater percentage of male migrants seek information from friends. This difference may reflect wider spheres of social engagement open to men that extend beyond kinship networks.

Among international migrants, the most common source of information for both male and female international migrants are migration brokers and recruitment agencies,² and this reflects the important role that they play in the provision of reliable and useful information on international migration.

In terms of other sources of information, the study found that, in general, mass media plays a minor role as a source of information. Of these, the Internet is the most commonly used source of information, followed by newspapers. Among the different groups of migrants, international female migrants had accessed most sources of information (an average of 1.7 information sources) and internal female migrants the least (1.2 information sources).

Table 13: Sources of information about migration

Information source	Percentage of migrants			
	International		Internal	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Families/relatives at origin	22	31	39	46
Friends at origin	30	20	24	18
Neighbours/other villagers at origin	3	2	2	2
Families/relatives at destination	12	25	29	33
Friends at destination	17	20	16	14
Migration brokers/recruitment agencies	40	34	1	0
Internet	3	11	0	0
Newspaper	1	8	2	0
Television	1	6	0	0
Radio	1	3	1	0
Others	7	5	11	11

Note: Respondents were allowed to give multiple answers; as such, columns do not total 100 per cent.

Most information sought prior to migration related to the job search, with: (a) information to secure a job at destination (“Guaranteed work” in Table 14) or, at least, (b) information to identify agents (“Migration brokers/recruitment agencies who know potential employers”) who may be able to identify job opportunities, by far the most common responses. The general job market situation, and accommodation options and living conditions at destination, while relevant to both male and female internal migrants, seem less important to international migrants. Higher percentages on others cover information related to education for internal migrants who migrated for schooling. Female migrants were more likely to gather different types of information than male migrants.



Lashio, Shan State. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

² In the quantitative survey, no distinction was made between licensed recruitment agencies and informal brokers, since the family members would not have knowledge of whether they were licensed or not.

Table 14: Types of information sought prior to migration

Information type	Percentage of migrants			
	International		Internal	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Guaranteed work	35	47	32	32
Potential employer	2	0	8	4
Migration brokers/recruitment agencies who know potential employers	30	25	1	1
General job market situation	9	9	14	15
Accommodation options	1	5	14	15
Lifestyle at destination	1	2	6	9
Encouragement to migrate	9	8	8	9
Others	2	5	17	20

Note: Respondents were allowed to give multiple answers; as such, columns do not total 100 per cent.

2.2.2. Decision-making

Migrants themselves are not always the ones to decide on the migration destination. Instead, the choice is often made by their parents. There is a greater tendency for parents to get involved in decisions of migrating daughters than sons, and mothers tend to get more involved in cases of daughters migrating and fathers in cases of sons migrating. Female migrants are socially constructed as needing more protection and also not being able to make decisions of such significance by themselves. Migration brokers and recruitment agencies have a certain level of influence in cases of international migration.

Table 15: Persons involved in the decision pertaining to the choice of migration destination

Person involved ("decision co-maker")	Percentage of migrants			
	International		Internal	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Migrants themselves	26	27	32	29
Father	44	48	52	60
Mother	42	52	50	61
Other family members	27	22	24	21
Friends	9	9	5	6
Migration brokers/recruitment agencies	6	11	0	0
Others	4	6	3	3

Note: Respondents were allowed to give multiple answers; as such, columns do not total 100 per cent.

Case study 7 illustrates some intra-family dynamics of migration decision-making and how negotiations take place within the family prior to migration.

Case study 7: Negotiations on migration within the family

A 41-year-old Rakhine woman whose 18-year old daughter migrated to China describes the negotiations within the family around her migration. Her husband is the main breadwinner in the family. He earns a living by cutting trees and bamboo in the jungle and selling them in the town market. The respondent also earns some money by catching crabs, cultivating rice and moving rice sacks at a warehouse. Her daughter used to work part-time as a labourer for a crab exporting business. When a neighbour informed the family of a job opportunity at a purified water factory in

China, her daughter decided to go. Her daughter went with 11 other people from their village, with the help of a broker from a nearby village. The mother describes how she was first opposed to her daughter's decision to migrate, but later conceded that she would be better off going rather than working in crab processing units in Myanmar.

"My daughter wanted to go to China with others. I told her not to go, but she insisted because we didn't have jobs here. At last, I allowed her to go. Crab warehouses employ a few full-time workers. My daughter wasn't a full-time worker because a full-time worker has to work and reside by the river. It is not safe for my daughter to stay overnight with male workers. I just asked her to go and work in the daytime and came back home in the evening. That is why she did not have work every day."

Without an interview with the daughter, it is difficult to assess what her personal aspirations might have been. The mother says that the daughter has no intention of returning from China for the foreseeable future. She also describes how hard it was for her to trace her daughter's whereabouts in China. She was finally able to speak to her after locating a phone number for the fish factory where she was employed from a woman who was working in the same factory and was at the time back in the village. The fact that the daughter made no effort to contact the mother even after she found another job and was successfully employed suggests there may be conflict within the family that the mother does not wish to speak about, and that the daughter may be using the distance as a way of forging her own path.

Respondents were also asked a question on the factors influencing the choice of migration destination. Table 16 shows the percentages of respondents in each migrant group who reported the listed factors as influencing the choice of migration destination (respondents were allowed to choose three main influencing factors). Having friends at a particular destination is the most frequently cited factor, and this is especially the case for international migrants. Having families and relatives at destination, on the other hand, is more important for internal migrants and female migrants. Knowing brokers and recruitment agencies who can arrange migration to a particular destination is important for international migrants, and it, indeed, is the most commonly cited factor by male international migrants. The replies indicate that security at destination (in terms of finding a place to live and being able to fall back on someone for help) are important considerations.

Table 16: Factors influencing the choice of migration destination

Factor	Percentage of migrants			
	International		Internal	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Having friends at destination	48	48	44	45
Having family/relatives at destination	21	31	46	54
Availability of brokers/recruitment agencies able to arrange migration	51	30	1	1
Confidence in finding employment at destination	21	17	20	21
Having work arranged prior to migration	10	13	13	16
Having the highest potential income option	12	11	5	7
Proximity of destination to home.	2	0	9	10
Low cost of migrating to destination	4	3	6	3

Note: Respondents were allowed to give multiple answers; as such, columns do not total 100 per cent.

2.2.3. Facilitators of migration

The survey included a question on who helped make the actual migration process possible. Here, the definition of “helping with the migration process” encompasses a wide range of support, which could include financing, travel arrangements, finding or offering of accommodation, and job search referrals. CHIME refers to these people who provide help as “facilitators of migration.”

Facilitators of migration are often the same persons that migrants turn to for information about migration. International migrants rely less on their friends despite them being important sources of information – perhaps because friends are less able to help with the practicalities, bureaucracy and costs of migration. Table 17 shows that 43 per cent of male international migrants and 28 per cent of female international migrants migrate with the help of brokers or recruitment agencies. The percentages of international migrants using brokers or recruitment agencies are particularly higher in Mandalay and Rakhine. In terms of international destinations, 49 per cent of international migrants to Malaysia 31 per cent to Thailand and 31 per cent to China use brokers or recruitment agencies. Unlike international migrants, internal migrants hardly use brokers. Few migrants migrated without anyone’s help.

Table 17: Migration facilitators

Migration facilitator	Percentage of migrants			
	International		Internal	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Families/relatives at origin	22	31	49	57
Friends at origin	18	13	13	15
Families/relatives at destination	15	28	33	33
Friends at destination	24	22	17	14
Migration brokers/recruitment agencies	43	28	1	1
Employers	3	2	3	3
Other	1	3	6	6
No one	6	6	4	3

Note: Respondents were allowed to give multiple answers; as such, columns do not total 100 per cent.

The in-depth interviews corroborate the fact that the migration experience is profoundly shaped by migrant families’ social ties or networks. Individuals in migrants’ networks play a crucial role in various stages of the migration process, including informing them about job availability at destination, helping plan migration journeys, finding accommodation and teaching them to negotiate working conditions.

Social networks result in some destinations being linked to certain origin areas. The in-depth interviews yielded evidence of location-specific patterns where particular clusters of villages link to particular destinations and even specific worksites. Several villages seem to have two or three main associated migration destinations most certainly due to social networks, multilocal family ties and recruitment patterns by brokers. For example, in Mandalay City, teashops, noodle shops, restaurants, hotels and even construction sites tend to employ men and boys from villages where they have social ties; in Shan State, noodle shops usually hire men, women, boys and girls from (i.e. Northern Shan State); and in Mandalay City, many migrant workers from Rakhine State are employed in the fishing markets. Urban labour markets are thus highly differentiated and segmented along “village” or “ethnic” lines. Case study 8 shows how social networks are used to plan migration journeys.

Case study 8: Friends in destination help with navigating the passage and access to jobs

The respondent is a 57-year-old Rakhine man. He has three children but decided to migrate to Thailand to support his tenth-grader daughter's studies. He regrets that he was not able to complete his own education, so he wants his children to get a good education. He contacted his friends who were working in Thailand and invited a couple of friends to go together. His friends in Thailand arranged transportation for them to reach the kingdom and found jobs for them.

"I have friends and relatives who were working in Thailand. I contacted them and went. My friends are from other villages. I could gather three people. We had to study the route and the situation and be watchful and alert. We went there without knowing for sure what would happen. We had to learn how people travelled through the route. My friends sent us from Kawthaung to Ranong by boat. I don't know how they arranged that. They had already paid for the line bus and told us where to get off and where to wait. I did not understand the language, so I just followed my friends' instructions. My friends came to fetch us. They brought us to a place where there were fishermen's huts. We had a conversation about the job. They told us that we were going to work on fishing boats. When I asked them what kind of boat, they said we would have to work on small boats."

The migration journey is increasingly mediated by labour market intermediaries who are variously involved in recruiting, placing and channelling workers. It is evident that migration to faraway destinations where there are few contacts is usually undertaken with the help of either social networks or intermediaries, or both.

In the case of internal migration, other projects have shown that brokers³ operate in sectors that employ many migrant workers, such as domestic work and fisheries. This study did not gather enough data to be able to reveal how brokerage in these sectors works. Nonetheless, CHIME captured how brokers have helped migrants from rural areas find work in small-scale manufacturing units or factories, the hotel industry and security firms in urban locations.

Case study 9: Connecting migrants from rural areas to urban job markets

A 26-year-old man works in an ice factory in Yangon. His mother was approached by a woman from a neighbouring village whose brother owned the factory. The woman acts as a recruiter for the factory. The respondent had no prior knowledge of the woman or any kinship bond with her but as he put it, *"They were in need of workers and here we were in need of work, so the jobless ones went with them to Yangon."* After his mother informed him about this job opportunity, he went with the woman to work in Yangon and enjoined his siblings to work in the same factory later. When asked how he evaluated the experience of migrating through a broker he stressed how the broker was instrumental in connecting him to the urban labour market:

"I was happy to be accompanied by her to a place where I knew nobody. I arrived there safe and sound. I did not face any difficulties. The job is good as well. Having food is also convenient. We can order the food we wanted to eat. Food and accommodation are provided."

Case study 10 demonstrates how brokerage can help rural migrants access jobs in urban areas. This is especially useful to those who have few or no social ties in urban areas and those who may not have any idea how to approach employers. Many cases show that after migrants settle down, they themselves take on recruitment facilitation or brokerage functions by assisting their relatives or other

³ In the case of bonded labour of internal migrants working in fisheries and "working in the sea," labour intermediaries are called either "brokers" or "traders."

people from their villages to migrate and obtain jobs. This would result in gathering groups of migrants from the same or nearby villages to be sent to the same worksites or destinations.

Moreover, a common scenario for international migration is where the multi-locational family members have already identified the destination and occupation that the migrant should travel to, but they need the help of a broker to facilitate the journey and the migration process as a whole. Brokers are increasingly involved in international irregular migration, as they are able to help migrants navigate border checks and introduce them to potential employers at destination. These brokers are often individuals who have previously migrated themselves and worked in the same destination or have connections there and in the migrant-sending villages. However, in order to take migrants across borders without detection, brokers may engage in a number of practices that place migrants in vulnerable situations that bring them and their families extreme uncertainty, fear and worry, as the following cases highlight.

Case study 10: Migration and placement services provided by a broker

A woman from Mandalay Region recently paid MMK 1,100,000 (USD 815) to a broker to cross the border into Thailand. She left for Thailand to join her husband who had been working in a chicken processing factory. The broker is the same person who found her husband a job in the chicken factory, and this successful placement had earned him the villagers' trust. The respondent was travelling with two of her siblings, who were also crossing over into Thailand to work in the same factory. It is not clear how they reached the border, but they were met by another broker on the Thai side. Despite all the support she had, she describes arriving in a strange country and the practices of the brokers as frightening.

"I was going to a different country and I did not have passport or other document with me, so I was a little bit scared. When I got there, I was at the border of a different country. The broker who came and picked us up was also a foreign man. So, I was a little scared."

When asked why people from her village continued using brokers, she identified their ability to connect them to employers and offer a greater selection of employment opportunities than they would find on their own.

"When we go with a broker, we don't have to contact the employer directly. If we go with a broker, we can choose the work we want to do, and the broker will help us get that job. If we go by ourselves, without a broker, we need to have people who are staying there who know how things are and how things work over there."

2.2.4. Financing migration

The costs of migration and the ability of aspiring migrants and their families to cover them also influence where migrants head to and how. This section explores the approximate costs for both internal and international migration, and how these costs are being financed. Since migrants often have to undertake substantial loans to finance their journeys, those who can help with the initial migration costs play a crucial role in enabling migration. Both quantitative and qualitative findings show that social networks and intermediaries provide critical assistance to finance migration journeys and are thus important facilitators. However, there is a risk of exploitation and bondage, as some cases show in Chapter 4.

Cost of labour migration

The data from the survey confirm that labour migration costs vary significantly. Table 18 shows that international labour migrants face higher costs and are more likely to pay migration brokers and

recruitment agencies higher fees. They also use loans, including from brokers and recruitment agencies themselves, much more than internal migrants. However, one must bear in mind that this information is provided by household respondents and not the migrants themselves, so reported amounts should be treated cautiously. The large number of missing values indicates the reluctance of many household respondents to speculate about migration costs, an unwillingness to share such information and/or a genuine lack of information. Recall, too, that some of the migrants left home a considerable time back, and so household respondents may have been genuinely unable to provide a figure, and if they did, these values could at best be treated as loose estimates.⁴

Table 18: Cost of labour migration by type

Cost type	International migration		Internal migration	
	N*	Mean (MMK)	N*	Mean (MMK)
Estimated total funding required	181	1,403,371	379	157,733
Broker/Recruitment agency fees	34	700,003	4	36,250
Transportation	37	696,488	167	26,627
Accommodation	15	162,335	38	59,579
Other living costs	16	250,001	72	50,938
Others (not specified)	13	2,746,923	27	17,037

Note: *The numbers reported in the table are based on non-missing responses. N is the number of people who gave responses. All interviewees were asked but not everyone gave an answer.

In estimating the total funding required, households were asked to indicate their approximations of broker's or recruitment agency fees, transportation expenses, and initial living and accommodation expenses at destination. In roughly 600 of the cases, household respondents were unable to give estimates; the remaining households reported a mean cost of MMK 1,403,371 for international migration and MMK 157,733 for internal migration.

From these limited responses, broker's or recruitment agency fees for international labour migration seem to be the single most expensive item, with 34 household respondents reporting a mean value of MMK 700,003. However, it is not clear whether these broker's or recruitment fees are also used to cover other costs associated with international migration (such as transportation and passport fees). Where transportation is mentioned as a separate fee, it came out as the second most expensive expenditure item. For internal migrants, costs to pay for accommodation at destination is reported to be the most expensive cost item, followed by other living costs.

Among the various destinations of the 298 international migrants covered in our sample, the Republic of Korea is reportedly the most expensive destination, with a median cost of MMK 2.65 million, followed by Malaysia (median cost of MMK 1.5 million), Thailand (MMK 500,000) and China (MMK 250,000). China is the only destination country for which the mean cost of migration is considerably close to the median cost, implying fewer outliers in the sample, and, thus, we might confidently assume that migration costs to China are, indeed, the lowest. That labour migration to China costs the least may be explained by a greater percentage of labour migrants with upfront migration costs paid for by their brokers.

⁴ A small proportion of households reported rather substantial amounts for an unspecified category of costs. Anecdotally, we think this may refer to training costs, costs to obtain visas (such as student visas), and costs that the households incurred to support their migrants through, for example, on gifts, care packages and money transfers. The small number of observations (6–7% of the sample), however, precludes us from drawing strong inferences from this particular set of data.

Table 19: Cost of labour migration by destination country

Destination country	Mean cost (MMK)	Median cost (MMK)	Number of responses
Republic of Korea	3,900,000	2,650,000	10
Malaysia	1,822,185	1,500,000	87
Thailand	608,750	500,000	64
China	244,286	250,000	14

Sources of migration financing

The survey suggests that majority of migrants rely on assistance from family and relatives at origin, and, to a lesser extent, at destination. Such assistance is more common among internal migrants than international migrants.

International migrants are much more likely to turn to loans – from relatives, friends and brokers – reflecting the higher costs of migration. Considering that over 35 per cent of respondents in the sample sought loans to finance migration, the ability to access them can be interpreted as an enabler of international migration to a certain degree.

Savings are used by only 14 per cent of migrants in the sample to finance migration, although it is not clear from the data whether there is an overlap between assistance from the family at origin or destination with household savings (some respondents may have miscategorized household savings as assistance from family). The CHIME study captured only a very small number of respondents who sold their assets to finance migration.

Table 20: Sources of migration financing

Source of migration financing	Percentage of migrants		
	International (%)	Internal (%)	All (%)
Financial support			
Assistance from family or relatives at origin	38	56	51
Assistance from family or relatives at destination	14	21	19
Assistance from friends at destination	2	4	4
Assistance from friends at origin	1	1	1
Savings			
Use of existing household savings	12	14	14
Loans			
Loan from relatives	17	2	6
Loan from friends	10	2	4
Loan from broker	9	0	3
Loan from employer	2	1	1
Sales			
Sale of home	1	0	0
Sale of land	1	0	0
Sale of other assets	2	2	2

Note: Respondents were asked to name all means of migration financing that they used; as such, columns do not total 100 per cent.

Where the cost of migration becomes an issue for poor households, labour market intermediaries who can arrange for labour migration and help with upfront costs could be a big facilitator of migration. Relying on the household survey alone, it is not possible to understand the extent to which brokers finance initial migration costs. Nonetheless, in-depth interviews captured a few cases of arrangements that were mediated by such intermediaries. Shouldering upfront costs in behalf of the migrant and then recouping them through the migrant's wages is one way in which this is done. This arrangement traps the worker in debt temporarily, but the interviews indicate that migrant-sending families fully understand this practice and know that they have to wait until their "investment starts paying back. In one rare case, the initial migration costs seem to have been covered by the employer.

Case study 11: Intermediaries mediating upfront costs of migration

A 30-year-old man in Ayeyarwady migrated to Malaysia through legal channels, aided by a broker. He is the breadwinner of a family of four. He left home eight years previously, when he was still an undergraduate student, because he longed to own a motorbike like other people. He contacted his cousin in Malaysia and decided to go there. He found a job through a broker. He was glad that he met a helpful broker who he says always took care of him. His felt that the broker provided a guarantee of finding work.

"I contacted a broker and found a job. The broker was good. I was lucky. They found a job for me and took care of me until I came back."

He said that the broker didn't take money directly from him or from his salary, but charged his employer, although he wasn't sure if his employer had deducted any money from his salary. He couldn't tell exactly if he was charged for the cost(s) of recruiting him because there were no records on his account that point to this, and the money may have been deducted before it was sent to his account.

"It had nothing to do with us. The broker went to the company. Although it cost MMK 500,000 or MMK 1 million, the broker did not take money out from our salary. They made it clear with the boss. But it was not [the case] for everyone – just for some lucky guys. It also depends on the boss whether he will take out money from his employee's salary or not. If the boss wants to, he can do it."

When migrants rely on intermediaries to help with migration costs, it can bring forth risks of being exploited or cheated, particularly for those who are involved in irregular migration. Although cheating is not very common, there certainly were cases of it. The consequences would have been serious had the migrants not have the support of each other and from their social networks at destination.

Case study 12: Tricked into bonded labour migration

The respondent is a 41-year-old woman in Rakhine State. Her 18-year-old daughter migrated to China five months ago with friends and neighbours in a group of 12, aided by a broker. The broker was known to a relative of a friend; the villagers had contacted him because they wanted to find work in China. The broker did not charge them anything and her daughter now has to repay the costs of her recruitment through work. After the daughter left the village, she lost contact with her mother for five months, making her mother extremely worried about her. When the respondent finally heard from her daughter, she said she had been tricked by the broker.

"She told me about why she couldn't contact me. She said that the broker deceived them. She said: 'Mom, we had to work at a water purification factory. But the broker took all of our salaries in advance. We didn't get our salaries. That is why all of us (12 persons) ran away from

the factory with a Chinese guy. Fortunately, we accidentally met a Rakhine guy who asked us where we were going. The Rakhine guy helped us and searched for a new job for us at a fishing factory.”

Had it not been for the man from Rakhine who helped them find another employer, these migrants' migration efforts would have gone to waste.

Walking school from in Lashio, Shan State. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo





Travelling to Kyaukpadaung, Mandalay Region.
© Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

Remittances and welfare



Sewing workshop in Meiktila, Mandalay Region.
© Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

In Chapter 2, we saw the enormous significance of social drivers of migration and how closely they are intertwined with its economic drivers. Although it is too simplistic to say that people migrate solely for economic reasons, seeking improvement in employment or income was widely cited as a reason for migration, driven at least in part by a desire and/or need to contribute to household finances. This chapter explores how this is put into practice by examining the remittance behaviour of migrants and considers the potential impact of migration on household welfare.

According to the Migration Policy Institute's (MPI) Data Hub, the annual remittance inflow for Myanmar was around USD 3.1 billion (4.8% of GDP) in 2014, up dramatically from 2012 – when the remittance inflow was about USD 274.6 million (0.4% of GDP) – and compared to the long-term stagnancy from 1987 and 2010. World Bank data further indicates that migrant remittance inflows have hit an unprecedented high, reaching USD 7.23 billion in 2017. This is close to the USD 8 billion estimated by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MOLES) in 2015 (Gupta, 2016:33).¹ While overall remittance flows to Myanmar are substantial, it is important to consider microlevel behaviours and variations related to gender, region and migrant destination, as discussed in this chapter.

Part 1 of this chapter outlines CHIME findings relating to remittance incidence, while Part 2 is concerned with remittance amounts. Particularly striking are the different remittance patterns between internal and international migrants, a contrast that is likely due to the large wage differentials between Myanmar and common international destinations. The findings also point to similar remittance incidences between men and women. The third part of the chapter presents data on methods of transfer, which also shows significant differences between internal and international remittances. Parts 4 and 5, in turn, provide an analysis of CHIME data relating to remittance use and insights into the relationship between remittances and household welfare.

3.1. Remittance incidence

CHIME data suggests that 66 per cent of economically active migrants sent remittances home in the 12 months prior to the survey, with as many as 84 per cent of male and 77 per cent of female migrant workers remitting (Table 21). In contrast to findings elsewhere,² we found little evidence that women are less likely to remit than men. In Mandalay Region, remittance incidences among men and women are almost identical, while in Rakhine it is higher among women than men. Given that the desire to find work (or better work) motivates both men and women's migration, and that a large proportion of the migrants are single and are sons or daughters of heads of households, it is perhaps not surprising to see similar remittance behaviour between men and women.

Table 21: Remittance incidence (percentage of migrants remitting) among economically active migrants by region of origin, gender and destination category³

Destination category		Region/state of origin					
		Mandalay		Rakhine		Ayeyarwady	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
International	Number of migrants	72	17	109	25	19	7
	Percentage of migrants remitting	84	82	50	40	84	–
Internal	Number of migrants	149	97	49	46	76	96
	Percentage of migrants remitting	59	64	32	66	83	77

¹ The discrepancy between estimates by the MOLES and others shrank in 2017. Possible reasons for the differences in estimates are: (a) different estimation methods (MOLES estimates both official and unofficial flows, while MPI and the World Bank focus only on official flows); (b) an increasing number of migrants remitting through official channels; and (c) higher earnings at destination.

² In a paper that explored remittances of international migrants from 18 low- and middle-income countries, Orozco et al. (2006) found that women remitted lower amounts than men, and this likely reflected the broader global pattern of remittance-sending by women. This is usually explained by the poorer economic opportunities facing migrant women at destination, that is, that women earn less at destination than men and, therefore, have less money left over after covering essential personal expenses; hence, they are less likely to send money home, and if they do, they send less than men do. In a more recent study, Niimi and Reilly (2011) argue that gender differences in labour market earnings are more important in explaining gaps in remittance amounts in Viet Nam than behavioural differences between men and women.

³ Samples of some disaggregated data cells are too small to be reliable. "n.a." refers to cells with fewer than 10 respondents.

Given that international migration is usually associated with higher wage differentials between origin and destination, we might also expect international migrants to be more likely to send remittances than internal migrants. Despite regional and gender variations, our data suggests this to be the case – at least among economically active migrants (Table 21), and albeit with international migrants having only a slightly higher remittance incidence than internal migrants. Overall, 69 per cent of economically active international migrants were reported to have sent remittances home in the preceding 12 months, compared to 66 per cent of economically active internal migrants. In some origin states and regions and within gender categories, the gaps were greater. For example, male international migrants from Rakhine State were 1.6 times, and those from Mandalay Region 1.4 times, more likely to send remittances home than their internal migrant counterparts. Only among female migrants from Rakhine State was remittance incidence lower with international migration than internal migration. Our data does not allow us to draw concrete conclusions as to why this was the case.

The percentage of internal male migrants from Rakhine who sent remittances was particularly low at 32 per cent, which means that only about 1 in every 3 male internal migrants from Rakhine State remitted money home during the period covered. The overall low rate of remittances among migrants from Rakhine might be due to the relatively precarious employment conditions at destination. Again, there is a need to investigate this trend further. Data from Rakhine consistently showed desperate economic circumstances from which people migrate and the greater likelihood of these people to experience vulnerabilities and risks when migrating; these are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Our qualitative interviews suggested that the amount and frequency of remittance transfers were based on a migrant's job stability, salary, living costs at destination, intended purpose for the money and their families' emergent needs. Around half of the migrants who sent remittances in the 12 months prior to the survey did so once or twice, and a small number (12%) sent remittances almost every month. Our data does not suggest that migrants generally had a "remittance plan" agreed to with their families back home: 60 per cent of migrants sent remittances spontaneously, without being asked to send money home or having previously agreed to do so. Of course, it would be naïve to take this figure at face value given the likely implicit agreement between migrants and their households, and it is likely that migration was undertaken and supported with the understanding that remittances would be sent home. It should also be noted that remittances flowed both ways. In fact, around 16 per cent of the migrants in our sample (excluding those who migrated for education), in turn, received money from their families back home.

Although international migrants generally earn more than internal migrants, the costs of international migration are usually higher (see Chapter 2). Where international migrants are still repaying loans, their disposable incomes would be lower, making remittance-sending more difficult and less probable, as case study 13 shows.

Case study 13: Delayed remittances

One female migrant is reported to have spent MMK 600,000 on broker's fees to migrate to Malaysia. She first had to settle the loan she took out and could not remit money home until she had paid it off:

"She could only send remittances home after she had paid back her debt. She did not transfer money back home to her family for the first six months after she arrived in Malaysia because she had to pay back the broker's fees and transportation fees. She also had no contact with us. She told us that she did not have a job when she first arrived in Malaysia. When she got her first job, she transferred MMK 500,000. After that, she transferred MMK 200,000 two times."

There is generally a delay in making the remittance transfers while migrants establish themselves at destination. Migrants do not immediately have disposable income to make remittance transfers:

Employment and accommodation must first be secured, and the initial costs of migration paid off before a migrant is able to send money home. This is supported by the qualitative data presented in Chapter 4, but temporal variations in remittance incidence are also evidenced by the survey data (Table 22).

Table 22: Remittance incidence (percentage of migrants remitting) among economically active migrants through the years⁴

Period		International		Internal	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
2016 onwards	Number of migrants	62	18	113	81
	Percentage of migrants remitting	71	56	52	62
Between 2011 and 2015	Number of migrants	95	28	114	117
	Percentage of migrants remitting	59	61	68	78
Before 2011	Number of migrants	43	3	47	41
	Percentage of migrants remitting	70	67	62	66

We find that internal migrants in the initial phase of migration are less likely to send remittances home than those who are more established at destination and that remittances do, indeed, tail off after the migrants have been away from home for more than around six years. This may indicate that internal migrants who have been away for extended lengths of time are not anticipating returning home soon, or that family ties at home have weakened and/or have been replaced with new ties and responsibilities at destination.

International migrants show a different set of patterns. Within this group, remittance incidence is highest among more recent migrants and those who have been away for longer periods, at least when we consider male migrants (the samples sizes of female international migrants are too small to make inferences). This suggests that different forces drive remittance behaviour among international migrants and/or that they have different plans for return.

3.2. Remittance amounts

Ignoring estimates for Ayeyarwady Region, which are based on a small sample (Table 23), we find average⁵ international remittances to be higher than internal remittances. Around 80 per cent of internal migrants sent less than MMK 500,000 in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared to around 60 per cent of international migrants (Figure 1). The differences between internal and international remittance amounts are particularly substantial among migrants from Mandalay Region (and especially so for women). This may be because of the large proportion of internal migrants from Mandalay who were employed in agriculture within the state – often as part of well-established seasonal migration patterns – supporting the notion that international migration brings comparatively larger rewards for those shifting away from traditional migration patterns.

⁴ Table 22 shows the number of economically active migrants from Mandalay Region, Rakhine State and Ayeyarwady Region by duration of migration and the percentage of those who sent remittances home in the 12 months prior to the survey. (In the survey, we grouped migrants into: (a) those who migrated relatively recently (2016 or later), (b) those who migrated between 2011 and 2015 and (c) those who migrated prior to 2011.)

⁵ We report medians rather than means because the data is rather noisy and there are some very extreme values that are likely to actually be miscoded values. We also trimmed the top 5 per cent of the observations.

Surprisingly little was remitted in kind – and this is perhaps related to the concept of filial piety – as cash remittances gave parents (assuming they are the main recipients) greater freedom to spend as they saw fit. However, while the overwhelming majority of migrants who sent remittances did so in monetary form, women (and, particularly, women internal migrants), were slightly more likely to send goods home instead of, or as well as, money. Food and clothes were the most common items sent home, as reported in the survey. However, unfortunately, the sample is too small to reliably estimate the value of in-kind remittances.

Table 23: Average (median) remittance amount sent by gender, are of origin and destination category

Gender		Mandalay		Rakhine		Ayeyarwady	
		International	Internal	International	Internal	International	Internal
Male	Number	52	87	53	16	14	65
	Median amount (MMK)	500,000	300,000	500,000	450,000	300,000	350,000
Female	Number	14	60	10	32	3	75
	Median amount (MMK)	500,000	150,000	500,000	200,000	200,000	300,000

Looking at the remittances of internal migrants by gender, we see some differences in the amounts sent home, with transfers from women concentrated below the MMK 300,000 mark. However, gender differences are small: 75 per cent of men remit less than MMK 500,000, compared to 80 per cent of women. Average remittances from international migrant women are very similar to those of international migrant men, while internal migrant women’s remittances are around half of what internal men migrants send home. Since women are more likely to send goods as well as or instead of cash (which are not valued), these figures are also likely to underestimate the value of women’s remittances and their contribution to households.

Figure 1: International migrants send higher amounts than internal migrants

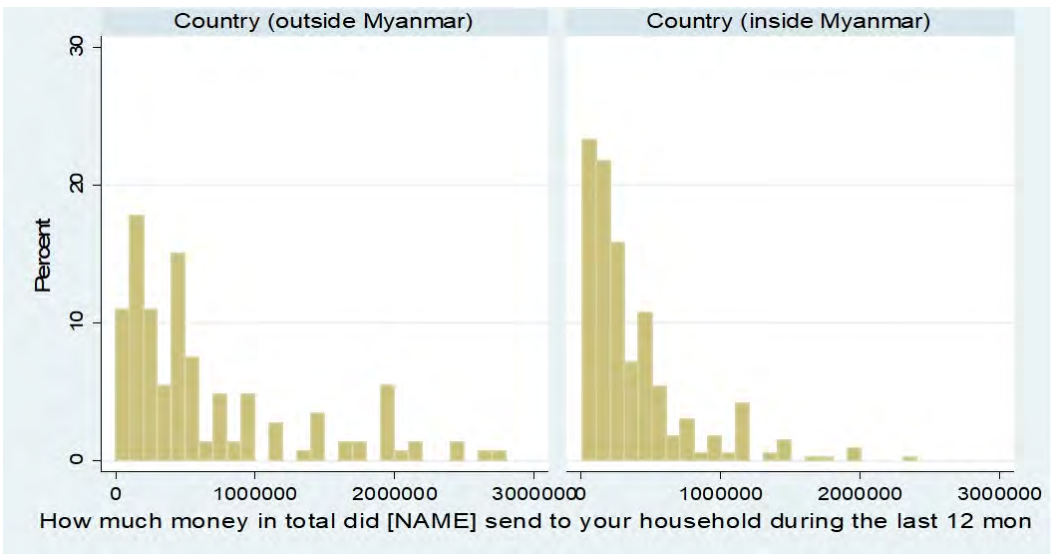
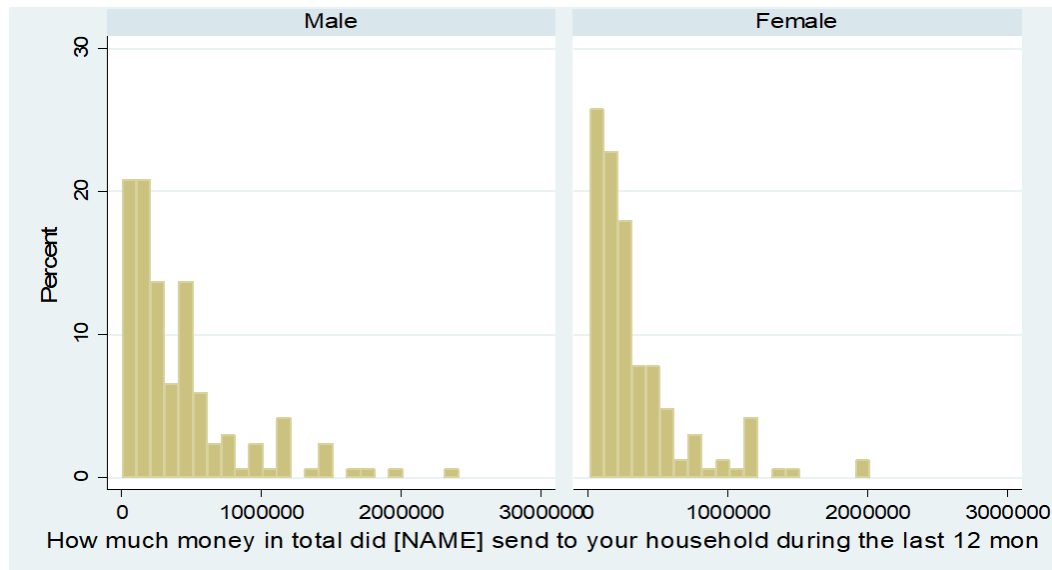


Figure 2: Male and female internal migrants send similar remittance amounts

3.3. Methods of money transfer

How a household in the surveyed regions and states received remittances depended, to a large extent, on whether the migrant household member migrated internally or internationally (Table 24). Majority of international migrants used banks and other formal financial institutions to send money home – 82 per cent compared to just 41 per cent of internal migrants – and the data did not suggest variations across regions and states of origin. Meanwhile, roughly half of internal migrants used informal channels, sending money via friends and relatives or giving it directly to their families during visits. Indeed, our qualitative data suggests that internal migrants used banks only if their families could easily and cheaply travel to a branch nearby. Formal and informal remittance channels may have also worked together, as the passage below shows:

“He transferred Thai baht to an agent in Myawadi City. The agent in Myawadi City then transferred the money to Minbya City. It is not possible to transfer through a bank because there is no bank in the village. People also don’t know how to withdraw money from the bank. The money is transferred through agents. If my son transfers MMK 150,000, then I just withdraw that amount from the agent. The agents have bank accounts under their names. The bank sends a message to an agent’s phone when money has arrived in their account. Then the agent has to go and withdraw the money from the bank. They have to travel from the village to the city, and so they should get some fee.”

While studies conducted before the official reforms of 2011–2012 found that the bulk of transfers were made through informal channels, more recent studies suggest a shift towards more formal systems of money transfer.⁶ In this study, the use of *hundi* (informal money transfer) agents was not very prevalent, with only 2 per cent of households with internal migrants and 8 per cent of households with international migrants receiving remittances through *hundi* agents. This latter figure is very low compared to those from studies in different source regions.⁷ However, the qualitative interviews suggest that the *hundi* system continues to be important for irregular international migrants (such as those in Thailand) and is well established in such areas.⁸

⁶ R. Akee and D. Kapur, “Myanmar remittances”, final report (S-53405-MYA-1) (International Growth Centre, London, 2017). Available from www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Akee-and-Kapur-2017-Final-report.pdf

⁷ See, for instance: IOM and ARCM (2013).

⁸ The link between the legal status of migrants and remittance methods has been noted by Akee and Kapur (2017).

Table 24: Main methods of sending money home by migrant type

Remittance method	International (%)	Internal (%)
Banks and official financial institutions	82	41
Carried home by friends or relatives	6	26
Carried home by migrants themselves	1	15
<i>Hundi</i> ^a brokers	8	2
Handed to visiting household members	1	8
Carriers, merchants or drivers	0	4
Mobile phone transfers	0	0
Others	2	3
Total	100	100

Note: The hundi system involves a web of informal operators with established networks on both sender and recipient sides. Some hundi dealers profit through the exchange rate, while others may charge a transfer fee. Those who benefit from exchange rates charge migrants slightly higher rates and ask their counterparts to deliver a corresponding amount to migrants' family members or relatives in identified locations in Myanmar.

The qualitative interviews suggest that irregular migrants can easily find *hundi* agents through their social networks or at shops and restaurants that offer remittance services. This informal method is easier and quicker for migrants working abroad and enables migrants without legal papers or bank accounts to send money home. Indeed, the choice of remittance method seemed to depend upon a migrant's legal status and the channels of remitting available between destination and origin. It is difficult for irregular international migrants to remit through official channels due to the requirement to present a passport as identification and documentary requirement when sending money. Some qualitative interview respondents revealed that, in the case of irregular migrants, remittances could also be sent by the employer or agent directly to migrants' families.

In the past few years, telecommunications technology has significantly improved in Myanmar. Migrants can now easily contact their families back home to ensure that remittances have reached them safely. However, no one reported receiving remittances via mobile phone transfer, perhaps reflecting the limited development and penetration of this technology.

3.4. Remittance use

The household survey asked families about remittances received from each migrant and about the main uses of these remittances. It collected data across a range of uses, grouping them into: (a) non-productive asset purchase (not limited to buying a house, non-agricultural and residential land, furniture, fixtures and the like, but also includes home improvements and repairs); (b) production (purchase of agricultural land, seeds, fertilizers and other production inputs, as well as farm machinery, boats and fishing equipment); and (c) food, health, education and savings.

Looking at the main uses of remittances by migrants' region or state of origin and destination type (Figure 3 and Table 25), we see that a common use of remittances was for the purchase of food. Food expenditure was one of the three main uses of remittances for between 43–66 per cent of international migrant-sending households, and between 54–63 per cent of internal migrant-sending households. In fact, food expenditure was mentioned as the first choice for remittance use by 40 per cent of all migrants who send remittances, and the second choice for another 20 per cent. Among the 86 international migrant-sending households in Mandalay Region who received remittances, 40 of them have food as a main use of remittances. This finding supports existing evidence that remittances are used for everyday household consumption.

Asset purchase is another common use of international remittances received by households in Mandalay Region and Rakhine State, but much less so for internal remittances, whereas education is a common use of internal remittances. In Mandalay and Ayeyarwady Regions, remittances are widely used for agricultural production (which includes purchase of farmland and other farm and business equipment).

A limitation of the data is that, being self-reported, it may be subject to misreporting, especially if a respondent household does not consider the interchangeability of income. As one form of income, remittances are most likely pooled with other sources. Hence, remittances received may free up other sources of income, which could then be used for other purposes. For example, cash handed over directly during a visit home may be spent directly on food, allowing the household to spend the rest of its income on other things. We do not know to what extent households make these calculations when replying to the survey questions.

Figure 3: Main uses of remittances by type of destination

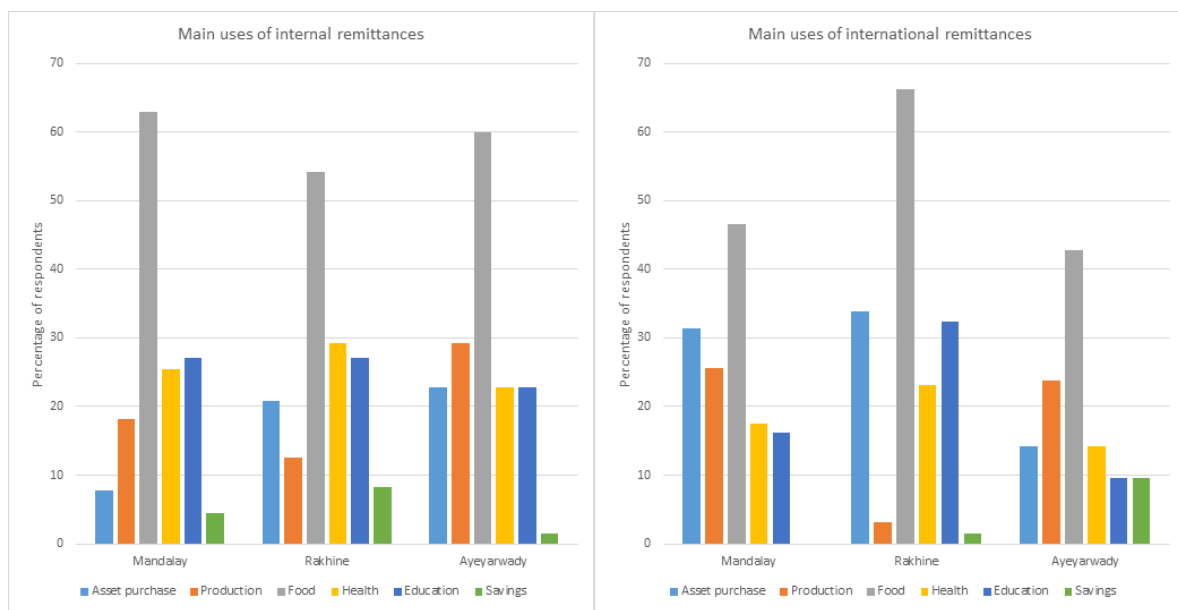


Table 25: Main uses of remittances

Destination type	Use	Mandalay	Rakhine	Ayeyarwady
International	Asset purchase	27	22	3
	Production	22	2	5
	Food	40	43	9
	Health	15	15	3
	Education	14	21	2
	Savings	0	1	2
Number of migrants sending remittances		86	65	21
Internal	Asset purchase	14	10	32
	Production	33	6	41
	Food	114	26	84
	Health	46	14	32
	Education	49	13	32
	Savings	8	4	2
Number of migrants sending remittances		181	48	140

In addition to the uses outlined in Table 25, findings from our qualitative interviews suggest that remittances are also used to make donations to religious institutions and support community projects such as dams (see quoted account of an Ayeyarwady respondent below). While this does not have a direct impact on the material welfare of the household, it will often raise their social status in the village.

“We donated 10 lakhs (MMK 1 million) for the dam when he sent the money. We also donated money to the monastery for its renovation. Every year, we donate money for the festival of gluten rice delicacies. We would donate a pan of gluten rice delicacy for one monk. We also donate sweets for monks every year as well. We have been doing it since he left.”

3.5. Migration and welfare

The relationship between migration and household welfare outcomes is complex. CHIME findings show that a key driver of migration is the desire to improve one’s life – an aspiration to move away from “back-breaking work under the sun,” find work that pays more (or just any job when there are few options at home), or take advantage of education opportunities in more urban areas. Providing a mere snapshot in time, the household survey data cannot provide robust answers regarding impacts. However, we can explore the data alongside qualitative case studies to gain some valuable insights into the impacts of remittances on the welfare of rural households.

Our household survey asked respondents to reflect on their welfare using a “poverty ladder” (i.e. to give a self-perceived or subjective poverty ranking): *“Imagine six steps where at the bottom (the first step) stand the poorest people, and on the highest step (the sixth step) stand the rich: On which step are you today and on which step were you twelve months ago?”* In response to this question, most respondent households placed themselves on the lowest three steps of the ladder, with a mean score of between 2 and 3, both at the time of the survey (2017) and 12 months prior (2016).⁹ Indeed, most households reported little or no change in their situation. Respectively, 75 per cent, 77 per cent and 81 per cent of households in Mandalay, Ayeyarwady and Rakhine reported being on the same step as they were 12 months earlier (Table 26).

Table 26: Average subjective poverty ranking in 2016 and in 2017

Migrant’s state or region of origin	With no migrants		With international migrants		With internal migrants		With both internal and international migrants	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
Mandalay	2.56	2.57	2.54	2.60	2.41	2.41	2.66	2.82
Rakhine	2.30	2.22	2.20	2.17	2.32	2.23	2.51	2.41
Ayeyarwady	2.73	2.68	3.11	3.12	2.78	2.84	3.27	4.00

Statistical testing also suggests that there is no difference between the subjective poverty ratings of households with migrants and households without migrants. This holds true for individual surveyed regions and states, across the sample as a whole, and for both rounds. The data does not show evidence of any simple association between changes in subjective poverty ratings and whether the household has a migrant – and, if they do, the destination (internal versus international) of the migrant. This is not very surprising since there are many ways through which migration may affect the welfare of origin households. Migration is risky and benefits to the origin household are not guaranteed and may take time to accrue.

⁹ Columns with a “2016” header refer to households’ rating of their situation 12 months prior to the survey, that is, retrospectively, on their position in 2016. (Note: The survey was conducted in 2017.)

The impact of migration on the household, if there is any, depends on a complex set of factors, including, but not limited to, the role the migrant played in the household economy before migration, the contribution he/she makes as a migrant, and how the household adapts to the migration. For some, simply having one less mouth to feed at home may represent important household savings. Thus, we can identify a number of ways in which migration may impact on the welfare of the household at origin, namely: (a) through remittances, (b) through a decrease in available household labour and (3) through migration financing/expenditure.

3.5.1. Remittances and household welfare

Remittance receipt by households is associated with an increase in self-perception of poverty. Survey data reveals a relationship between improvement in subjective poverty ranking and remittance receipt. Proportionally more of the households receiving remittances reported an improvement in their perceived position on the poverty ladder between 2016 and 2017 than those who were not, and proportionally fewer reported moving down the poverty ladder.¹⁰

While it is not possible to identify a causal impact of migration and/or remittances on household welfare based on the data collected, the data nevertheless seems to suggest that remittances are an important channel through which migration benefits families back home. It is a significant finding, therefore, that migration does not always result in remittances. Not all migrants would be able or would be willing to send remittances home. In our sample, only around 9 per cent of households overall had received remittances in the preceding year (Table 27). The figure was particularly low since majority of migrants in our sample were internal migrants, among whom remittance-sending was lowest. It is likely that international migration, with the likelihood of higher remittances, would have more effect on welfare. However, an understanding of the reasons why migrants send money home and the interaction between economic and social barriers and pressures is necessary in order to understand what might be done to facilitate remittance flows.

When we examine the percentage of households that received remittances, we see that fewer than half of households with migrants received remittances in the year prior to the survey. Broken down by region or state, we find that 44 per cent of migrant-sending households in Ayeyarwady, 34 per cent in Mandalay and 23 per cent in Rakhine received remittances.

Table 27: Remittance receipt and improvement in household welfare

Change in perceived position on the poverty ladder (2017–2017)	Question: Did the household receive remittances in the 12 months prior to the survey?		
	Response: No	Response: Yes	Total
Moved up	206 (9%)	33 (15.5%)	239 (9.8%)
No change	1,727 (78%)	165 (77%)	1,892 (77.6%)
Moved down	290 (13%)	16 (7.5%)	306 (12.6%)
Total	2,223 (100%)	214 (100%)	2,437 (100%)

3.5.2. Household labour dynamics

Our data suggests that migrants who were economically active before migration were more likely to be economically active at destination, and in turn more likely to have sent remittances home. Migrants who were economically inactive prior to migrating were much less likely to have sent remittances home: only 30 per cent of migrants who were economically inactive prior to migration had sent remittances, compared to 42 per cent of those who were economically active prior to migration (Table 28).

¹⁰ Our analysis shows that these differences are statistically significant.

Table 28: Remittance receipt by economic activity/inactivity of migrants before migration

Receiving remittances?	Economically active before migration?	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
Yes	42	30
No	58	70

Given that large proportions of migrants (40% in Mandalay; 60% in Rakhine; and 65% in Ayeyarwady) were economically inactive prior to migrating, either because they were in school or looking for work, their contribution to household finances before migration can be considered small. Moreover, of those in work prior to migration, majority were employed in agriculture – sometimes as regular, waged employees, but often as casual labourers, and many in casual non-farm work in and around their villages. While we do not have data on how much migrants earned before they migrated, the nature of their employment,¹¹ combined with what we know about the main reasons for migration (see Chapter 2) and information from interviews, suggests that wages were low, that work was not always available, and that there were large gaps between the wages that women and men receive. Given the low wages at origin, migrants who were able to secure jobs in their respective destinations were likely to be able to make more meaningful economic contributions to their households.

The net economic contribution of a migrant would also depend on whether the remittances he/she sends cover the cost of any additional labour employed to replace him/her. Here, the very low levels of contribution of migrants prior to their migration is further evidenced by the finding that majority of surveyed households (53%) in Ayeyarwady, Mandalay and Rakhine reported having no replacement labour for their migrant household members (i.e. because they were not contributing work in the first place, there is technically no need to “replace” them). In 33 per cent of households, the work was taken over by another household member.

Case study 14: Wage differentials in migration

The brother of a female Rakhine migrant who works in a sausage factory in Malaysia compared her situation there with her life in Myanmar:

“She was a manual worker before. As a manual worker, she had to carry stones for a road construction project. Females earned around MMK 4,000 to 5,000 kyats per day. Men earned more money than women. If men earned MMK 6,000, women earned MMK 5,000. There are no jobs all the time here. If the village has a road construction project, then villagers work for the project. The longest time the project last was over one month.”

A Rakhine woman whose son works in a fish processing unit in Thailand also observed:

“But daily wage in Thailand is THB 300 per day. One hour of overtime work is worth THB 55. The workers should earn around THB 9,000 without overtime. If there is overtime pay, workers earn more than THB 10,000. That is a lot of money for someone from Myanmar.”

¹¹ The World Bank (2016) reports that an agricultural worker in Myanmar earns only USD 1.80–2.50 per day during the monsoon season and USD 3.00–3.50 during the dry season – very low compared to the rates of USD 8.50 per day in Thailand and USD 7 per day in the Philippines. (S. Zorya, “Unleashing Myanmar’s agricultural potential,” East Asia and Pacific on the Rise: a World Bank blog, 27 May 2016. (World Bank, Washington, D.C., Available from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/unleashing-myanmar-agricultural-potential>)

Data from the International Rice Research Institute suggests that wages for rice workers in Ayeyarwady Region in 2004 were around USD 1 a day (in 2012 dollars). (S. Wiggins and S. Keats, “Rural wages in Asia,” research report (Overseas Development Institute, London, 2014). Available from www.odi.org/publications/8747-rural-wages-asia)

3.5.3. Migration financing dynamics

As shown in Chapter 2, households can go into significant debt to finance the migration of a young family member. These debts must be paid either using the wages of the migrant at destination, the remittances he/she sends home or the income of the household at origin. However, we do not find much evidence that migration-induced indebtedness impedes or diminishes the benefits of migration. We urge caution here, however, as the sample sizes involved are very small.

One woman from Ayeyarwady described how her parents spent MMK 50,000, obtained through the sale of their cows and gold and by borrowing money from relatives. The migrant son was able to send money soon after he migrated, as he had migrated through official channels and obtained an “office” job. Eight years on, the family has been able to repay all the debts and buy more land. They have also bought more cows and have started donating to community projects and religious causes. In contrast, the transformation in the living standards of the families of migrants whose jobs are less well-paid at destination are slower and smaller.

As this section has made clear, there are various dynamics at work which make it difficult to make generalizations about the relationship between migration and household welfare. At the same time, it is important to note that migration and remittances may affect the household in indirect and non-material ways, for example, in terms of social status. For example, one middle-aged farmer in Mandalay, whose two daughters and son work in Yangon as factory workers, explained that although his standard of living had not changed much, he felt more respected in their village:

“Before, they (the villagers) were not respectful to me. Now, I can participate in all the activities in the village. Since I have my own house now, people give me more respect compared to before.”

These socioeconomic impacts, which further complicate the relationship between migration and welfare, are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.



A classroom in Lashio, Shan State. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

CHAPTER 4



Harvesting sesame seeds in Nyaung U, Mandalay Region.
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Precarity and temporalities of migration

The previous chapter explored the remittance behaviour of migrants and their households, illuminating the complex relationship between migration and household welfare. This chapter explores migrants' (and their families') experiences of

precarity¹ through several case studies on insecure and unpredictable migration pathways, employment and living conditions. The interviews show that migrants can fall victim to vulnerability and uncertainty at any stage of migration: prior to departure, in transit, at destination and even after return. However, others benefit economically and socially from migration through access to improved livelihood opportunities.

Both internal and international migrants are concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid sectors. Internal migration towards Myanmar's larger cities, especially Yangon, has increased at an unprecedented rate as migrants seek work in the garment industry, small-scale manufacturing and informal services. Growing numbers of young women from rural areas are breaking tradition by migrating for non-farm work, leaving older women in the community to handle care duties at home. Nevertheless, some traditional forms of migration continue, including rural–rural migration of men who work as gold and gemstone miners, and women working as local farm labourers. International migrants tend to work in fish- and chicken-processing units, water-bottling plants, chopstick-making facilities, commercial farms and factories producing export goods. Although these jobs are at the bottom end of the labour market in destination countries, migrants' wages compare very favourably with earnings in similar work in Myanmar.

The interviews show that migration tends to be fraught with uncertainty, uninsured risks and hardship at first. Nevertheless, in majority of the cases (described in the succeeding sections), these initial challenges and difficulties were gradually overcome. The rate at which a migrant's circumstances improve depends on his/her skills and education, as well as his/her destination and type of work. These findings complement the survey data by enabling participants to reflect back on a longer period of time than the two survey rounds. Consequently, the interviews provided rich accounts of the impacts of migration on the community and how these changed and developed over time.

This chapter is composed of two parts: (a) migration experiences in the short-term, followed by (b) longer-term impacts and changes over time. Taking into account the changes that occur in migrants' experiences over lengthy periods of time, the study suggests it is important to understand how impacts and outcomes occur at various stages of the migration cycle – that is, to see migration and its impacts and outcomes through a temporal lens.

4.1. Experiences during the migration journey and at destination

Poorer migrant-sending households were purposely selected for the in-depth interviews. These interviews indicate a period of extreme vulnerability, insecurity and risk during the initial stages of migration. This can occur due to a variety of reasons, ranging from not having a place to live, not having a stable job, being in an irregular migrant status and in constant danger of being reported and deported, fined or arrested, as well as getting sick or injured in the workplace. The following sections describe how precarity is created and experienced at different points in the migration journey. While some experiences are brought about by certain practices of brokers, others point to inadequate protection of labour migrants in Myanmar and in receiving countries.

4.1.1. Precarity from crossing borders irregularly and related uncertainties

The in-depth interviews indicate that international migration for low-paid, low-skilled work is often irregular and undertaken with the help of brokers, who are often members of the same community as the migrants and were migrants themselves. They, therefore, have information and knowledge about migration routes and job opportunities at destination. Brokers are used by migrants to organize their

¹ According to the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE) of 1993, workers in precarious employment include those in casual, seasonal or temporary employment where the employing enterprise or person can terminate the employment contract on short notice and/or at will. In other words, this refers to employment under insecure conditions where workers can be dismissed without recourse to any legal protection, paid only for the hours they work, or are without cover for sickness or injury.

travel and assist with job placement. Even when a migrant has relatives at destination and has secured a job, he/she still relies on brokers to facilitate safe travel to their destination. Irregular migration of this kind is risky because of the chances of being discovered by law enforcement officers during the migration journey, which may result in fines, imprisonment or deportation. There can also be risks of injury because of the transport methods and unanticipated costs of accommodation and routes used.

4.1.2. High costs of migration

A case study from Rakhine State shows how a broker's practices create precarity and vulnerability.

Case study 15: Penniless and unable to call home

The respondent, a 56-year-old Rakhine man whose son migrated to Malaysia to work in an iron factory through an informal broker describes his son's experiences. The son approached the broker after learning about him through his network of friends. The respondent recalls that the broker's arrangement of his son's journey to Malaysia was fraught with uncertainty and precarity. His son idled in Yangon for a few days and was stranded on his way to Malaysia for more than a month while waiting for the broker to gather other migrants to be sent along with him. He paid the broker around MMK 600,000 and had no money left for contingency, so he experienced financial hardship during the journey. In addition, the respondent was unable to contact his son for over a month before he arrived in Malaysia. He suspected the broker might have been afraid migrants would run away and so did not allow them to contact their families as a precaution against this.

"I think the broker gave a place like a garage for my son to stay in. The broker usually sends 50 to 100 people at a time to Malaysia. Until they had a certain number [of migrant workers to send], my son had to wait for others . . . I couldn't reach him while he stayed on the way for one month because the broker didn't allow him to use phones there. I think the broker might have been afraid that my son and others would run away."

4.1.3. Risk of being arrested and/or deported

Some cases show how the migration journey is fraught with risks of being arrested, fined or deported. The following case shows how migrants sometimes face obstacles at checkpoints and must negotiate with and bribe border police to continue their journey.

Case study 16: Arrest at a border checkpoint

The respondent is a 34-year-old man from Mandalay Region who worked in Thailand for nine months. His goal was to send money home as others from his village did. He expected to build a house and buy his own land. A broker from another village arranged for migrants to work in Thailand, and each migrant paid him MMK 400,000. The respondent borrowed money at an 8 per cent monthly interest rate to finance his journey. The broker identified a fishery job for him. The broker convinced him that applying for a passport was time-consuming and that he would get to his destination faster and more directly by using an informal broker. However, he and others in his group of migrant workers were arrested on their way into Thailand because seven of them were unable to respond to questions at a border checkpoint on the Thai side. They were arrested as irregular migrants and had to negotiate to reduce their fines and be released.

4.1.4. Precarity resulting from the power imbalance between brokers and migrants

The stories of respondents with international migration experience illustrate the commoditization of migrants for cheap labour. Migrants – especially in certain job sectors – told of how they were

“evaluated” by intermediaries and employers. The following case exposes practices to ensure they were in good health and had the bodily strength necessary for performing physically demanding work, based on culturally defined notions of “masculinity” and what labourers’ body types should be like.

Case study 17: Physical inspection of workers for recruitment

A 42-year-old male respondent from Rakhine describes himself as the breadwinner of his family of seven. He worked in Thailand several years before the interview. He describes how he travelled with a group of seven migrant workers (himself included) aided by a broker based in Yangon. On their way to Thailand, the brokers took the seven migrants to a forest for hiding and did not provide them any food while they were there. Brokers from Thailand linked up with them and discussed with the Myanmar brokers in Thai. The respondent could not understand what was being said, but he felt that they were checking them for their physical strength. He recalls that they were made to stand in a line so that the Thai brokers could check their hands and legs, marking their hands with “C2.” He describes his experience as akin to buffalo trading for the Bangladesh market where the animals are sorted before being sent off. The seven migrants were split into two groups and taken away by two separate brokers. It took the respondent, who worked on a rubber plantation, four months to pay off the broker’s fees and only started to actually earn money after that.

4.2. Precarious working and living conditions at destination

In-depth interviews show how the difficulties that migrant workers experience at destination (whether abroad or in an urban area in the same country) create situations of precarity. Migrants’ lives are precarious both within and outside the workplace. In the many cases where employees in precarious jobs are provided accommodation, these two are connected. (This is one of the reasons migrants accept such jobs in the first place, as finding accommodation at destination may be very difficult.) Another common challenge faced by migrants is securing stable earnings in the light of irregular working days and employers’ practice of withholding pay. Respondents faced other precarious working conditions, such as bonded labour, dangerous work environments and discrimination. The following cases illustrate some of these experiences.

4.2.1. Scarcity of affordable accommodation for new migrants in the city

Migrants spoke about the daunting challenges upon their arrival in a new place. The most pressing immediate concern was finding affordable accommodation. Even when migrants did find accommodation, the problem of overcrowding was very common, and a tiny room or flat may be crammed full of family members or shared with other migrants. The following case of a 27-year-old female migrant from Rakhine State illustrates these difficulties.

Case study 18: Taking on debt to afford accommodation

The respondent is from a poor family that has fallen on hard times. Three of her four siblings have migrated to Yangon because of the desperate situation of the parents. After arriving in Yangon, the respondent remains unemployed for a month. During this time, she has moved three times because she could not afford to continue paying the rent. She then gets a job and finds a new place to stay; she pays rent in the amount of MMK 70,000 in advance. She borrows money from her aunt to make the payment.

4.2.2. Precarity in bonded labour

The in-depth interviews show two ways through which bonded labour: debt bondage and dubious contracts. A number of interviews reveal that bonded labour practices are endemic in agriculture

and fisheries. Some cases show respondents trying to meet their bondage obligations by “pawning” themselves or their children as workers to repay their debts. Some workers on time-bound contracts face obstacles to withdrawing from their employment at will, remaining bonded to their employer until the contract term is completed. Such obstacles include employers’ withholding of wages until the end of the contract term, taking away documents and/or keeping identity cards. Examples are further elaborated in the following cases.

Case study 19: Unfair contract terms

This case exposes how an employer uses a dubious contract to prevent employees from leaving their employment, thereby ensuring sufficient manpower for a fixed period.

A 24-year-old Rakhine man migrates to Yangon. His father’s sickness has created financial difficulties for the family, so the respondent searches for a job in the city, staying with his sister working at a sewing factory there. He goes to a broker to secure employment as a company security guard with very low pay (MMK 30,000 per month), but with accommodation and food provided. The company keeps his ID card and requires him to sign a contract to agree that he would not quit his job until after a certain period; otherwise, he would not get paid in full. The company fails to pay him a weekly wage, as initially agreed upon. He eventually quits, but the employer does not pay the wages owed him or return his ID card.

Case study 20: Debt bondage

Debt bondage, dependency on patrons and intermediaries, and the resulting extreme hardship are illustrated by the case of an Ayeyarwady fishing family.

The respondent’s husband works for a fish trader on a fishing boat who recruited their family against a promise of paying them a lump sum in advance for work to be done during the peak season. However, the trader did not always pay the family the advance at the time it was promised. The family’s situation eventually became desperate. They reached a point where they were pawning their possessions and having only one meal a day. As such, they tried to work for a different fish trader in the hope of earning more but had to wait until the end of the work season to do so. Imbalanced “patron–client” power relations are in evidence here as the respondent’s husband worked with the first trader for over nine years and did not leave, even though he knew he paid them less than other traders. The respondent said that cheating by traders is common, compounding the precarity and vulnerability of families in their community.

4.2.3. Precarity related to a lack of occupational safety

As reported by Moise and Schenker (2018), immigrant workers are more likely to encounter occupational hazards and be subjected to adverse working conditions, leading to poor health outcomes, workplace injuries and occupational fatalities. This disparity is often the result of language and cultural barriers, the political climate of the host country, irregular status (thus making them more exploitable) and poor access to health care (as a result of exploitation).

Case study 21: Workplace accident

The 24-year-old Rakhine respondent in case study 19 eventually found another job at a steel-cutting factory that paid MMK 60,000 per month (accommodation and food was provided). There, he once again faced precarious working conditions. His job involved the use of machinery to solder and cut iron sheets. However, safety measures were lacking, and five months later he suffered a serious injury to his leg and was hospitalized for three months. He had no knowledge of his rights

as an employee. The employer paid for his medical treatment and continued to issue his salary, but there was no compensation of any other kind. The in-depth interviews show that this case is not unusual, and a number of respondents reported that they found themselves working in precarious jobs at destination. Such jobs are dirty, degrading, hazardous, underpaid, inadequately protected by labour laws at origin and/or destination, “invisible” and, thus, highly vulnerable to exploitation.

Case study 22: Exposure to noxious chemicals

The case of a 27-year-old female migrant from Rakhine State who works at a slipper-making factory in Yangon illustrates the dangerous conditions that factory workers face. Her job is to apply glue in the manufacturing process. She says the fumes from the glue and paints are extremely strong and makes her sick. Once she took two days off, and two days’ wages, totalling MMK 36,000, were deducted from her salary. Moreover, the factory has a rule that the employees have to complete a certain minimum number of slippers in order to get a bonus.

“My team leader told me that I would get a wage deduction, but I had no choice. The smell of the glue and the paint are too strong there. They say the chemical smell can cause infertility to young people. We have to cover our noses all the time. Our clothes are tattered and torn from being stained with glue. They deduct from our wages for irregular attendance. We have the production reward. If we can make the required number of slippers in a day, we receive 2,000 extra. If we cannot, no one receives the extra payment.”

The respondent has to make a contribution towards the government social security system for factory employees every month but obtains the social security card only six months later.² As she can’t afford private medical treatment, she self-medicates and buys medicines from a pharmacy instead of visiting a doctor. When asked if she has any health insurance, the respondent mentions that the factory claimed they would compensate workers for any work-related accidents at the factory. Two months prior to the interview, a female co-worker at the factory was injured and the respondent suspects that the injured worker was dismissed without compensation.

Case study 23: Gold mines as death traps

Work in rural locations can be equally perilous in low-paid occupations. The accounts of gold mine workers in Myanmar powerfully illustrate the extreme vulnerability and precarity faced by those who work in this industry. A 39-year-old Rakhine man from a family of seven works as a tenant farmer in the summer, a manual labourer in winter and a fisherman after the rainy season. In the past, when work opportunities in the village were scarce, he would migrate to Sagaing Region, Kachin State and even China in search of work. He, along with two other men from his village, found a job in a gold mine through their social networks. Mining was undertaken with mechanical diggers, and the workers had to pay for their own food, petrol and the cost of using the machines. The mine was highly susceptible to erosion and collapsing sides; when this occurred, work had to stop. Earnings were based on the amount of gold the workers found, so they would continue digging despite poor conditions.

“In the night time, we had to use lights to be able to work, but we couldn’t even see what was happening on the ground. There was smog all around and we didn’t know if that mud cave would collapse on us. That was why we were worried all the time.”

² These benefits are available through the 2012 law implemented by the Social Security Board (SSB), which was established under the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population. The new law came into force in 2014 and protects workers against several risks and expenses, including injury, illness, maternity costs and loss of income due to sickness. The SSB operates two hospitals in Yangon and one in Mandalay where treatment is provided to beneficiaries of the scheme.

Such a collapse did occur and two of the workers were killed. The respondent decided to return home. After working at various mining sites for eight months, he returned to his village with MMK 200,000 in earnings.

4.2.4. Precarity of being an irregular migrant

A considerable proportion of international migrants from Myanmar are involved in irregular migration that is often characterized by clandestine entries, linked to informal work or the result of overstaying. The Census shows that a large proportion of the Myanmar population in major migrant-sending states and regions, especially Rakhine (37.7%), Shan (35.3%), Ayeyarwady (30.6%) and Mandalay (21.4%) (DOP, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, 2015e) are without ID cards. Without ID cards, it becomes difficult to apply for legal documents and travel through official migration channels, which may partly account for the high levels of irregular migration to Thailand, Malaysia and China. According to IOM and ACRM (2013:3), majority of Myanmar migrants in Thailand, working in agriculture, animal husbandry, casual labour work, fisheries and construction were undocumented. Most of these workers were paid less than the minimum wage: the same study also found that more than 90 per cent of surveyed Myanmar migrants in Tak (a border town in Thailand) were paid below the minimum wage and that nearly half of them were paid less than half of the minimum wage. Thus, irregularity is often intertwined with precarity.

Case study 24: Caught as an irregular migrant on the way home

The CHIME study's in-depth interviews reveal how migrants experience irregularity and the risks and hardships they encounter. The case of a 20-year-old female from Rakhine State who migrated irregularly to China, aided by her social network and as part of a group of migrants, illustrates this. The migrant, who had been working at a snack packaging factory for one year and eight months, decided to return home due to health problems. On their way back to Myanmar, she and other migrant workers from her village were caught by Chinese police while crossing through the border near Muse. The respondent (the migrant's father) reports that she had to contact people from Rakhine State who lived near the border to help them. The migrants ended up paying either fines or bribes to the police of about CNY 1,000 per person. Her father recalls the event and mentions that the families of the migrants caught were informed by other villagers who received phone calls from contact people at the border. The family had to borrow MMK 200,000 at 5 per cent interest for his daughter to be able to pay the Chinese police.

"They [referring to co-villagers] said that the girls from this village and men from other villages who came back from China were caught by Chinese police on their way home. They had to pay the police and so on. They [referring to his daughter and other migrants] had just enough money for their travel expenses. When they had to pay the police, some had to get money from their families and others had to ask for help from people in Muse."

Case study 25: Slipping from a regular to an irregular status

Another case illustrating precarity and irregularity is that of a 29-year-old migrant who recalls his experience of being deported from Malaysia. The respondent is originally from Rakhine State and currently working in Yangon at a furniture factory. He has 10 years of international migration experience working in Thailand and Malaysia. After working in Thailand for a few years, he travelled overland to Malaysia with the assistance of a broker. His first employer helped him obtain a passport and a work visa. However, he did not get any support from his second employer to renew his visa. Without a valid work visa (and, eventually, a valid passport as well), he soon became an irregular migrant worker. He and his friends were caught by the Malaysian police because some of them did not have passports or held fake documents and were detained. The respondent mentions that about 80 people were detained with them. They were kept in a detention centre which hosted

about 700 migrants. He was eventually deported with a group of seven other people and had to pay for his plane ticket back to Yangon. He indicates that many migrants work in Malaysia irregularly due to unaffordable work visa fees.

The in-depth interviews point to the following structural and social reasons for persistent irregular migration and the placement of migrants in precarious work:

- (a) Limited opportunities for legal migration for low-paid and low-skilled work;
- (b) Unregulated brokerage, in which there are insufficient checks and controls on brokers' and recruiters' activities, the modes of transport used to convey migrants, and costs borne by migrants and their families;
- (c) Collusion between brokers and employers to traffic workers from disadvantaged backgrounds into the worst jobs at destination;
- (d) A lack of legal and social protections for migrants at destination.

Case study 26: Idle gap in between jobs

Another case illustrates how an irregular migrant had to go into hiding to avoid being identified by the police. A 57-year-old male return migrant in Rakhine State went to work in a fishery in Thailand in 2006 with several of his friends. His friends in Thailand (who were already working there) arranged transportation for them to cross the border and found jobs for them. The working conditions in the fishery were below his expectations, so he decided to shift to masonry work. He needed to wait about 20 days before he could start on the new job and had to wait until the end of each month to be paid. By the time he got his first salary in his new job, one and a half months had passed. He recalled his difficulties and the experience of hiding in the jungle to avoid the police:

"When I moved from one job to another, I had to wait about 20 days and spend all the money I had earned by then. Since we were not legal workers, we had to flee when the police came to our worksite. We had to stay two or three days in the forest."

4.3. Impacts of migration on migrants and their families

Households with migrants can experience both positive and negative changes over time depending on a number of factors. These include: (a) regularity of salary payments, (b) interruptions to the contract, if any, and (c) whether working and living environments are safe and as promised, as well as (d) the employer's conscientiousness to ensure that workers are not exploited in terms of these. On the migrant's side, factors include: (a) shocks that his/her household or he/she personally experiences, and (b) personal attributes of the migrant, for example, whether she/he is careful with money and able negotiate better working conditions and survive in harsh working environments.

4.3.1. Changes at the individual migrant level

Further education and new career options

Many young migrants work in urban destinations while simultaneously pursuing further education and gaining new knowledge, skills and professional experiences. They believe that education is a viable pathway for upward socioeconomic mobility. Their remittances may similarly support the education of a sibling(s) or another, younger family member(s).

In many cases, young people's urban migration reflects their parents' expectations, as a 49-year-old father in Ayeyarwady Region advised his daughter: *"Do not only chase money, but pursue education and general knowledge as well."*

The 53-year-old mother of two migrants from Mandalay Region remarked:

"I'm glad that they have learned a new profession. As a parent, I'm happy for them. They don't

have to work as a farmer and as a mechanic anymore. They can always find a new company to work for. As they are already past the ages of 18 and 20, they are able to decide for themselves what they want to do with their lives . . . we cannot decide for them.

New attitudes and social skills

Some respondents were proud that their children have acquired new attitudes and social skills that they believe will help them adjust to modern living. A variety of positive changes were mentioned, such as becoming more open-minded, polite and understanding, as well as having more sympathy for people who were in need. Some parents said that their children now have better social communication skills and are more socially active.

“Even the way she talks has changed. When she was at home, she was a calm and quiet person. Now, she is smarter. She has more general knowledge and understands social relations more.” (55-year-old father of a migrant from Mandalay Region)

“They have become a bit open-minded. They have more knowledge now. Before, they didn’t have the experience of travelling alone and didn’t dare to speak out. Now, they can speak, travel and communicate better. But they still respect our traditional culture. They stay in line.” (52-year-old mother of migrant siblings from Ayeyarwady Region)

“In the city, he felt sympathetic for people of his age and brought them clothes. One girl cried at night when she missed her family and he even burst out in tears with her. I think his attitude has changed.” (A 43-year-old female respondent and mother of a migrant from Ayeyarwady Region)

Becoming a “modern” person, including in appearance

Respondents mentioned that young migrants learned to change their lifestyles, ways of dressing and hairstyles. Many parents were pleased to see their children knowing how to use modern appliances and dress smartly. However, there was sometimes tension around such transitions, especially when fathers did not approve of short hair, dyed hair, short skirts and fancy shirts. Such cases convey this theme: that a successful migration story resulting in changes towards a modern lifestyle and social values can be perceived as threatening by more traditional family members. Meanwhile, modern consumption patterns represented migrants’ higher “purchasing power” due to improved incomes in urban destinations – a change welcomed by family members. Some parents emphasized that even the complexions of their children had changed. “Fair skin” conveyed that their migrant son or daughter worked indoors, in contrast to their parents’ generation, who work/ed “under the sun.” The following quotes from respondents illustrate these viewpoints.

“Their [referring to her daughters’] bathroom and restroom are so shiny, and when they cook, all they have to do is to press some buttons. I don’t know how to cook like that! [Laughs] In the past, they were so dark, but now even their legs are so white. (I think I like it now because they used to cover their heads [in the style of farmer women] and they are not sweaty all the time.³) I feel happy to see them “shiny” and nice like this. (A 52-year-old female respondent and mother of migrant siblings from Ayeyarwady Region)

“My elder daughter used to have long hair. Now she has short hair around her neck and she has straightened it. Also, the way she dresses has changed. Before, she used to wear clothes very simply and now she wears short skirts . . . My younger daughter is a student and has already been “modernized” as well. She always wears pants. Their upper garments are also different now. They put fancy patterns of fruits on it . . . they wear something like that in Yangon. (A 50-year-old female respondent and mother of two migrant sisters from Ayeyarwady Region)

³ The eldest daughter of the respondent also expressed her comment.

Some people think that they ([her two sons]) are doctors, as they are good-looking for selling products at the hospitals . . . He [referring to her elder son] wears a white shirt and long pants in the office. He got complimented as he has white skin . . . They look inspired and I'm happy seeing my children wearing nice clothes. (A 62-year-old female respondent and mother in Ayeyarwady Region)

4.3.2. Impacts of migration on families back home

The in-depth interviews illustrate the complexity of resource mobilization and allocation decisions within the household. Households use remittances for various purposes depending on specific priorities, as well as the existence of any other sources of income. The interviews also show the critical role of investment in education, both in terms of being a drain on household resources in the short term, and in paying off in the longer term by enabling migrants to access better jobs in the city.

Impact of migrants' precarity on their families back home

In-depth interviews with migrants' families revealed how they are affected by periods when these migrants are unemployed or are employed but receiving irregular income or have received injuries. One of the challenges that irregular migrants face is the discrepancy between expected and actual working conditions and employment terms, which may result in unforeseen costs. Such costs may be incurred due to periods of unemployment or irregular payment. In one case, this prompted the sale of family assets and mounting debt.

Sudden shocks

One of risks that migrants face is encountering sudden shocks, especially injuries, which are relatively common in certain sectors (e.g. construction) and associated industries (e.g. steel and iron works). Such shocks can deepen poverty. The following cases illustrate how injuries sustained by breadwinner migrants may impact their families back home.

Case study 27: Workplace accident causing unexpected expenses

A 20-year-old male respondent from Rakhine belongs to a poor family of eight. His brother migrated to Thailand to work at an iron factory and help improve the family's financial situation. He migrated with a group of villagers through a broker. They each paid MMK 500,000, of which the parents had to borrow MMK 300,000 from friends and family. He sent remittances twice, allowing the family to partially repay the loan. However, the remittances came to an abrupt end when he suffered a serious injury due to an iron bar falling on his leg. He is unable to work but remains in Thailand. Unable to send money back home, his family is forced to mortgage their house and land.

Downward slides into debt and poverty

In a small number of cases, migration failed and had dire consequences for the households concerned, as the story of the 39-year-old gold mine worker in case study 23 illustrates. The respondent's first migration undertaking to work in a gold mine was financed by mortgaging the family land, with the expectation that large amounts of money could be made. The migrant returned eight months later, having saved MMK 200,000. Of this, MMK 50,000 was used to release the land from the mortgager, while the remaining MMK 150,000 was used by the family for their everyday needs for a month and a half. As the family's house was dilapidated, the respondent decided to work in China to earn money to buy a new house. He migrated with a group of six friends from his village.

Case study 28: Unstable migrant earnings leading to family debt

The impact of precarity on families is illustrated by the case of a 45-year-old woman in Shan State. She has six children, of which two are married. Her eldest son migrated to Thailand with the help

of his uncle's contacts. Two middle sons have likewise moved to Thailand and her two youngest children are still in school. The eldest son initially got a job at a tofu shop but later shifted to a painting job. The uncertain work schedule of the painting job led to unstable earnings, which created financial problems for the family back home.

"We do not own farmland anymore. Our family was not doing well, so my son went to Thailand three years ago. We didn't have money to pay for his migration, so we borrowed money from other people at 10 per cent monthly interest. He sent a little bit of money, and it was all spent to pay just the interest. He hasn't sent us money for a year because he has not been doing well, and so we had to sell our farmland to pay back the debt as it was getting bigger."

Case study 29: Multiple precarities impacting on the family back home

Following an accident in which he broke his hand, another respondent was hospitalized for 20 days. His employer allowed him to stay without working for three or four months but would only pay him THB 3,000 per month. With this amount of money, it was difficult for him to survive in Thailand. He decided to return to his village of origin. He further emphasizes that unstable employment made migrants more vulnerable in foreign countries. His daughter faced a similar issue in China, and her wages were not even enough cover her own living expenses, let alone allow her to send money home.

"In the case of my daughter, their factory was not doing well and so they could not work full days. They were paid only for the days they worked. They could only work ten days in a month. The wage they earned could not even cover their personal expenses. So, they could not send money home."

Improved standards of living

Some migrant households that received remittances recounted how they had spent remittances on household appliances, renovating houses, buying land and other status-enhancing uses. One migrant, even as he was irregular and experience discrimination at destination, nevertheless had positive outcomes from migration.

Case study 30: Home improvements

A 62-year-old woman in Ayeyarwady relates that remittances sent by her two sons have been used to pay off debts, repairing the ceilings and other parts of the house, buying household appliances, paying medical bills and supporting their younger siblings' education – all of which brought about significant changes for her family. The respondent is proud to show off her house and explains that it has been upgraded to a more solid and comfortable dwelling with an extended new wing because of the money sent home by her sons.

"They repaired the ceilings and bought us TVs, batteries and solar panels. They even bought us a bike and some equipment – and [it was] they [who] bought all of them, not us. It was once a wooden house and not beautiful like this. My husband prepared the wooden house [for the renovation], and when my sons sent home money, it has become beautiful like this. It's changed because of them, as you can see now. They told me to use the money any way I like . . . They even took me to the Golden Rock Pagoda."

Case study 31: Improved overall standards of living

A 49-year-old man from Ayeyarwady has a daughter who works in Yangon. He uses the remittances sent by his daughter to buy household appliances, pay back debts and support his younger daughter's education, thus bringing about a gradual improvement in their lives.

“There have been a few changes after she left. Our livelihood improved a little bit – we could manage to live a simple life. We bought things we need for this house. Now we are also able to save money, and we get to eat enough. Do we have any debts? We do, but we have less debt different now. My migrant daughter helps [by sending money] every month, and even though it is not a big amount of money, it can help us reduce our debt. She helps her youngest sister with everything for her education. When her youngest sister wants something – like new clothes – she would buy it for her.”

Case study 32: Overall positive outcomes despite irregularity

A 60-year-old return migrant respondent in Ayeyarwady has extensive migration experience of over two decades. After staying in Yangon for over 16 years, he led his family to migrate, with 11 members moving to Myawaddy and Thailand. The respondent describes how his employer, while paying him well and even showering him with benefits for his son's novice monk initiation ceremony, would not allow him to step inside his house and pointed towards things with his feet (a sign of disrespect in Buddhism). He felt discriminated against and insulted. He also describes feelings of being trapped and vulnerable arrest as an irregular migrant. Nevertheless, he encourages his children to return and work for the same employer because of the decent pay and because he knows that such migration could bring about positive changes in their family's life back home.

“We [my family and I] worked there for four years. In the third year, my son turned 25 and we initiated him into the Buddhist order [i.e. for him to be a novice]. We held the donation ceremony for one month. The boss provided food and drinks for one month. It was a big ceremony. Such a good man the boss was! However, he never allowed us to step inside his house. Whenever I was at their house, I would not have a place to sit on, but if there was food to eat, they would give me some. We worked for them for four years and they were able to buy two cars as a result.

When he asked us to do something, he would point with his leg. He treated us with a gloomy face a lot of the time and we did not have freedom. There were news of people getting captured here and there at night, so whenever we saw people in long pants, we had to contact and alert each other. We came back to Myanmar, but my family eventually went back there to have stable livelihoods.”

Impacts on social status

Migration can improve the social status of the family back home, as some of the in-depth interviews show. The interviews suggest, however, that social status does not upgrade automatically because of migration, but rather only when migrants have proven successful migration stories – that is, they are able to send remittances, and their families are able to repay debts, have higher purchasing power and can contribute to the funding of village activities and projects. In some cases, successful migration not only promotes the social status of migrants and their families, but also increases their bargaining power.

Case study 33: Held in better regard by the community

A woman from Rakhine with two sons in the city reports changes in the behaviour of her neighbours and other people in the community after learning that her sons have migrated. Whereas no one would lend them money before, she describes how they were willing to do so once they knew she had migrant sons. The respondent also expresses a sense that her social status has changed, with more invitations to social occasions and requests for donations. She feels that her sons' migration has led to her being more integrated in village life and more respected by the community. A similar experience is described by another migrant household in the Ayeyarwady Region. A mother of

three migrant daughters mentions that people have changed their attitudes towards them. The family could live with dignity, free from hunger and discrimination, and earn more respect after the daughters migrated. They were able to repay their debts and could now dream about their family's future.

"They [referring to her children] will come home when we can afford to have our own business, maybe paddy-growing, gardening or trading with own capital . . . We can't exactly say when. They don't have a deadline."

While a successful migration story may lead to an upgraded social status for a migrant and his/her family back home, a deterioration of social status may occur if the migrant works with a subordinate status. Migrants spoke about feeling degraded by the jobs they did and by the attitudes of their employers abroad but carried on because they saw their employment income as the only way to pay off debts, meet their spending needs and secure stable livelihoods at home.

Impacts on gender roles and responsibilities

In-depth interviews suggest that gender norms related to labour force participation and the division of labour in the household are shifting due to migration, in addition to wider changes in society. Interviews conducted in a village in Mandalay Region show how older women commute to work as farm labourers to nearby villages while the younger generation of women are migrating to Yangon to work at teashops and other businesses. There certainly shifts occurring within households with regard to women's work and accompanying changes in appearance and dress are pushing the boundaries of gender norms as the following case study illustrates.

Case study 34: Changing gender norms governing appearance and dress

The mother of a female migrant from Ayeyarwady Region relates how she and her husband initially received a change in their daughter's appearance with shock and disapproval, but eventually accepted it.

"A Burmese lady must be Burmese. She must wear a htarmain [a Burmese skirt]. Her hairstyle must be Burmese. Look at how I keep my hairstyle. . . Our daughter wanted to dye just two locks of her hair this summer. I told her, "Your father will not tolerate that." She said, "Just two locks of hair; could you ask Dad's permission for me to do that?" So, I dared to ask for her father's permission and said, "Your daughter is asking you to let her dye just two locks of her hair." . . . It was like red and yellow – or gold. Just one or two locks. Not many. Not that visible. One may not even notice it at first glance. I gave a glimpse just for the sake of seeing it. Nothing wrong with it, in my opinion. She did not dye her hair like others who colour the whole head red. I had to understand it from the viewpoint of modern youngsters."

Case study 35: Taking over as head of the household

The migration of men changes the day-to-day responsibilities of women in the families back home. Such is the case for a 39-year-old woman respondent with six children, whose husband works as the head of a crew of fishermen. She reports how her husband is in charge of two fishing boats and 49 rafts and supervises about 200 fishermen. He is often away for three months at a time. In his absence, the respondent has to take control of the household finances, including pawning jewellery to pay workers to ensure that they retain them. She describes her responsibilities when her husband is away:

"[The household] all depends on me. I decide everything by myself. I tell him my decisions when he comes back. He agrees with my decisions because I do not make wrong decisions. When

he is away, I am the head [of the household]. I can withdraw as much money as I need from the bank account. He lets me do that because [he knows] I am not going to waste the money.”

Apart from managing the household's finances, she also participates in different kinds of social occasions on behalf of her husband:

“The invitations for social events come with his name and I go to them on his behalf. I tell him how much I have contributed to these social events when he comes back. I always maintain transparency between us.”

The above case study shows how the respondent seems to have gained a degree of autonomy in terms of household decision-making, being in charge of the financial affairs of the household and participating in social events as the head of the household in lieu of her husband. Similar accounts were heard in other case studies, but it is not possible to state on the basis of this study, which took place at one point in time, whether there is a permanent shift in gender norms. In the above case study, for example, despite the frequent absence of the respondent's husband, the change in gender norms may be temporary and the household setup may revert to traditional norms whenever the husband is at home.

4.3.3. Impacts at the community level

The in-depth interviews show numerous and diverse impacts at the community level ranging from labour shortages to the development of a parallel system of loans and financing, investment in infrastructure and education, as well as attendance at public events.

Loss of labour force

Many respondents felt that out-migration had led to manpower shortages in their home villages, impacting on agricultural productivity and the work allocation during important social occasions. From the perspective of the families back home, the impacts of migration on work allocation and distribution during village events – which include both secular and religious observances – was the greater concern of the two.

Village events

Large-scale out-migration has increased the burden on the remaining villagers in the community because they have to take on greater responsibilities and additional work when fewer people were available to participate in the village's events. A number of respondents said that social life in their villages in the past was richer – expressing a sense of nostalgia for the past. While these respondents may attribute these changes to migration, these kinds of transitions are being observed in modernizing and industrializing societies in general, as relationships become more commercialized and less dependent on reciprocity and social trust. Respondents were positive about the impact of migration on the community in other ways, reporting that remittances contribute to the community by financing village events such as weddings, funerals and religious activities, as well as road repairs, village clean-ups, educational projects and community infrastructure.

A 46-year-old female respondent described the impacts of labour shortage for community affairs in her village: *“Before, there were many people participating in the social occasions [in the village] and it was enjoyable. Now, we have fewer people and it is a bit boring.”*

However, another 61-year-old woman had a different viewpoint, and noted that even though the burden is left on the remaining villagers, people shared their new responsibilities. She said that now even teenagers now help in community affairs. She believed the community could cope with labour shortages.

“Many are gone but many are still here. There are a lot of youngsters in the village. . . Yeah, they are not as many as there used to be before. By next year, there will be a lot of boys in grades eight, nine and ten. . . Everyone who went to work in Yangon are doing fine. You will see gold ornaments all over their bodies when they come back.”

A village in Mandalay with a well-established migration pattern of local women moving to Yangon to work in teashops Yangon (as described in some of the case studies) illustrates the positive impact of migration at the community level. According to villagers, there are approximately 300 households in this village. The main economic activities in the village are: (a) growing cash crops, such as green beans, green gram, sesame and peanuts, and (b) animal husbandry, specifically, goats, cows, pigs and chickens. The village has a middle high school, a subregional health centre, three monasteries and one small bean-splitting mill, but lacks an electrical grid system. There are different organizations providing microfinance and development projects in the village. However, many migrants have left the village and started running and working in teashops in Yangon and Bago. One villager described the labour situation thus: in the village where there is large-scale migration to work in teashops, because there is a shortage of jobs for men in the village. Migrants from the village own and run 80 teashops in Yangon. Because of this, there are only about 20 men left, and women bear the responsibility for day-to-day tasks. An alternative solution to manpower allocation for social occasions in the village was indicated by a 47-year-old male villager:

What has happened to the social events ever since a lot of people started working outside the village? [Now only] one person from each household [is available to] help with the work when preparing for village events. We also have a committee [referring to the committee members] that does good deeds.”

A 33-year-old female respondent described the situation in her village, reflecting on the “good old days”:

“When it comes to social events, there have been some losses. This is different time from when we used to have a lot of people in the village. If there was a wedding, we used to have a lot of people and everybody was united in participating and helping out, but now we don’t have that much village unity anymore.”

Her husband added some comments, saying a large scale of out-migration may lead to “retrogression” in religious matters and village development:

“There are 20 families, or 87 people, who have gone out of the village to work. This is a retrograde step for the village. Some people left their old parents in the care of others and went there [referring to the Myawaddy–Thai border]. A long time ago, one or two persons going to work in Myawaddy was seen as an “adventurer.” Now, people are following in others’ footsteps because they are jobless here. Negatively, there has been retrogression in religious matters as well. When active villagers leave the village, it is a retrograde step for the village.”

Another villager mentioned that their village had developed other strategies to manage the shortage of manpower by inviting people from other villages to participate in events: *“We do it with the few people we have. With few people here, we have to take care of everything. Since people from other villages are also invited, the events are teeming with people.”*

Agricultural work

The case of a village in Ayeyarwady with approximately 120 households is particularly illustrative of massive out-migration that leads to agricultural labour shortages. The village, which can be accessed only by boat and where most of the houses are built of wood and bamboo, is not covered by the

electrical grid system, but several households have solar panels for lighting and electrical devices. The village roads are in poor condition and prone to waterlogging and flooding during the monsoon season. There is a primary school and a monastery in the village. The main agricultural activities are growing betel leaves, rice, mango, green beans and green gram, but agricultural risks appear to have worsened, with agricultural production dropping seriously last year due to pests and diseases, as well as bad climate. Farm wages also remained low at MMK 2,500–3,000 per day and job availability was falling. In such circumstances, entire families migrated from this village.

A very small number of family members (10 out of 192 respondents) in the survey mentioned the difficulties of labour shortages in agricultural work. There are some possible reasons for this, considering that majority of our respondents (up to 70%) were either from landless families or those with smallholdings (farmlands smaller than 5 acres). The former, who often worked as daily wage workers or bonded labourers, rented land from landowners or waited for remittances from migrant family members. The latter were those smallholders who may lease out their land to other farmers or use remittances to hire daily wage workers if they lacked family members to work on the farm. They were not in a financial position to offer wage advances to bonded labourers to work on their land and must pay labourers at the market rate. As a result, some of them may simply rent agricultural machinery or lease out a portion of their farm to others.

Similar opinions were expressed in a village of approximately 200 people in Ayeyarwady, located behind the Rakhine Yoma Mountain ranges. The village is near the Patheingyi–Monywa Highway, but the roads leading to the village are muddy and slippery in the rainy season. The representatives of the village call this village a “village of the farmers” because almost two thirds of the households are farming families. Here, agricultural production is risky because of the climate. The Government provides loans to the farmers at a small interest through the Myanmar Economic Bank. Although this is a farming village, there are large numbers of casual workers that are rarely employed beyond the planting and harvest seasons, so they are compelled to borrow money from the landowners as wage advances. They receive wages that are below the market rate and must promise to work in the fields during the peak season. As a result, they have to borrow money from local lenders for their daily subsistence. Trapped in an endless cycle of debt, villagers see migration as a route to decent jobs. Recently, a trend of migration to Myanmar and Thailand has emerged – through both regular and irregular channels. The migrant population is increasing year by year partly because of growing networks and new intermediaries. There are several abandoned houses that are falling apart because no one lives in them anymore, as entire households have migrated to Thailand.

Donations

Some respondents in Ayeyarwady Region mentioned that donations from migrants facilitated social occasions and community affairs in the villages. Migrants themselves reported that they could donate, through their remittances, to community affairs, religious almsgiving, the renovation of monasteries, among others.

A 53-year-old female respondent expressed appreciation for remittances from migrants which facilitate village social life: *“I volunteer in village affairs, transportation and all religious affairs. When they are away, they provide us with some money; which enables me to do more volunteer work.”*

A 43-year-old male respondent made a similar remark: *“Those who are working in other places, they don’t hesitate to donate for social occasions in their village and we can ask for money if necessary.”* Some migrant respondents stressed that this kind of donation could be easily made while they worked outside of their village.

As a 46-year-old female respondent said, *“If we were here we would not be able to give like this. By working, there many people could support the village social or religious matters financially.”*

Community lending and insurance

Again, referring to the example of the “teashop migration” village in Mandalay, migrants have established funds for serious injuries and funerals, as well as a group lending facility to support those who wish to set up new teashops. As teashops need reliable labour; they usually employ children from the village ages 10 to 11 years. In such a situation, some poor families send their children to teashops opened by their relatives or acquaintances for wages in advance. Some of these children end up as bonded labourers, while others may move on to find work in factories or set up their own shops. A 47-year-old male respondent from this village explained how teashop businesses are established:

“Some villagers who open teashops started out as workers. They borrowed money when they were still workers and then started their own teashops. We had only three or four teashops before, but now there are about 80 of them. That’s how they started. The next generations have vision. They went to work in teashops and learned a lot of things and become educated. . . there are people who even pawn or sell their farmland to open teashops, as it’s impossible to open these shops with the kind of money they made from farming. There are four or five people who lend money at an interest in this village. It came down like that and, one after another, everyone starting to own a teashop.”

There are also individual migrants who have used remittances to set up loan facilities for their fellow villagers, as the case study of a 46-year-old female return migrant in Ayeywarwady shows. Five years ago, she and her husband took two children with other family members (ten family members in total) to Thailand with the help of her sister’s connections. While the respondent was working in Thailand, her family back home used the remittances she sent to lend money to other villagers at a low monthly interest rate of 2 per cent.

Investment in infrastructure

Other migrants contribute to improving the infrastructure in their villages of origin. The case of a migrant working in Mandalay shows how migrants contributed to the construction of infrastructure in their village in Kyaut Pandaung Township, where there was a big pond and, when it rained, it was difficult to approach the monastery nearby. Some young people from the village suggested building a bridge over the pond to access the monastery and to make the scenery more attractive. The bridge was under construction at the time of the interview, with migrants donating amounts of MMK 3,000 and above. The respondent mentioned that saving money from working in the city made the project possible: *“It’s impossible to save money in the village but it is possible in the city, so we all started this project and hopefully it will go well in the coming year. We will continue to handle other matters after this bridge as well.”*



Carrying Toddy Palm juice in Nyaung Oo, Mandalay Region.
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Harvesting peanuts in Lashio, Shan State.
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2017/Ko Oo



Daily life in Lashio, Shan State. © Metta
Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo



Children studying in Ho Pong,
Shan State. © Metta Development
Foundation 2017/Ko Oo



CHAPTER 5

A goatherd in Taung Tha, Mandalay Region. © Metta Development Foundation 2017Ko Oo



Key findings

This chapter presents the key findings of the study, grouped by region and thematic area. The CHIME consortium will disseminate the findings during stakeholder consultations and targeted communications to contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of migration, as it relates to Myanmar's regional and national development prospects. The findings are intended to provide an evidence base that will enable national and regional/state governments, donors, development actors and civil society stakeholders to develop narratives, policies and interventions to increase the developmental role of migration in the four target regions.

The study provides a richly textured account of the drivers and outcomes of migration, and how they vary. The findings show that Myanmar has a highly mobile population in the four regions studied. Migration is undertaken for a variety of reasons, including: to repay debt; to access better-paid work; as a response to sudden shocks; to realize aspirations for a different lifestyle and life trajectory; and to be able to invest in education, health and housing (either for the migrants themselves or someone else in their households). The study also illuminates the complex relationship between migration and poverty. While migration may be perceived as the only way to escape interlocking problems of debt and extreme poverty, migrants may accrue further debt if they are forced to borrow the funds necessary to finance their migration. In the long-term, the benefits of migration can offset initial hardships by leading to increased income generation and enabling new opportunities – for both migrants and their families.

Decisions to migrate can be precipitated by economic and infrastructure gaps between migrant source areas and destinations, extreme weather events, a lack of social security, extreme poverty, the inability to cope with shocks, and/or accumulating debt. However, it must be recognized that the drivers of migration are inextricably tied to aspirations for a better life, further education and modern lifestyles, especially among younger migrants. Migration is facilitated by improved communications, road networks, transport facilities and transnational ties, as well as social networks and brokers. As Myanmar continues to develop, and as more opportunities open up in urban areas and neighbouring countries, migration is likely to grow. This makes understanding the relationship between migration, development and poverty more important than ever.

5.1. Migration trends

The household survey confirms the widespread nature and complexity of migration patterns. Of the 2,819 rural households interviewed in round I of the CHIME household survey, approximately a quarter had at least one current migrant. This rises to over a third of households in Mandalay and falls to less than a fifth in Ayeyarwady, corroborating the findings of the World Bank QSEM study of 2016.

The study findings show that migration patterns are in a state of flux, with routes, duration and destinations changing all the time. Migration may involve a short distance, for example, to a nearby village or town; a short duration, as in the case of seasonal migration within the country and across the border into neighbouring Thailand. Importantly, the case studies show that there may be several kinds of migration in the same household, with siblings in different locations doing different jobs, but working towards fulfilling the same family goals. Some migrants remain in destination countries for a number of years, and others may oscillate between internal and international migration. In other words, different types of migration can morph into each other, creating a complex landscape of mobility.

Majority of migrants covered by the study who were economically active prior to migration (ranging from 58% to 67% across the states/regions under study) were employed in agriculture. A significant proportion (27%) were also in education before migrating, which suggests that they had their first paid jobs as migrants. Only 18 per cent of migrants found jobs in agriculture, forestry or fisheries at destination, but disaggregating the data reveals that internal migrants were most likely to find work in agriculture (22%), followed closely by non-food/accommodation services (17%), and then construction and the hospitality industry. International migrants were employed in construction (22%), other services (20%), manufacturing (19%), and accommodation/hospitality and food (14%). The survey data show that a majority of migrants moved into stable, paid employment, though this does not necessarily mean that they were regularly employed.

In terms of the demographic characteristics of individuals, the research revealed a strong correlation between being younger and male and the decision to migrate across all three regions. Men were also

more likely than women to choose international destinations over internal destinations, controlling for a range of other characteristics.

The study identified strong regional variations in migration patterns and outcomes.¹ However, within each focus area, the drivers and outcomes of migration varied according to the circumstances of migrants and their families, as well as the opportunities and types of jobs available at destination.

Mandalay Region. The data highlights regional flows of rural–rural migration, which are associated with a long-established history of seasonal agriculture. Majority of migrants (78%) from Mandalay were internal and typically found low-paid, precarious work. Migrants in urban areas commonly worked in eateries, guesthouses or construction projects, while migrants in rural areas were likely to be engaged in charcoal-making, mining and sugarcane farming. The receipt of international remittances was associated with higher asset values, better living conditions and higher welfare overall. Notably, this was not the case for internal remittances. In Mandalay, households with internal migrants appeared to be least well-off across each of CHIME’s welfare measures. This was contrary to findings from Rakhine State, Shan State and Ayeyarwady, where households with internal migrants at least had higher welfare levels than those with no migrants.

Ayeyarwady Region. Majority of migrants from Ayeyarwady were internal migrants who come from landless households and were migrating for the first time. Ayeyarwady tended to produce younger migrants, with a median age of 19. Their main destination was Yangon, with 60 per cent of migrants travelling to the capital city. Intraregional migration in Ayeyarwady was much less common than in other surveyed regions. Women and girls were more likely than men to migrate internally, whereas international migrants were mainly men migrating to Thailand. There was evidence of established rural–rural, seasonal and circular migration, although the scale of such types of migration was much smaller than in the case of migrants from Mandalay. The large numbers of migrants who were previously economically inactive, and who engaged in unpaid family labour, suggest that migration was being used as a pathway to accessing paid employment – especially among young females in rural areas. Indeed, the urban interviews indicate that many young women were finding work in garment factories and other manufacturing facilities.

Rakhine State. Rakhine State had equal numbers of internal and international migrants. Migrants from Rakhine State were escaping desperate economic circumstances. Correspondingly, they faced a greater likelihood of experiencing vulnerabilities and risks during the migration process. Internal migration from Rakhine State was unusual in that Kachin State, which was generally not a common destination for migrants from Myanmar, was the third most popular destination for migrants from Rakhine State – after Rakhine and Yangon. The popularity of Kachin State as a destination was most likely influenced by its proximity to China, which was the third major international destination for international migrants from the state. There was a very high number of previously economically inactive migrants, showing a lack of work opportunities at home. Migrants from Rakhine State were more likely than migrants from other the other areas studied to move into precarious employment with irregular income. Remittance incidence was highest among economically active female internal migrants, but particularly low (32%) among male internal migrants. International migration did not necessarily result in poverty reduction through more or larger remittances being sent home. The low remittance-sending among migrants from Rakhine State might be due to the relatively precarious employment conditions at destination.

5.3. Social drivers of migration

The study highlights the enormous significance of social drivers and their interconnectedness with economic drivers. Survey data revealed that by far the most common reasons shaping migrants’

¹ We did not offer a summary for Shan State because our sample for this state was not representative.

decisions to migrate were to seek better employment and secure livelihood opportunities. Other reasons were aspirations to live in the city and gain education, livelihood losses at home and a lack of local job opportunities and any of various family-related issues. Both male and female migrants cited family reasons, including marriage and plans to join a family member who had already migrated to a destination. The in-depth interviews enhanced the survey data by providing detailed qualitative insights regarding the main economic and social reasons for migration. These reasons included: aspirations for a better life; chronic poverty and debt; indecent and unfair working conditions in rural areas; and shocks and other adverse changes affecting the family. The interviews suggest that migration decisions are not usually motivated by a single reason – rather, they are a result of a range of social and economic reasons that overlap and combine, creating a cumulative impact serves as a driver at various levels: that of the individual, the family or household, the village or community, the wider region or state and nationwide.

5.4. Education

The CHIME study identified that migration, both internal and international, was frequently cited as part of households' strategies to ensure that the education of younger siblings can be undertaken. While similar observations may be made in other countries, the in-depth interviews suggest that this objective is particularly strong in Myanmar and remarkable because extremely poor families place such faith in education and pooling resources together to ensure that it happens. In cases where younger siblings have been pulled out of school to pay for the migration of an older sibling, that older sibling will often support the younger sibling, sending remittances to pay for his/her education. The scenario with education contrasts with the disillusionment with education among the extremely poor seen in other parts of the world because education cannot guarantee employment. Myanmar rural families appear to believe that education offers good prospects and migration is one way of mobilizing resources for that.

5.5. Debt

For majority of the in-depth interviewees, migration was regarded as the only way of releasing the family from debt. Debts were incurred for a variety of reasons: to cope during the lean season when employment is scarce, pay for education and health, and to fund migration. Migrants and their families often borrow and go into further debt to finance migration even if migration is being undertaken to repay existing debt, as it is seen to offer greater prospects for doing so than local employment. Our case studies provide detail on both the level of constraints and the coping mechanisms that are operationalized by the rural poor. A number of interviews revealed that the families attempted to repay their debt through a variety of means and borrowed money from multiple sources, including relatives, employers, microfinance institutions, government bodies and private money lenders. A number of qualitative interviews with poor households indicate that they are unable to effectively utilize credit schemes because of problems with repayment schedules and terms of borrowing beyond their means.

5.6. Remittance patterns

CHIME data suggest high remittance incidences in the four regions: 66 per cent of economically active migrants sent remittances home in the 12 months prior to the survey, with as many as 84 per cent of male and 77 per cent of female migrant workers remitting. There was a striking difference between the remittance patterns of internal and international migrants, a contrast likely due to the large wage differentials between Myanmar and common international destinations. International migrants were more likely to send remittances home and to send, on average, larger amounts than internal migrants. Remittance-sending may not start immediately on migration. Migrants may start remitting as soon as they are able to secure work and accommodation and pay off migration costs. In-depth interviews

suggest that the amount and frequency of remittances transfers are based on migrants' job stability, salary, living costs, plans for the money and their families' emergent needs. CHIME data does not suggest that migrants generally have a remittance "schedule" that they have set with their families back home: 60 per cent of migrants send remittances spontaneously without being asked to send money home or having previously agreed to.

Looking at the main uses of remittances by region and by destination type, CHIME data show that a common use of remittances is the purchase of food, as reported by 43 to 66 per cent of international migrant-sending households, and between 54 to 63 per cent of internal migrant-sending households. This supports existing evidence that remittances are used for everyday household consumption. Experiences were recounted by some migrant households in receipt of remittances where these have been spent on buying household appliances, renovating houses, buying land, paying off debts, paying medical expenses of family members and supporting younger siblings' education once the migrant has become better established at destination.

The relationship between migration and household welfare outcomes is complex. CHIME findings show that improving one's life is a key driver of migration – an aspiration to move away from back-breaking work "under the sun," to find work that pays more or even just any job as there are few options at home, or to take advantage of education opportunities in more urban areas. Providing a mere snapshot in time, household survey data cannot provide robust answers regarding impact. The impact, if there is any, would depend on a complex set of factors, such as the role the migrant played in the household economy before migration, the contribution they make as a migrant, and how the household adapts after migration. For some, simply having one less mouth to feed at home may represent an important saving. At the same time, it is important to note that migration and remittances may effect household welfare in indirect and non-material ways, for example, in terms of social status.

5.7. Community impacts

Migration appears to be having both positive and negative impacts at the community level. On the one hand, migrants invest in infrastructure development and social events back home, providing cheap loan facilities for neighbours who wish to set up a new business, as well as funding to help those with serious illnesses and injuries or in need of conducting funerals. On the other hand, however, some interviews show how migration has adversely impacted on social events and village life when so many adults are away. It has also led to a shift in tasks that were previously performed by adult males on to young boys in the village. Whether or not this has impacts on their education or other aspects of their well-being is not clear and needs to be investigated further. Another issue that was mentioned in the Ayeyarwady interviews was the negative impact of labour-displacing machinery on local job availability. As these machines are likely to be rented out to several large farmers there could be community-wide impacts.

5.8. Information sources

Migrants typically gather information about the likely costs, opportunities and risks involved in migration before making the decision to migrate. Many respondents reported more than one source of information. Family, relatives and friends at home and at the destination are common sources of information about migration, reflecting the importance of emerging migrant networks in Myanmar. Most information sought prior to migration relates to job search, with information to secure a job at destination – or at least to identify agents who may be able to identify job opportunities – by far the most common responses, which is reflective of the eventual source of information: brokers, recruitment agents and friends at destination.

5.9. Temporalities in migration

CHIME research shows that the impacts of migration in the short term are almost always a combination of labour depletion and heavy expenditure – on brokers, border controls, obtaining official documents and/or transport – for the migrant’s family at origin. This often comes at a time when the family has already suffered a setback, which may take the form of a shock, such as serious illness or injury of a breadwinner, or the taking on of heavy debt to pay for education. For migrants themselves, the initial period is fraught with uncertainty and risk – due both to the practices that brokers engage in to evade border controls and the unwelcoming climate in urban areas and bordering countries keen to import cheap labour but reluctant to provide decent jobs and secure living conditions.

Over time, these initial disadvantages, costs and risks are gradually replaced with more prosperity for the migrant and his/her family – debts may be repaid, food security may improve, siblings become educated, elderly parents are cared for and the social standing of the family rises. The role of sibling-based and filial piety-based social capital in managing risks and providing support to lift other family members out of poverty is evident. However, this depends on the individual migration trajectory. Those migrants with more skills and/or in destinations with well-paying jobs in China, Malaysia and Thailand or skilled factory work in the city can effect these changes for the wider family faster. For those who are trapped in poorly paid jobs at the bottom of production chains or rural enterprise, change may be slow or imperceptible. However, even such migration arguably prevents further downward slides into poverty by reducing the demand for food and other resources in the household back home.

5.10. Precarities

CHIME interviews revealed how precarity is created and experienced at different points throughout the migration journey. While some experiences are related to the practices of brokers (see further below), others point to inadequate protection of labour migrants in Myanmar and in receiving countries.

At destination, both internal and international migrants are concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid sectors. Internal migration towards Myanmar’s larger cities, especially Yangon, has increased at an unprecedented rate as migrants seek work in the garment industry, small-scale manufacturing and informal services. In-depth interviews indicate a period of extreme vulnerability, insecurity and risk during the initial stages of migration. This can occur due to a variety of reasons, ranging from not having a place to live or a stable job, being irregular and in constant danger of being reported and deported, fined or arrested, as well as getting sick or injured in the workplace. One of the most common challenges is securing stable earnings and the vulnerability often stemming from irregular workdays and the practice of withholding pay by the employers. Migrants also faced other precarious work conditions such as bonded labour, dangerous work environments or discrimination.

5.11. Brokerage patterns

According to accounts from the in-depth interviews, brokers are variously involved in recruiting, placing and channelling workers. The household survey data indicate that almost a third of men and a quarter of women use brokers or agents if they are migrating abroad. The figures are even higher in Mandalay and Rakhine, with 50 per cent of male and female international migrants in Mandalay and almost 40 per cent of those from Rakhine using a broker.

It is evident that migration to faraway destinations where there are few contacts is usually undertaken with the help of either social networks or brokers or both.² In fact, a common scenario is where family

² The term “broker” is mentioned in 75 of the qualitative interviews, and often in the context of migration, so this is clearly a significant issue. However, we must bear in mind that brokerage also refers to mediation in trade.

members have already identified the destination and occupation that the migrant should travel to, but for which they need the help of a broker to. This is encountered more frequently in the case of international migration for low-skilled jobs. In the case of internal migration, brokers can be important as well if the migrant has no connections and may not know how to approach employers and where to live.

There are various ways in which brokers facilitate migration; meeting upfront costs for migration and then recouping them through migrant wages is one way in which this is done. The arrangement traps the worker temporarily in debt, but the interviews indicate that families are aware of this practice and know that they must wait for the initial investment in the migration undertaking to start paying back. CHIME research also establishes the high upfront costs of migration which can run into hundreds of thousands of kyat. The survey data found that international migrants were paying MMK 454,350 on average, compared to internal migrants who paid only around MMK 10,000. These costs can place irregular migrants in extremely precarious situations. Having paid large sums of money for the journey and being illegal at destination trap them in precarious jobs until they are able to repay their debts.

5.12. Opportunities for women

Migration has opened up several opportunities for women. The interviews from Ayeyarwady suggest that their migration may be overtaking the migration of men. Industrial zones in Yangon have created plenty of job opportunities for women whose families are struggling to manage with their land or rural employment. With so many young women breaking tradition and leaving their villages, coupled with wider changes in society, gender norms related to labour force participation and the division of family labour seem to be shifting. Accompanying changes in appearance and dressing are pushing boundaries of gender norms. Apart from gaining knowledge and skills or changing attitudes, respondents also mentioned that young migrants are changing their lifestyles, manner of dress and hairstyles. Many parents reported being pleased to see their children knowing how to use modern appliances and dressing smartly, though sometimes such transitions were accompanied by tension.





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Paving a road near Nyaung U, Mandalay Region. © Metta Development Foundation 2017/Ko Oo

Appendix: Research Methodology

Quantitative component: the household survey

Sampling approach and sample size

Two regions (Ayeyarwady and Mandalay) and two states (Rakhine and Shan) were selected for the study, reflecting the priority areas of the Livelihood and Food Security Fund (LIFT). The International Organization for Migration (IOM), a team of researchers from the University of Sussex and the Metta Development Foundation worked with Myanmar's Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population to design a sampling methodology that would deliver a representative sample of rural households in each of the chosen regions and states. The Office of the Census used the master sampling frame from the 2014 population census to provide the project with a list of randomly selected enumeration areas in each region and state.

Unfortunately, due to local security issues in Rakhine and Shan States in early 2017 that could have placed fieldworkers at risk and/or increase local unrest, fieldwork teams were unable to visit all of the selected enumeration areas in these two states. Consequently, the resulting samples from Rakhine and Shan States cannot be considered representative of their rural populations. Only the data for Ayeyarwady and Mandalay can be used to make statistically reliable inferences about the rural populations in these regions. In particular, caution must be exercised when interpreting any of the results for Rakhine and Shan given the likely association between insecurity and migration. It is plausible that the enumeration areas visited by the CHIME field researchers had disproportionately lower incidences of insecurity and thus cannot be used to make inferences about migration in the broader region.

Thus, the originally intended sample size of 3,400 rural households distributed across the four regions was reduced to 2,819 rural households (see table A1), regionally representative for Mandalay and Ayeyarwady, but not for Shan or Rakhine. Of these households, 260 in Rakhine were visited at a later stage of fieldwork because of delays in securing permission to access the selected enumeration areas in the state.

In addition to the rural sample, CHIME included a small sample of urban households in Shan. A fieldwork team had already been recruited to collect data in the state and, given the very small size of the rural sample, permission was obtained to visit a number of urban households. We exclude these urban households from the analysis presented in this report because they were not re-interviewed in round 2.

A rapid listing of the households in each enumeration area was carried out by the fieldwork team; 20 households from each enumeration area were randomly selected. Training in sampling methodology and technical support to supervisors in the field were provided by Third Eye, a data management company based in Yangon.

Attrition and replacement

Households selected in the first round of the survey (between January and March 2017) were revisited in June and July 2017 for a follow-up (round 2). Attrition rates were very low across all regions, due in part to the very early follow-up. Of the 2,559 households in the initial rural sample, 98 per cent were re-interviewed in round 2. A total of 66 households across the regions/states dropped out of the study; to be specific, only 10 of these 66 households actually refused to be re-interviewed, with

the remainder having either moved away from their villages or unavailable for an interview. The low attrition rate meant that the samples for Mandalay and Ayeyarwady continued to be representative at the regional/state level (Shan and Rakhine not being representative in the first place owing to the reasons detailed above).

It was decided that households would be replaced only in those enumeration areas where more than three households dropped out. As this was a very rare occurrence, only two households were replaced in the end. Hence, for the purpose of making a comparison between survey rounds, the CHIME sample size was 2,493 rural households.

Table A1: Number of households in the quantitative survey sample (rounds 1 and 2)

Region/State	Round 1			Round 2			
	Original round	Late round	Sub-total (round 1 total)	Re-inter-viewed	New households	Not re-inter-viewed	Sub-total (round 2 total)
Mandalay	840	0	840	829	1	11	830
Ayeyarwady	860	0	860	836	0	24	836
Rakhine	519	260	779	509	1	10	510
Shan (rural)	340	0	340	319	0	21	319
Shan (urban)	277	20	297	0	0	0	0
Total	2,836	280	3,116	2,493	2	66	2,495

Key definitions used in the household survey

CHIME adopted the following definitions for its key concepts.

A *household* was defined as a group of people who normally lived and ate together in the same dwelling. These people may not necessarily be related to each other, following the concept of the “common pot” widespread in empirical work. This definition includes members who are temporarily away from the home for a period of less than three months.

A *migrant* was defined as a person who had been a member of the household but:

- (a) Was currently away and lived outside of the *village*;
- (b) Had been away for three months or more at the time of the interview;
- (c) Had left the household within 10 years prior to the interview.

The migrant may have been living in the same township, in another part of Myanmar or abroad, and may have left for a range of reasons.

A *return migrant* was defined as a person who had returned to the household within the 12 months prior to the interview after a period of migration. Data on return migrants was only collected in the second round.

Questionnaire design

The survey instruments consisted of a household questionnaire and a community questionnaire.

The *household questionnaire* consisted of 14 modules grouped into eight themes (Table A2). It was completed by a representative member of the household, who met the criteria of being over 16 years of age and having been informed about the broader household context. Some of the modules drew on existing surveys to define, for example, highest education level completed, and outcomes such as poverty and food security. The household roster collected data on each resident member of the household, including his/her age, gender, status in the household and relationship to the household head. Two further modules collected key information on education and labour force status and activity. Five modules (4a–4e) were designed specifically to provide rich detail on the extent, nature and experiences of migration of each migrant from the household, including decision-making in the migration process, remittance behaviour and contact with the family of origin. The remaining six modules collected data on the key indicators of development and living standards of households to draw associations between migration and development.

Table A2: Household questionnaire

1. Household roster	4e. Migration intentions
2. Education	5a. Household assets
3. Labour	5b. Household living conditions
4a. Return migrant(s) (round 2 only)	5c. Household income
4b. Current migrant(s)	6. Food security and poverty
4c. Information on migration	7. Credit and debt
4d. Migration financing	8. Land

The *community questionnaire* was designed to collect broader information about the villages. Often, two or three people from the village – usually village officials – contributed to the completion of the questionnaire. The community questionnaire was used to collect data on physical infrastructure, villagers' past experiences with migration, broad economic activities within the village and past shocks, such as floods and droughts.

Both questionnaires were administered using the Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) digital application managed by Third Eye and installed on a handheld tablet the size of a mobile phone. The use of CAPI meant quality controls could be carried out in real time, that is, by checking the consistency of the data as it was uploaded to the server and by making telephone follow-ups with a small number of randomly chosen households.

Training and fieldwork

The main training of the fieldwork team was conducted in Yangon by Metta and IOM with support from the University of Sussex in December 2016. The training covered ethical conduct, informed consent and safety of fieldworkers, as well as questionnaire administration both on paper and on the CAPI tablets. Third Eye participated in this training to ensure that all fieldworkers were proficient in the use of the CAPI application. All fieldworkers were provided with a field guide to refer to regarding definitions of key terms, ethical protocols and research team contact details. The household questionnaire was tested in a simulated exercise during the training workshop and in a short field visit to an informal migrant settlement.

A follow-up training session was run with team supervisors in May 2017 in advance of the round 2 surveys, facilitated as well by Metta and IOM, with support from the University of Sussex and Third

Eye. The purpose of this training was to highlight small changes in the questionnaire made between the first and second rounds (e.g. the inclusion of a module on return migration).

Qualitative component

Data collection process

Qualitative research was undertaken to explore the drivers of migration, migration patterns, migration decision-making and impacts of migration at the individual, household and community levels. The qualitative research was designed to shed light on a variety of dimensions of being a migrant-sending household, including the recruitment process, resource allocation within the household, community obligations and duties, moral economies and social networks. The qualitative research was also used for triangulation to supplement and examine the accuracy of the household data.

Qualitative data collection comprised four steps, and the in-depth interview was one of the main methods, together with field notes, through which CHIME collected data for qualitative research in selected enumeration areas and urban destinations.

Step 1 involved consulting with NGOs working with migrants in Yangon; this took place at the beginning of the training course in December. In step 2, CHIME identified source locations and randomly selected two contrasting enumeration areas in each target region or state with relatively high levels of migration from LIFT's target townships. The team conducted first-round in-depth interviews in the two enumeration areas identified per region or state. In total, there were 68 interviews conducted within six weeks. In step 3, fieldworkers conducted additional (late) first-round interviews in two urban destinations, with 15 key informants (who were migrant workers) in Yangon and 15 in Mandalay referred by rural households and other social networks. This first round of data collection took place between early February and early April 2017.

Step 4 adjusted and selected enumeration areas for the second round of data collection according to the gaps in data collected from the first round of research. The team conducted 64 in-depth interviews with rural households and 15 informants in each urban destination (Yangon and Tachileik) during the second round of urban interviews – a total of 30 interviews. This second round of data collection was carried out between early June and end of July 2017.

Selection of enumeration areas for the first round

The selection of first-round field sites followed these criteria and considerations:

- (a) Agro-ecological and climatic conditions;
- (b) Proximity to major road networks and urban areas;
- (c) Practical considerations, such as the availability of accommodation for the research team.

The specific criteria per region or state were as follows:

- (a) In Ayeyarwady Region, one cyclone-prone enumeration area was to be chosen from the southern region of Labutta; this area was badly affected by Cyclone Nargis, had a high incidence of landlessness among its population and had poor access to roads. In contrast to this was Hinthada District in the north, where beans, sesame, corn and irrigated rice were grown, and where there was a high incidence of migration to Yangon.
- (b) In Mandalay Region, one enumeration area in the dry zone in the south-west and another in the north, in the non-dry zone, were to be chosen.
- (c) In Rakhine State, one cyclone-prone enumeration area could be chosen from either Mrauk-U or Minbya, alongside a non-cyclone-prone enumeration area with roughly the same agricultural characteristics.
- (d) In Shan State, one enumeration area from either Kengtung or Tachileik in the east was to be chosen (in Kengtung, where the terrain is hilly in parts, the main cash crops are lowland or

upland rice, opium and corn). Another enumeration could be chosen from Taunggyi, where agriculture is higher-yielding and more commercialized, with potatoes, sunflowers, garlic and turmeric as the main cash crops.

Selection of enumeration areas for the second round

The workplan for the second round of data collection took into consideration issues of access during the rainy season. The same enumeration areas surveyed in the first round were used in the second round, with a few adjustments made to address research gaps. To be specific, five out of the eight enumeration areas used in the second round were retained from the first round; the remaining three were newly selected, using the same criteria as in the original research design. Additional conditions for selecting these three enumeration areas were as follows:

- (a) Proximity to and a similar agricultural pattern as the enumeration areas in the first round;
- (b) Accessibility during the rainy season;
- (c) More migrants moving out of villages.

Therefore, five out of eight identified enumeration areas were selected from quantitative surveyed areas, with three other nearby enumeration areas not covered by quantitative research but having more migrants out of villages.

In order to better understand different migration patterns at the township level, Tachileik, a border town located at Myanmar's junction with three neighbouring countries – Thailand, Laos and China – was chosen for qualitative data collection during the second round; as such, the Mandalay urban households were not re-interviewed. We decided to keep one city of destination, Yangon, from the first round but also shifted our attention to capture rural–urban and rural–rural migration patterns. Tachileik was selected as it featured both internal and international migration routes (including cross-border migration to Thailand), and seasonal and circular migration from rural areas.

Selection of potential respondents

Since the target regions/states were extremely diverse in terms of agro-ecological and climatic conditions, ethnicities, political situations and livelihoods, we chose households with relatively similar landholdings and ensured a fairly diverse selection of ethnic backgrounds and destinations. This aimed to provide a sense of how contextual factors shaped migration patterns. In order to juxtapose voices, gender and generational variations were considered. One adult male and one adult female were interviewed from each of these rural migrant-households to capture the perspective of each sex. However, if there were no individuals from both sexes among the family members, then only one person was interviewed and additional households were selected to be interviewed, to redress the gender balance. Each interview took between one and two hours, depending on how much the interviewees were willing to share.

Prior to the qualitative team's visit to an enumerated area, Third Eye generated the list of the sample of migrant-sending households, with certain specific items of information gathered during the first round of data collection, such as the number of adults and migrant members; their genders, ages, ethnic backgrounds and destinations; the household's agricultural land ownership status; and broker involvement, if any, in the migration process. The qualitative research team then selected a small number (four or five) of households with the following characteristics and set appointments with them for in-depth interviews:

- (a) Has a current migrant or a returnee (the migrant may be male or female, internal or international);
- (b) Has a small landholding (smaller than five acres) or none at all, or has poor-quality land, or are marginal farmers;

- (c) Has a migrant member who migrated for labour through a broker;
- (d) Is of a specific ethnic background;
- (e) Has a high dependency ratio (optional).

