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Household Migration During a Time of Crisis: Patterns and Outcomes in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes household migration, including paths, causes, challenges, and post-migration outcomes in Myanmar between February 2021 and July 2023 using the Myanmar Household Welfare Survey and the Myanmar Migration Assessment. During this period, we find that approximately ten percent of households in Myanmar migrated as a household or family unit. While nearly 40 percent of migration was urban-to-urban, a quarter was rural-to-rural, a quarter was rural-to-urban, and ten percent was urban-to-rural.

Employment was the primary driver of household migration, with 54 percent of households citing it as their main reason for relocating. Other motivations included the desire to escape conflict and improve physical security (15 percent), to help family (12 percent), and for marriage (eight percent). In regions characterized by high conflict, such as Kayah, Chin, and Sagaing, a significant number of migrating households relocated due to conflict (70, 47, and 37 percent, respectively). Further, because of under-sampling of conflict areas, the number of migrants who moved due to conflict may be significantly higher.

Households from high conflict regions often moved more than once before reaching their current destination. Decisions on where to migrate were significantly influenced by perceptions of employment opportunities (35 percent) and safety considerations (34 percent). Finding the money to migrate was challenging for most households. Sixty-two percent of households relied on savings to finance migration, while 14 percent of households relied on assistance from relatives.

The study also analyzes post-migration outcomes. House ownership decreased significantly after migration from 65 percent to 28 percent. Instead, dwellings were either rented (34 percent) or stayed in for free (32 percent). Further, post-migration income sources changed. There was a significant increase in non-farm wage income and income from remittances and donations after the move. Almost two thirds of households reported improved safety and security conditions after the move. About half of the interviewed households felt that they had better opportunities to earn an income after moving. Nevertheless, access to furniture, clothing, and cooking materials decreased for a third of the households (35, 27, and 29 percent, respectively). Moreover, there were notable disparities between households migrating due to conflict and households who moved for other reasons, including less access to income, furniture, clothing, and cooking materials after the move for households displaced due to conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the sustained effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and natural disasters combined to threaten the livelihoods of an increasing number of people globally. The consequence is a steep increase in migration and displacement. At the end of 2022, 71.1 million people were internally displaced worldwide. This is a 20 percent increase from the previous year, and the highest number ever recorded (IDMC 2023). This also reflects the reality in Myanmar, where COVID-19, and a coup in February 2021, and the resulting economic contraction and violence that erupted across the country led to economic turmoil (joblessness, financial disruptions, and inflation) and a sharp increase in migration.

The Myanmar Housing and Population Census recorded that in 2014, almost every fifth person in Myanmar was an internal migrant (19.3 percent of the total population) (Department of Population 2016), a figure that stayed constant in 2019 according to the Inter-Censual Survey (ICS) (Department of Population, 2020). At that time, 36.6 percent of internal migrants moved to follow family, 31.4 percent of internal migrants moved for employment, and 26.2 percent moved for marriage, while 0.7 percent moved due to conflict (Department of Population 2020). While in 2019, conflict ranked low as a driver of internal migration, at the end of 2022, Myanmar had the fourth largest population of internally displaced persons due to conflict and violence in the world after Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia (IDMC 2023). As of January 2024, UNHCR estimated that there were 2.6 million internally displaced persons in Myanmar and 60,500 officially recognized refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar in other countries (UNHCR 2024). In addition to conflict, households also face natural disasters, rising food prices, and fewer job opportunities. Households are now moving within Myanmar both for economic reasons and for physical safety as conflict rages on.

In this working paper, we present findings from the fifth round of the Myanmar Household Welfare survey (MHWS) and a sub-sample survey of 443 MHWS migrant households who have moved outside of their home township. First, we provide a descriptive account of households who have migrated within Myanmar between February 2021 and July 2023 from the MHWS. Since we do not survey households outside of Myanmar, we only capture household that have migrated internally. Second, this report explores household migration in greater depth using data from a sub-sample survey on migration, the Myanmar Migration Assessment (MMA). Using this data, we examine (i) driving forces behind migrant households' decision to move, (ii) migration routes, (iii) challenges during the migration process, (iv) and how living conditions and access to basic necessities have changed after or at the current stage of the migration journey.

This paper is organized as follows: section two provides background on the data and methodology used for the study. Section three documents our descriptive findings, including estimates of household migration in Myanmar, drivers of migration, migration patterns, challenges during migration, and post-migration outcomes. Section four concludes.

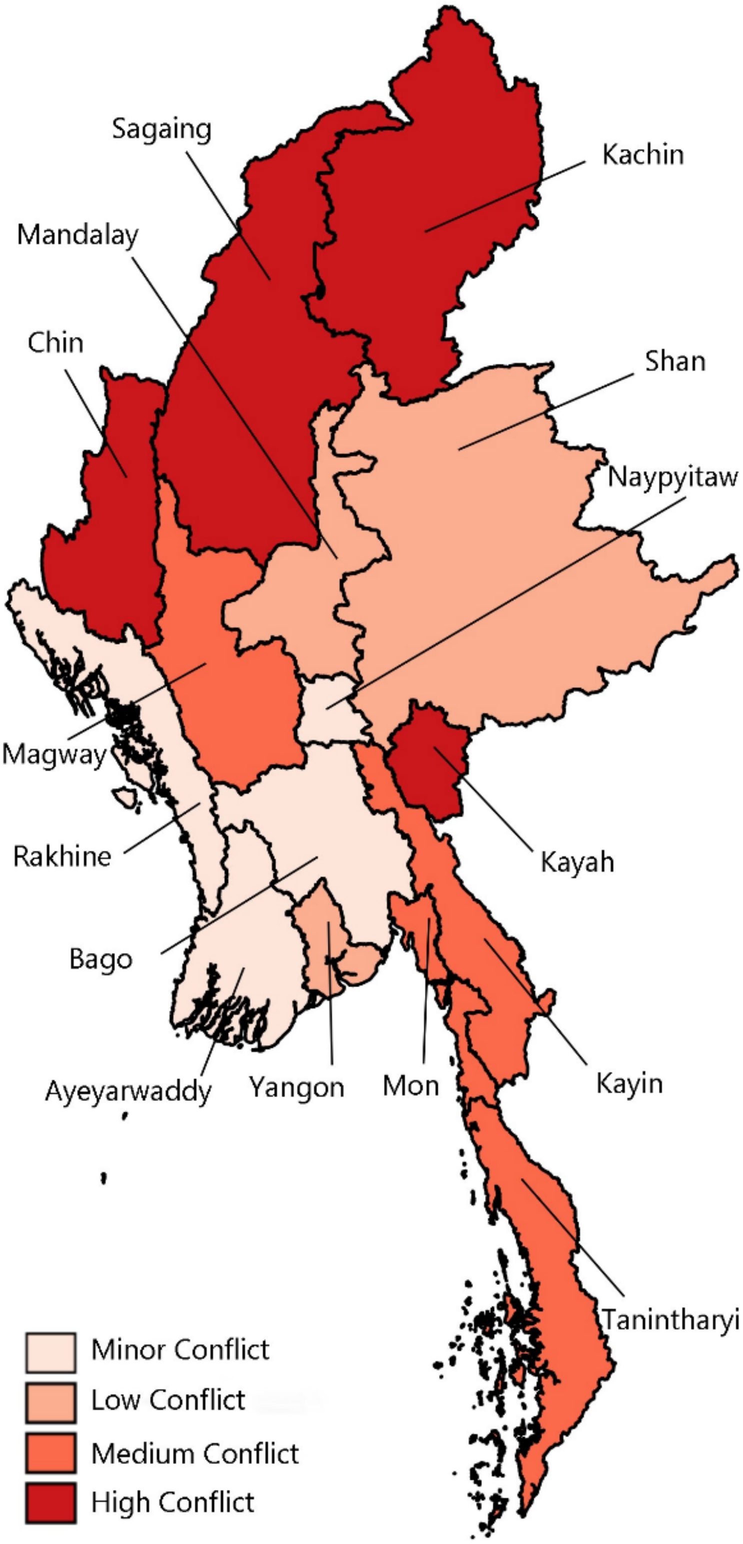
2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis presented in this paper relies on data from the fifth round of the MHWS, which was collected between March and June 2023 via phone and comprises 12,953 respondents. The survey is nationally representative at the rural/urban and state/region levels (MAPSA 2022a). For this analysis, we focus on households that have moved in Myanmar between February 2021 and June 2023, which we refer to as mid-2023. These households include any household that either recalled their move date or moved between this round and the previous survey round.

While MHWS collects information on where migrant households are moving, it does not fully capture the migration history of individuals and households, challenges faced during the migration process, and living conditions after the move. To bridge this knowledge gap, we conducted the MMA with a sub-sample of MHWS households who either had migrant members, households of migrants, or migrant households. In the MMA, we collected data across all states and regions of Myanmar to assess the characteristics of migrant and migrant households, the process of migration, and the consequences of migration. A total of 4,296 interviews were conducted across Myanmar between June 8th and July 14th, 2023. We present findings based on interviews in the MMA with 443 migrant households who moved outside of their township between February 2021 and July 2023. The origin state/region of these 443 households can be found in Appendix Table A.1. It should be noted that we oversampled households in Kayah and Sagaing. Twenty one percent of our sample is from Kayah, 95 observations, and 14 percent is from Sagaing, 63 observations.

Myanmar has been experiencing high levels of conflict and unrest following the military coup in February 2021. The number of incidents involving violence, explosions, armed clashes, attacks, and airstrikes across the country have been recorded by ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project). Using this ACLED dataset, we created a conflict variable which sums all the conflict events to assess the severity of the conflict situation across states and regions starting in 2021 and categorizes them as minor, low, medium, and high (Figure 1). Over the period February 2021 to July 2023, Ayeyarwady, Nay Pyi Taw, Rakhine, and Bago had relatively less violence than all other States/Regions and are therefore categorized in the minor conflict category. Yangon, Mandalay, and Shan had slightly higher levels of violence and are categorized as low conflict areas. Meanwhile, Mon, Magway, Kayin, and Tanintharyi are classified within the medium conflict category. Finally, Kachin, Sagaing, Chin, and Kayah have faced tremendous violence and therefore are categorized as high conflict areas.

Figure 1. Classification of states and regions based on the number of conflict events, February 2021-July 2023



Note: Minor conflict ranges from 80-250 conflict events per state/region, while low ranges from 250-800, medium is from 800-1500, and finally high conflict areas range from 1500-4800.
Source: Author's calculations based on ACLED data.

It is important to note key issues in the data collection that impact our estimates of internal household migration from MHWS. It is likely that our estimates of the total number of individuals that have moved with their households within Myanmar is too low because of several sampling issues.

First, households that have been displaced due to conflict are much harder to reach on the phone. They may be living in an area with limited or no cell phone service or electricity. Second, we find that attrition households were significantly more likely to have moved in the past two years compared to replacement households. Further, at the regional level, attrition households were more likely to live in Kayah, Kayin, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Mon, and Rakhine, all areas that are heavily affected by conflict. Although the MHWS always replaces households that leave the survey, we have not been able to survey enough newly internally displaced households to keep displacement estimates representative or unbiased (MAPSA 2023). Another issue is that we under sample households living in IDP camps. Only 77 households in our R5 sample were living in IDP camps, and 40 households living in IDP camps in the previous survey rounds dropped out of the survey in R5. Additionally, there may be some issues with measurement error. We have missing information on the reason for migration for 11 households in our sample who have moved since 2021. These households may have moved due to conflict. Finally, households may not be reporting that they are primarily moving because of conflict but instead state a different reason for their own safety.

These measurement challenges mean that the MHWS still underestimates migration, despite reporting quite high numbers. Comparisons between MHWS estimates and official UNHCR estimates shed some light on the possible degree of underreporting. Using sample weights (see MAPSA 2022a for more details on the weighting strategy), we estimate that at the national level approximately 890,115 individuals moved with their households between February 2021 and June 2023, primarily because of conflict. However, this number is much lower than the 1,537,500 IDPs estimated by UNHCR over the same period. Further, the under sampling of IDPs increases across rounds. Between February 2021 and November 2021, we estimate that 222,668 individuals migrated due to conflict; this is 83 percent of the number of IDPs estimated by UNHCR over the same period (267,500). Between December 2021 and July 2023, our results indicate that 667,447 individuals moved due to conflict, which is 53 percent of the 1,270,000 IDPs estimated by UNHCR during the same period.

In summary, while the findings from the MHWS and MMA are insightful and shed important information on the causes and consequences of migration, there are some inevitable limitations pertaining to our ability to track migrants and to survey conflict-affected migrant households, especially. We take into account the discrepancy between our estimates and UNCHR's estimates in our findings.

3. DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

3.1 Estimates of Household Migration in Myanmar

In the MMA, we asked respondents whether they moved as a household or as a family unit between February 2021 and July 2023. It is common in Myanmar to have multiple family units living together as an extended family under one roof. Due to this, we differentiate in our survey to see if households were moving as an entire household or moving away in nuclear families from their extended family. We further disaggregate the type of households by their location prior to the move and the level of conflict in those regions (Table 1). In general, in our sample, respondents were slightly more likely to move as a household (53 percent) compared to as a family unit (47 percent). Respondents from high conflict areas were more likely to move as a household (58 percent) compared to those from minor conflict areas (46 percent). In the rest of the analysis, we refer to both households that have moved and family units that have moved as household migration.

Table 1. Migration as a household or family unit, February 2021 to July 2023

	All	Minor Conflict	Low Conflict	Medium Conflict	High Conflict
Moved as a household (%)	53	46	53	45	58
Moved as a family unit (%)	47	54	47	55	42

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

We also inquired how many times the households have moved in their migration process. Households from the high-conflict regions were more likely to move more than once before reaching their final or current migration destination (Table 2). Twenty-six percent of households in high conflict areas moved twice, and four percent moved three times or more. This is in comparison to 91 percent of households from minor and medium conflict areas who moved once and seven percent who moved twice. These findings suggest that households from high conflict areas may find it harder to reach their final destination of migration in their first try and instead might have to resort to temporary housing situations as they navigate away from high conflict areas.

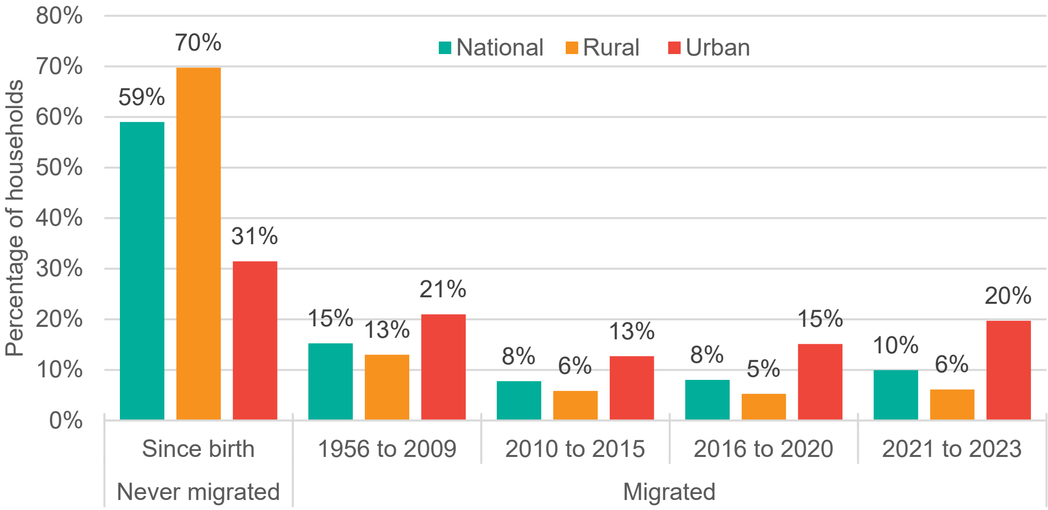
Table 2. Number of times households moved based on the level of conflict, February 2021 to July 2023

Description (%)	All	Minor Conflict	Low Conflict	Medium Conflict	High Conflict
Once	81	91	88	91	69
Twice	15	7	10	7	26
Thrice	3	3	2	2	4
Fourth	0	0	0	0	1

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

We use the MHWS data to analyze the level of household migration in Myanmar. In R5 of MHWS, households were asked when they moved to their current home. Note that MHWS only captures the most recent date of migration for most households. Among the MHWS R5 sample, 59 percent of households have stayed in their township of residence since birth and have never migrated (Figure 2). More rural respondents, 70 percent, have stayed in the same township since birth, while only 31 percent of urban respondents have never moved. Fifteen percent of households moved between 1956 and 2009. Another eight percent moved between 2010 and 2015 and between 2016 and 2020. From 2021 up until July 2023, ten percent of households migrated, with as many as 20 percent of urban households and six percent of rural households migrating. This is 4,803 million individuals, or nine percent of the Myanmar population migrating with their households between 2021 and mid-2023. The percentage of the population is slightly smaller than the percentage of households, since urban households are smaller than rural households. It is important to note that this is less than half of the migration stream over the same period. First, households moved outside of the country, which we do not capture here. Second, individuals also left their households and migrated either internally or abroad.

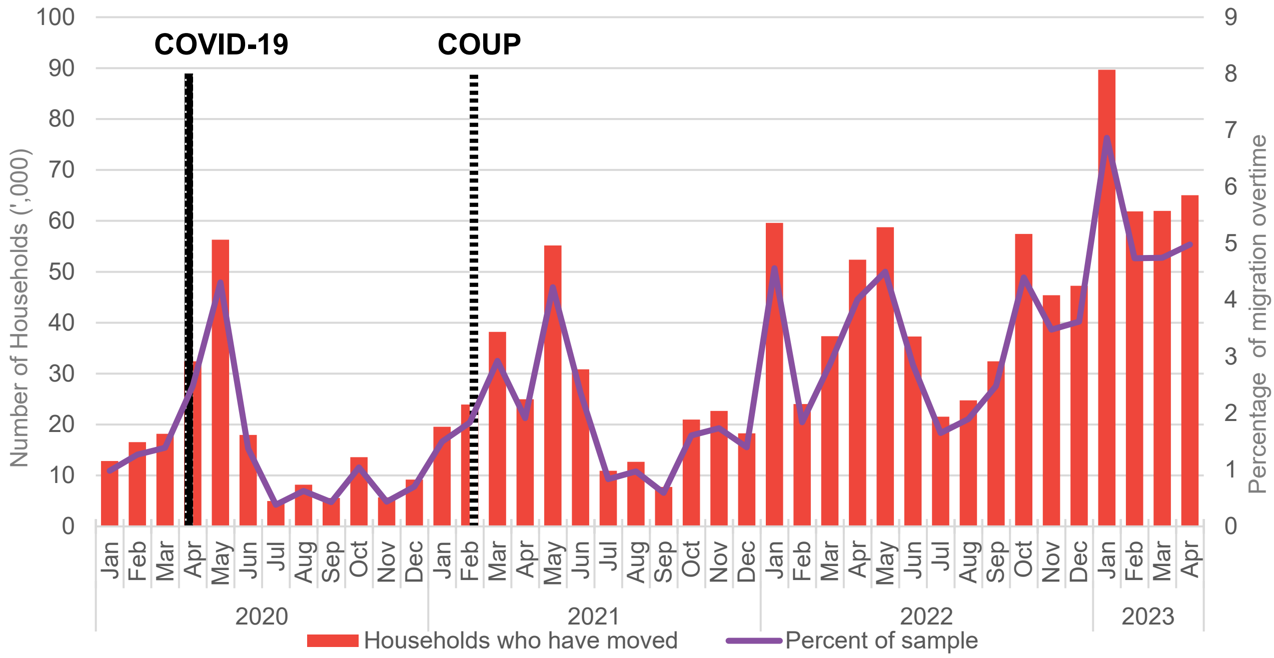
Figure 2. Percentage of households migrating by date of departure and rural/urban location of origin



Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS data.

Figure 3 shows the number of households who have moved by month since January 2020. The number of households that moved in 2020 increased steadily and peaked in May 2020, right after COVID-19 began, after which the number of households moving fell sharply and remained low for the rest of the year. Following the coup in February 2021, household migration picked up again, with an estimated 55,181 households migrating three months after the political crisis, in May 2021. However, due to a surge in COVID-19 cases, lockdowns were reintroduced between July 19th and August 1st, 2021, and this was again followed by a drop in the number of households migrating. Against the backdrop of conflict, rising inflation and a crumbling economy, when the lockdowns were lifted, households began moving once again. The percentage of households migrating reached a new high in January 2023, with almost 90,000 households migrating internally. There also appear to be seasonal patterns of household migration where during the rainy season, June through October, the number of households moving falls sharply. It is likely more challenging for households to move during the rainy season as infrastructure may be poor in certain remote and rural areas and roads may become impassable due to heavy rain and downpour. June is also the beginning of the lean season in Myanmar, a period between planting and harvesting. During this time, job opportunities are scarcer, incomes decrease, and food stocks decline. This may also prohibit families from making a big costly investment such as migration.

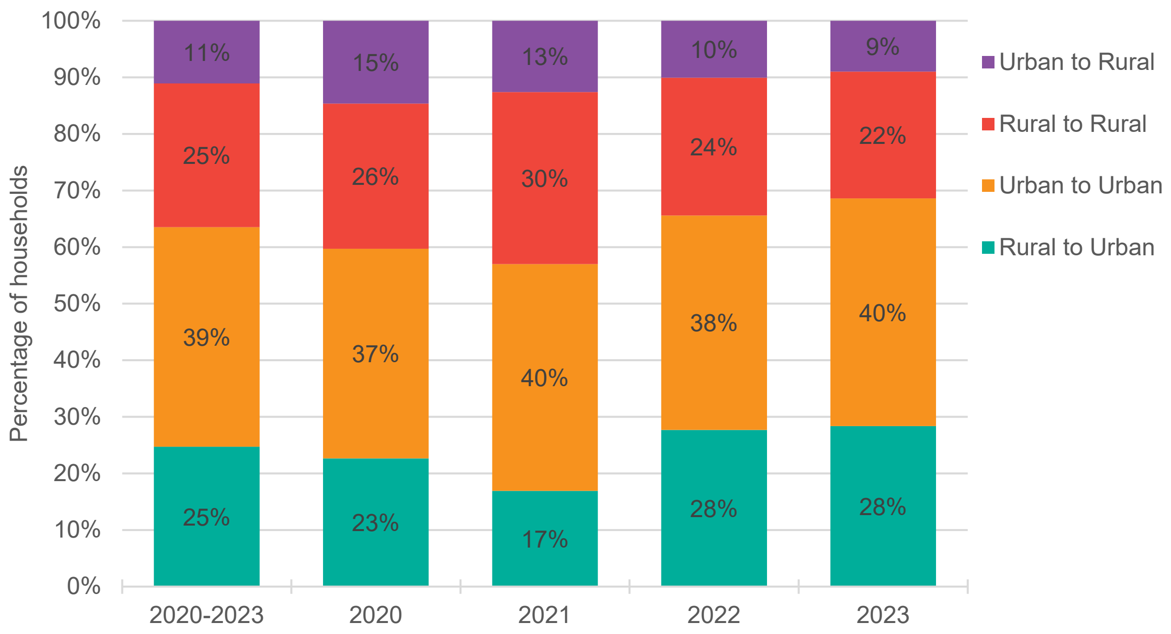
Figure 3. Number of households who have moved internally, January 2020- April 2023 (in thousands)



Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS data.

Household migration between January 2020 and July 2023 was diverse and households moved urban-to-urban, rural-to-rural, urban-to-rural, or rural-to-urban. During this period, as many as thirty-nine percent of households moved from one urban area to another. Further, 25 percent of respondents moved from one rural location to another rural area. Another 25 percent of households moved from rural to urban areas and 11 percent of households moved from urban to rural areas. These numbers imply that between 2020 and mid-2023 there has been a decline in the rural population, and an increase in the urban population. In Figure 4, we disaggregate these pooled averages by year. Rural-to-rural migration decreased marginally, from 26 percent in 2020 to 22 percent in 2023. Urban to rural migration decreased significantly over the period, from 15 percent in 2020 to nine percent in 2023. While there were no statistically significant changes in urban-to-urban migration, the share of households migrating from rural area to urban area increased in 2022 and 2023. Further, it increased considerably compared to estimates from the ICS, where rural-to-urban migration only made-up 13.7 percent of migration streams (Department of Population 2020).

Figure 4. Percentage of households who have moved internally between rural and urban areas, January 2020-July 2023

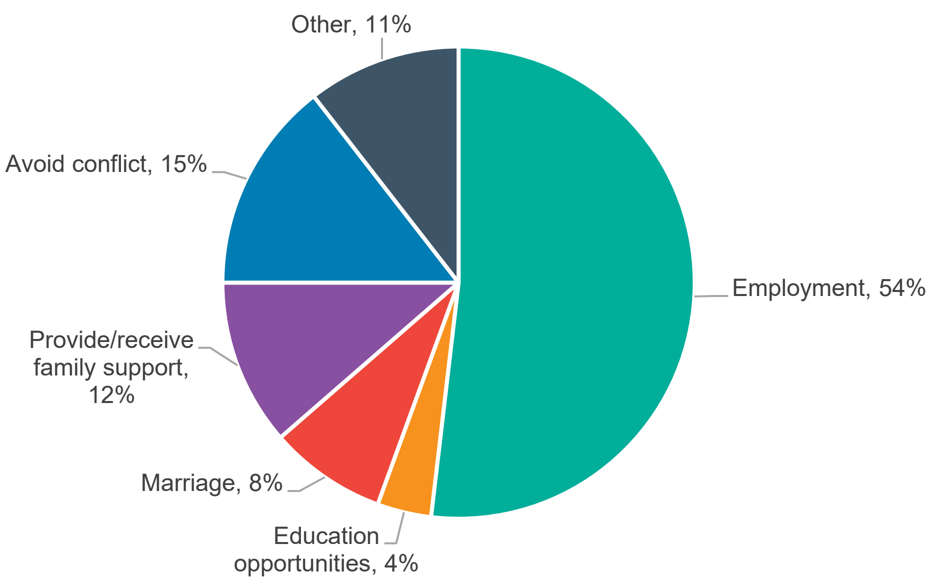


Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS data.

3.2 Drivers of Migration

Fifty-four percent of households stated they moved between February 2021 and mid-2023 for employment (Figure 5). Households also moved to either provide support to or receive support from their families (12 percent), for marriage (eight percent), and to avoid conflict and improve physical security (15 percent). Households who moved due to marriage take family members with them when they marry. We see an increase of migration over time driven by conflict, from nine percent in 2020, to 17 percent in the first half of 2023. While conflict intensified following February 2021, there were some pre-existing conflicts in 2020, predominantly in Rakhine and Chin, leading to migration.

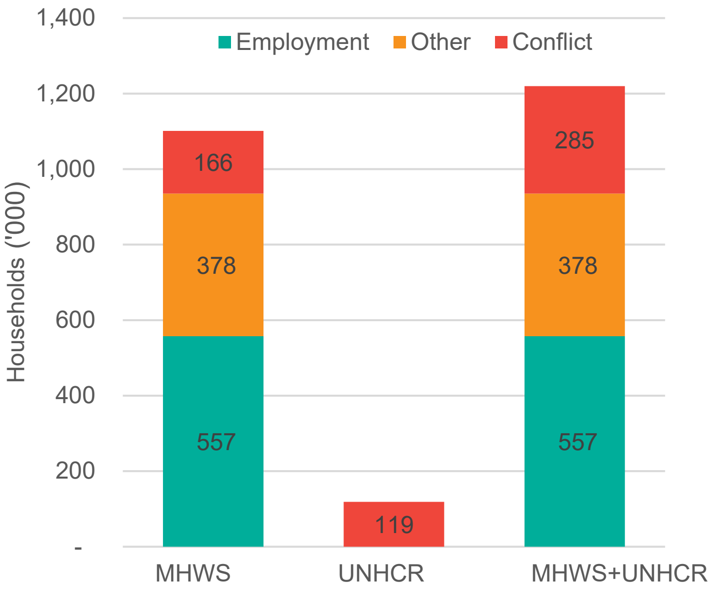
Figure 5. Main drivers for internal household migration, February 2021 to July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS data.

This is 165,859 households (890,115 individuals) who have moved because of conflict since February 2021 (Figure 6). If we add the difference between our estimate of IDPs and UNHCR's estimate (a difference of 118,764 households) to our sample, conflict becomes the principal cause for 23 percent of household migration, whereas employment accounts for almost 46 percent of migration. This highlights that despite sampling issues, it appears that employment was still the most important driver for household internal migration between February 2021 and July 2023. Note that combining these estimates suggests that in the same period, 12 percent of the population of Myanmar moved as a household or family unit within Myanmar. Not included in this report are households who have moved abroad and an additional 6,451,394 individual migrants who left their households between December 2021 and June 2023. With these data caveats in mind, this is a minimum of 24 percent of the population of Myanmar who have migrated between February 2021 and July 2023.

Figure 6. MHWS and UNHCR estimates of internal household migration by main drivers, February 2021 to July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS and UNHCR data.

Sixty-four percent of households who moved from rural-to-urban areas migrated due to employment (Table 3). While households who moved from rural-to-rural, urban-to-urban, or urban-to-rural areas also moved mainly for employment, around half of these households moved for non-employment reasons. Thirteen percent of rural-to-rural migrant households and 14 percent of urban-to-rural migrant households moved because of marriage. Movement from rural areas to urban areas for marriage was much less common. Conflict was a significant driver of migration; 15 percent of households who moved from rural-to-urban areas did so because of conflict. At the same time, 18 percent of urban-to-rural migration was due to conflict. Further, 28 percent of rural-to-rural migration was driven by conflict. Another notable movement is 18 percent of households who migrated from an urban-to-rural area reported migrating to either provide support to their families in the rural area or to receive support from them. Providing support to family could happen in the form of providing care to elderly family members, or assisting with family businesses, among other types of support while receiving support could mean returning home to stay closer to family, to save expenses on rent and food, or to recover from health issues while living with family.

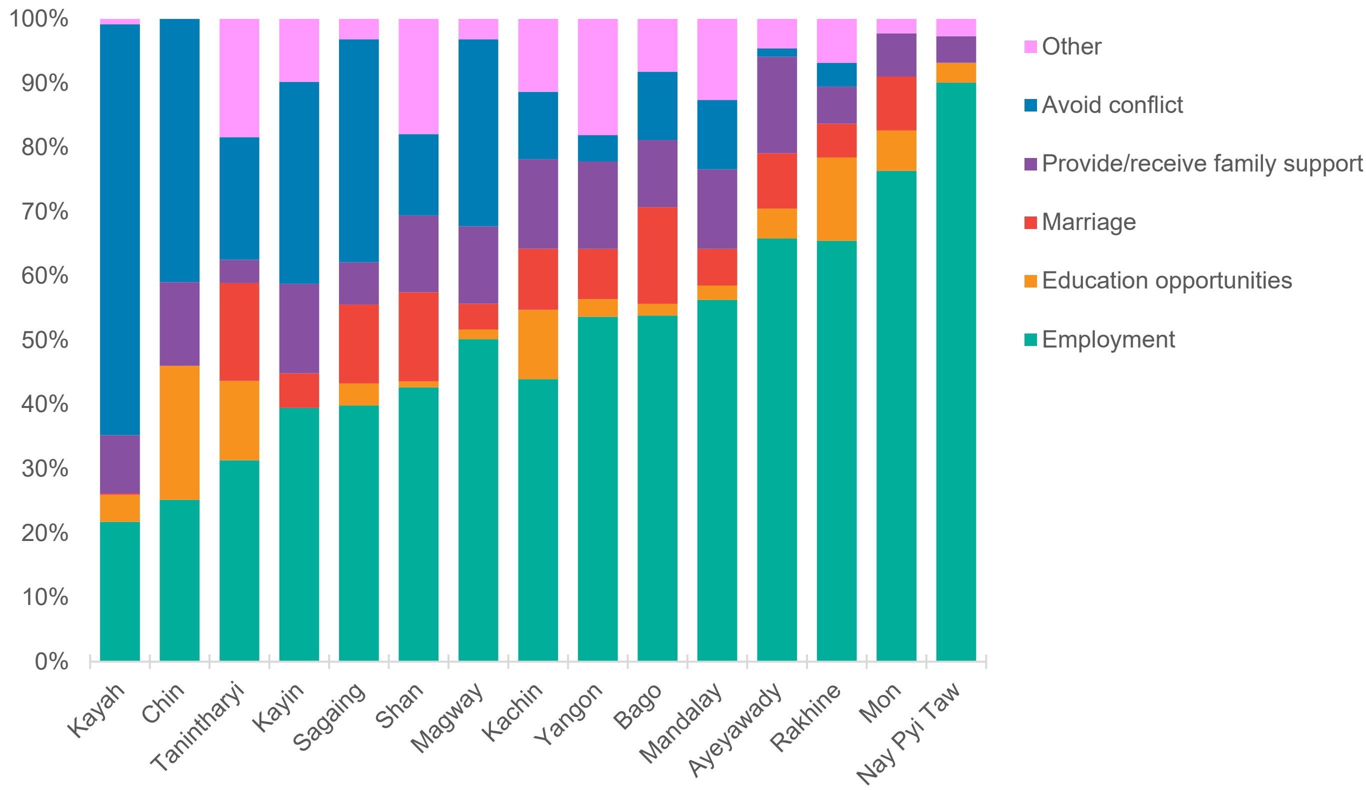
Table 3. Reasons for household migration by migration route, February 2021 to July 2023

	Rural to urban	Urban to urban	Rural to rural	Urban to rural
Employment (%)	64	56	47	43
Education opportunities (%)	8	4	1	2
Marriage (%)	4	7	13	14
To provide/receive support to/from family (%)	9	13	11	18
Avoid conflict/improve physical security (%)	15	6	28	18
Reducing risk of contracting COVID-19 (%)	0	0	0	1

Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS data.

While in most states/regions by far the most important driver of migration was employment, there were two notable exceptions. In Chin, 47 percent of households who moved, moved because of conflict, and in Kayah, 70 percent of households who moved, moved because of conflict (Figure 7). Conflict was also a significant driver of households moving in Sagaing, Kayin, Magway, and Shan. Most households that moved expect to stay at their current location for more than six months (41.5 percent) or permanently (23.4 percent). Though some households plan to stay between one and six months (10.2 percent), one month or less (1.8 percent), and many were unsure about how long they plan to stay there (22.9 percent).

Figure 7. Main drivers of internal household migration February 2021 to July 2023, by state/region



Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS data.

Using the data from the MMA, we analyze the reason for moving overall, and by level of conflict. It is important to remember that the MMA is not representative of households in Myanmar and households from high-conflict areas are oversampled. Searching for or obtaining new employment and avoiding conflict were the largest motivators of household migration (Table 4). In low conflict areas, 84 percent of the households were moving in search of employment while only 18 percent of the households from the high conflict areas reported moving in search of employment. Instead, as many as 81 percent of households from high conflict areas and 52 percent of households from medium conflict areas were moving to avoid conflict and improve their physical security. It is also alarming to find that eight percent of households from the high conflict areas reported moving from their primary location because their property or house was torched or appropriated.

When households reported moving for employment reasons, we also collected information on whose employment was the driving force behind the household's decision to move. Most commonly, people were moving for the household head's employment (35 percent) and less often for that of another family member (13 percent) or the spouse (six percent). Finally, it is important to note that as many as four percent of households overall, and 8 percent in the low conflict areas were moving due to schooling for a family member (Table 4).

Table 4. Main drivers of migration based on the level of conflict, February 2021 to July 2023

	Overall	Minor Conflict	Low Conflict	Medium Conflict	High Conflict
Employment (%)	46	84	69	36	18
Employment of the household head (%)	35	59	53	24	14
Employment of the spouse (%)	6	11	8	9	2
Employment of another family member (%)	13	24	22	12	2
Schooling for a family member (%)	4	8	3	5	2
Return to live with family (%)	8	12	13	7	3
Marriage or start new family (%)	2	1	4	3	1
Avoid conflict/improve physical security (%)	44	5	11	52	81
Property was appropriated or burned (%)	4	1	0	3	8

Note: 44 percent of households in the MMA reported moving due to conflict as opposed to 15 percent in the overall sample. This is because high conflict areas were oversampled in the MMA.
Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Households were strategic when it came to choosing their migration location. To understand what households took into consideration when choosing their next migration location, we grouped households into four categories based on the reason they moved: (i) employment contains those moving for employment-related reasons of either the household head, spouse, or another family member; (ii) conflict involves households either moving to flee conflict areas or due to their houses and properties getting torched or appropriated; (iii) family includes households or family units who are moving to return to their family, or those getting married or starting a new family; and (iv) school is defined as households moving due to educational, schooling or training reasons for a family member such as a child.

Overall, the impression that work opportunities would be available in their next place of migration was important for as many as 35 percent of households (Table 5). As many as 34 percent of households in our sample were moving in search of safety. More specifically, those moving for employment or school related reasons were more likely to choose their migration location due to existing work opportunities (65 percent and 63 percent, respectively) (Table 5). Households moving because of conflict were more likely to choose their next migration location based on whether it's safer than the community they used to live in (72 percent). Additionally, among migrants who moved due to conflict, 20 percent chose their new location because they had a relative living there, eight percent chose their next destination based on its suitability for temporary shelter, while an additional eight percent chose it simply because of its proximity to their current residence.

When we look at reasons behind choosing the next destination of migration by the level of conflict of the state/region we find that employment and work-related reasons dominate minor and low conflict affected households' decisions (59 percent and 49 percent respectively). Conversely, households from medium and high conflict-affected regions primarily prioritize safety, with 43 percent and 61 percent, respectively, opting for new locations they perceive as safer than their previous residences (Appendix Table A.2).

Table 5. Reason behind choosing their next place of migration by reason for migrating, February 2021 to July 2023

	Stated primary reason for migration				
	Overall	Job	Conflict	Family	School
Heard work opportunities exist there (%)	35	65	10	20	63
Safer than where we lived (%)	34	3	72	10	19
A family member lives there (%)	18	14	12	50	25
Relatives live in that location (%)	19	13	20	33	13
Our household used to live there (%)	8	8	4	25	13
A friend lives there (%)	12	12	12	13	0
Good place for temporary shelter (%)	5	2	8	0	6
Closest place to migrate to from the household (%)	5	3	8	0	0
Village member lives there (%)	4	4	3	0	0
Obs.	443	180	194	40	16

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

3.3 Migration Patterns

Figure 8 below presents the origin of the household on the y-axis and the destination of the household on the x-axis. The rows add up to 100, or the percentage of the original state/region migrants that have migrated to each destination between February 2021 and mid-2023. The redness in the figure deepens as the migration flow increases. Most households moved within their states/regions over this period. For those who moved across regions, Yangon is the most important destination for migrant households, accounting for all the significant migration flows from Mon, Magway, Bago, and Ayeyarwady. This is consistent with previous migration flows (ILO 2015). Mandalay is also an important destination for migrant households receiving 13 percent of migration flows from Sagaing, ten percent from Magway, as well as a significant share, four percent from Rakhine and seven percent from Nay Pyi Taw. Shan is also a key destination for migrant households with 14 percent of migrant households in Magway and another 13 percent from Nay Pyi Taw moving to Shan. Other important migration flows include 20 percent of household migrants from Mon moving to Kayin, 15 and 13 percent of migrating households from Rakhine and Sagaing moving to Kachin, and 26 percent or migrant households from Kayin moving to Bago.

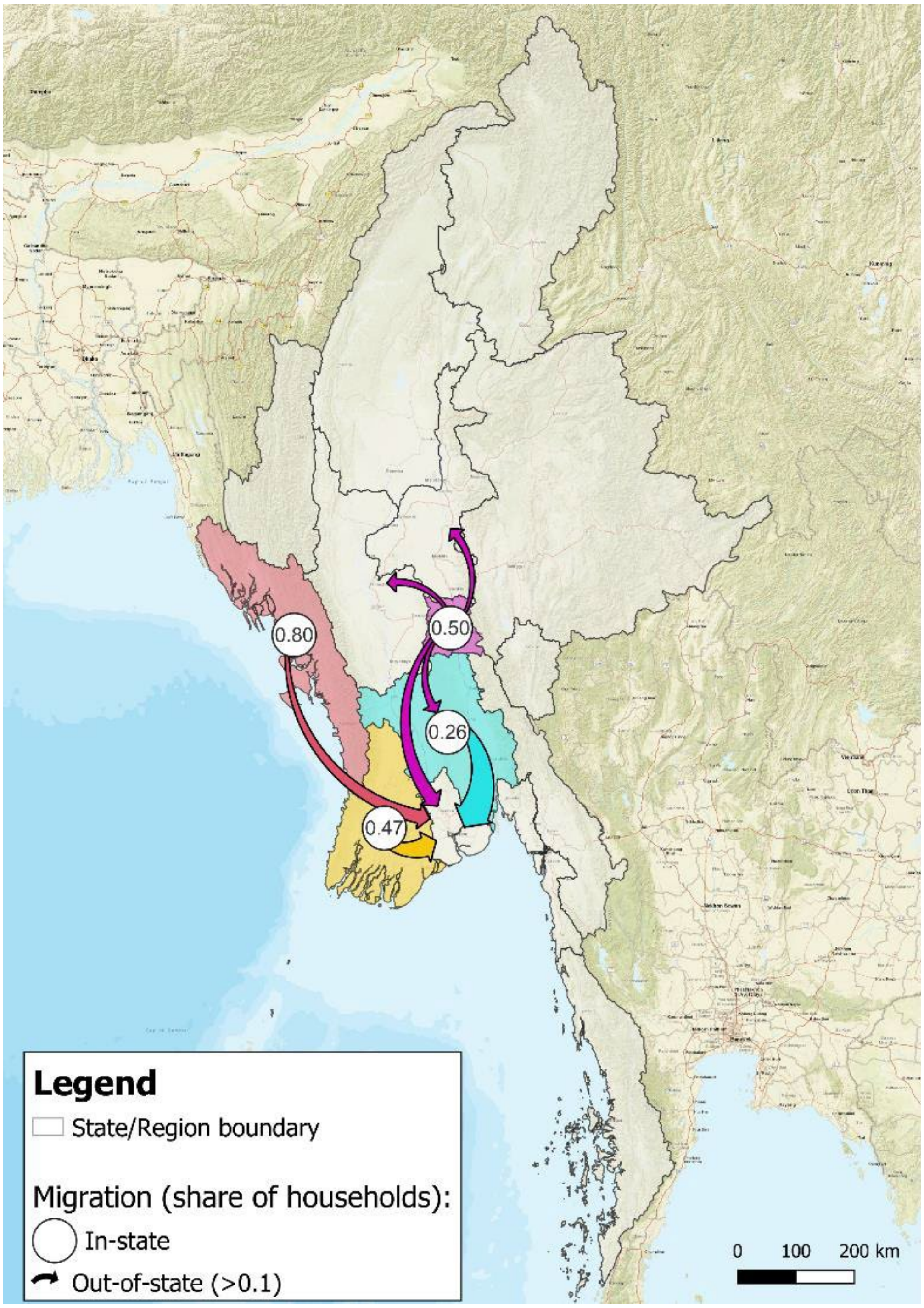
Figure 8. Myanmar migration flows of households moving internally, February 2021-July 2023

	Kachin	Kayah	Kayin	Chin	Sagaing	Tanintharyi	Bago	Magway	Mandalay	Mon	Rakhine	Yangon	Ayeyarwady	Nay Pyi Taw	Shan
Kachin (%)	85				3							9	3		
Kayah (%)		72	1				1	1	2			2		3	1
Kayin (%)			48		3		26		3	13	3			3	
Chin (%)				51	20			9	3			14			
Sagaing (%)	13		2	2	53		1		13	1		9		2	2
Tanintharyi (%)			3			72	10	3	3	3				3	
Bago (%)		1	2	1		1	48	1	1	1	1	32	1	3	4
Magway (%)	1	1	1		1		4	41	10			21	1	3	14
Mandalay (%)	1		1		2		1	2	69		1	12		2	9
Mon (%)			20				5		3	48		20	3		3
Rakhine (%)	15						4		4		63	11			4
Yangon (%)	1		2		1		4	1	3	1	1	77	3	2	2
Ayeyarwady (%)			3			2	2	1	1	2		30	54	2	1
Nay Pyi Taw (%)	3		3			3	3	10	7			13	7	37	13
Shan (%)	1	8				1		1	3			7		2	48

Note: Y axis shows the origin of the migrating household while the X-axis refers to the destination.
Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS data.

In the MMA, households were asked to list all the states and regions that they migrated to as part of each step of their migration process. We have created four maps based on the level of conflict groupings (Figure 9,10,11,12). The white circles are the share of households that moved internally within their state. Among minor conflict states and regions, households from Bago were the least likely to migrate intra-state (only 30 percent), instead, most migration flows were heading into Yangon region (Figure 9). In contrast, we find that households in Rakhine state mainly moved within their state (80 percent), though the remaining households were mostly moving into Yangon.

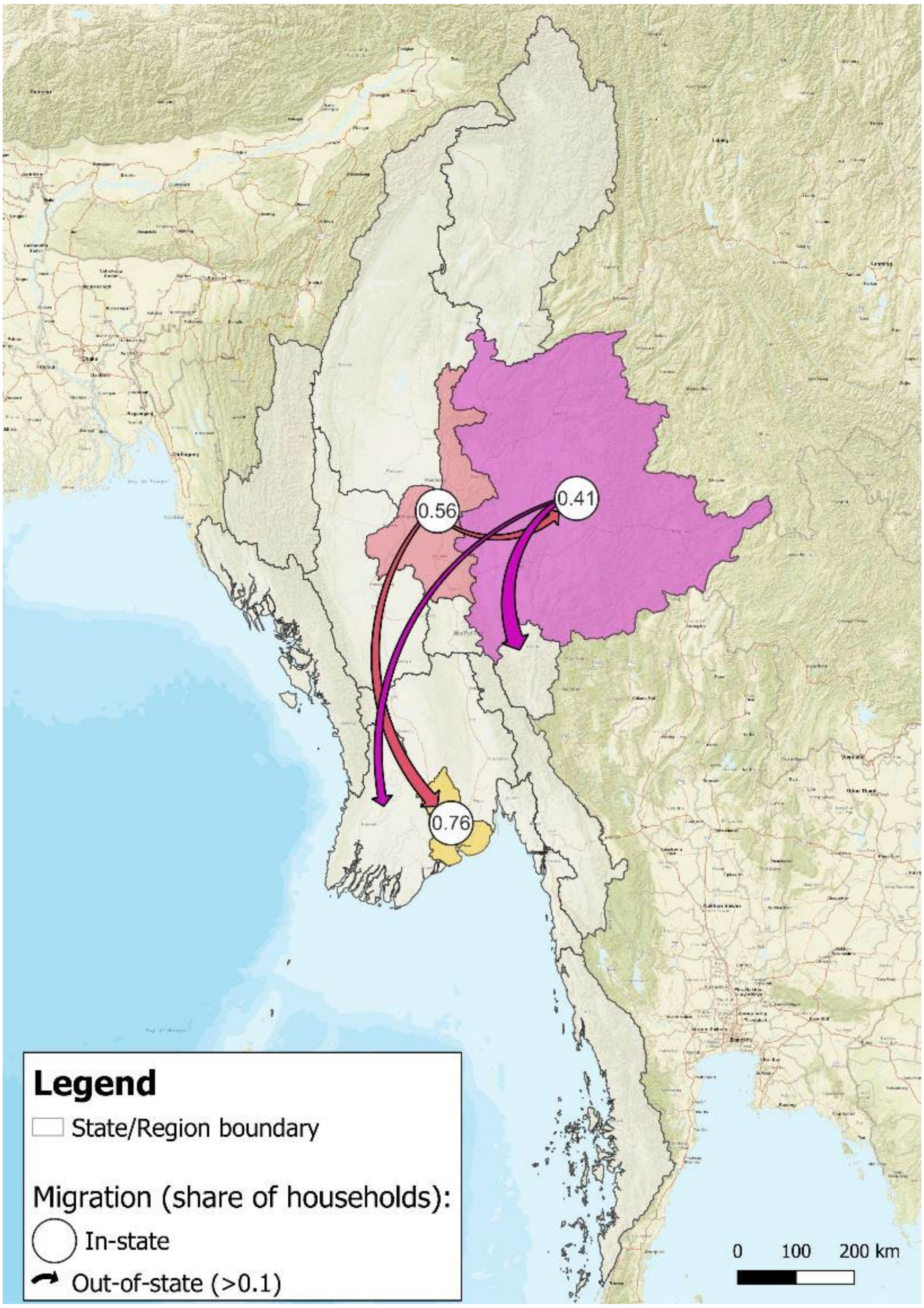
Figure 9. Migration paths in minor-conflict states, February 2021-July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Figure 10 shows migration destinations for the low conflict category which includes Yangon region along with Shan and Mandalay. Households in Yangon were most likely to move intra-state (80 percent), with the remaining substantial migration flows into Ayeyarwady region. Households from Mandalay region who did not move intra-state (60 percent) moved to Yangon or Shan. Household migration in Shan was more geographically diverse, with notable flows into Kayah and Ayeyarwady.

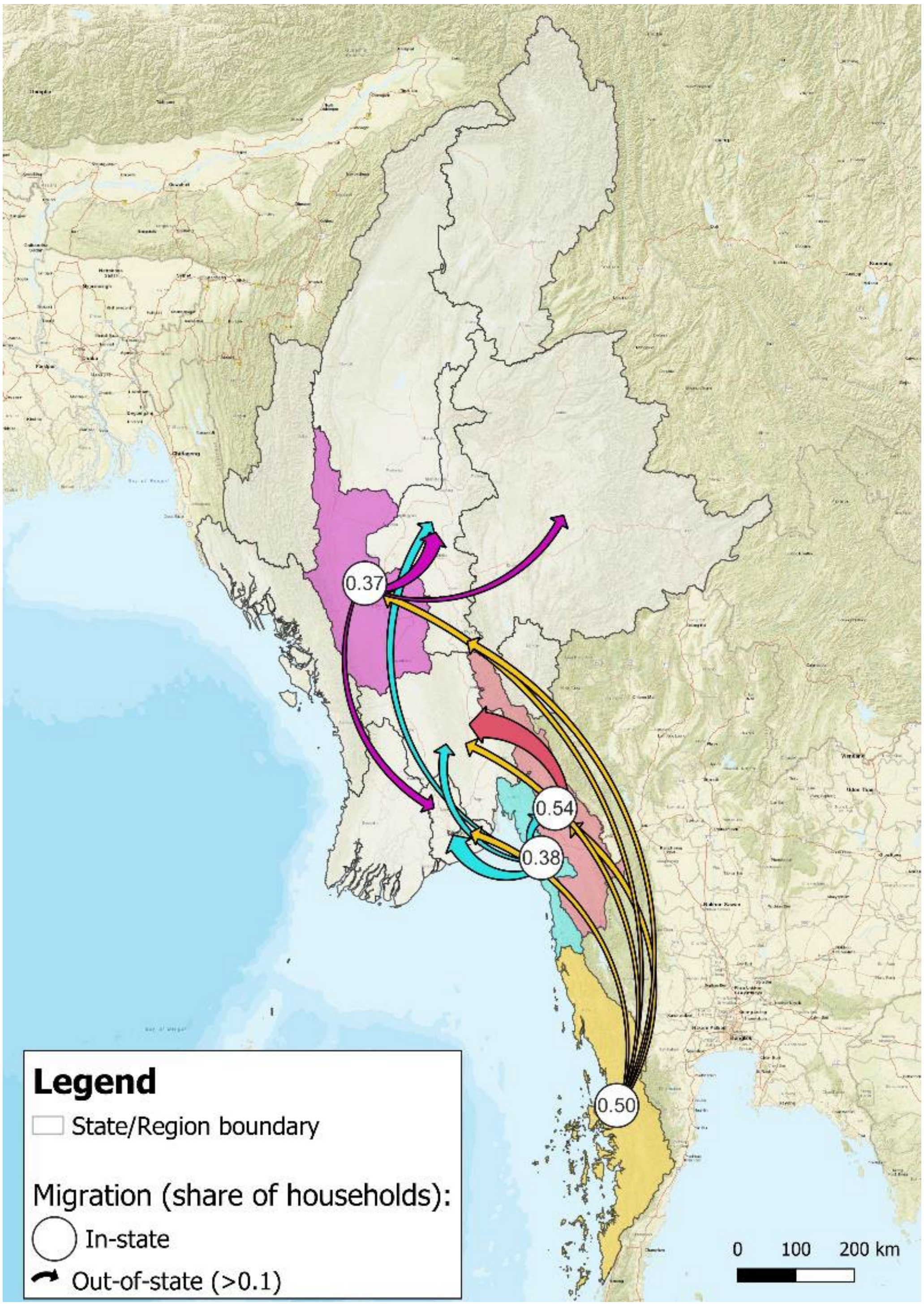
Figure 10. Migration paths in low conflict states, February 2021-July 2023



Source: Author’s calculations based on MMA data.

Households in the medium conflict-affected region had similar migration patterns (Figure 11). About 50 percent of households in Tanintharyi and Kayin moved within their state/region while 40 percent of households in Mon and Magway moved within their state/region. Households moving out of Tanintharyi were heading to various states and regions in the lower parts of Myanmar including Mandalay, Yangon, Bago, and Magway. Households from Kayin and Mon mainly moved to Bago and Yangon. In Magway, most out of region migration was also to Bago and Yangon as well as Mandalay and Shan.

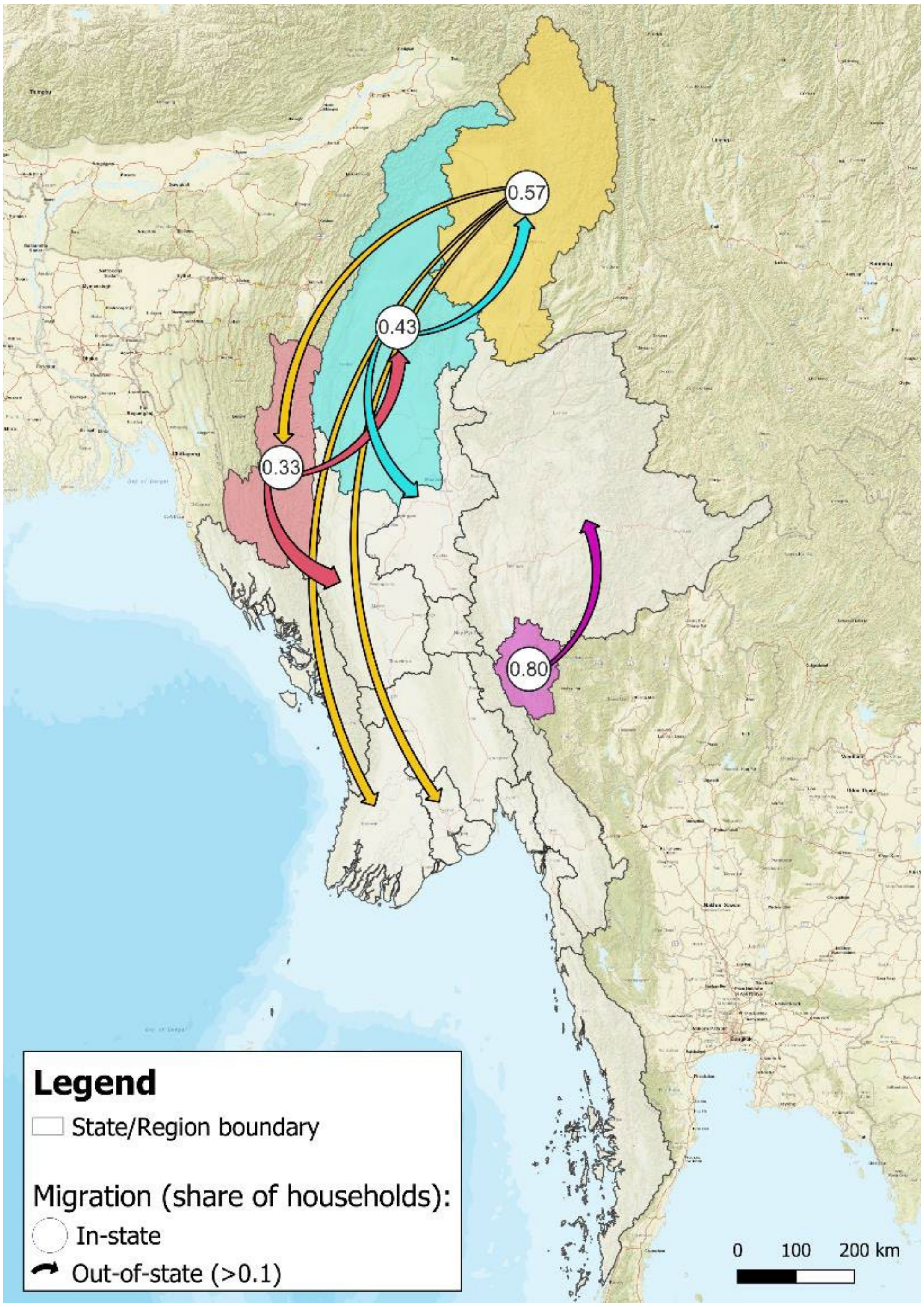
Figure 11. Migration paths in medium-conflict states, February 2021-July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Finally, results indicate that households in the high-conflict areas have more varied migration flows out-of-state (Figure 12). Among Kachin, Chin, Sagaing, and Kayah, households in Kayah were most likely to move internally (80 percent) followed by those in Kachin (60 percent). Most households moving out of high conflict Kayah were moving into less conflict-affected Shan state. Other notable out-of-state flows include migration flows from Chin into nearby Magway and Sagaing, as well as from Sagaing into Kachin and Mandalay.

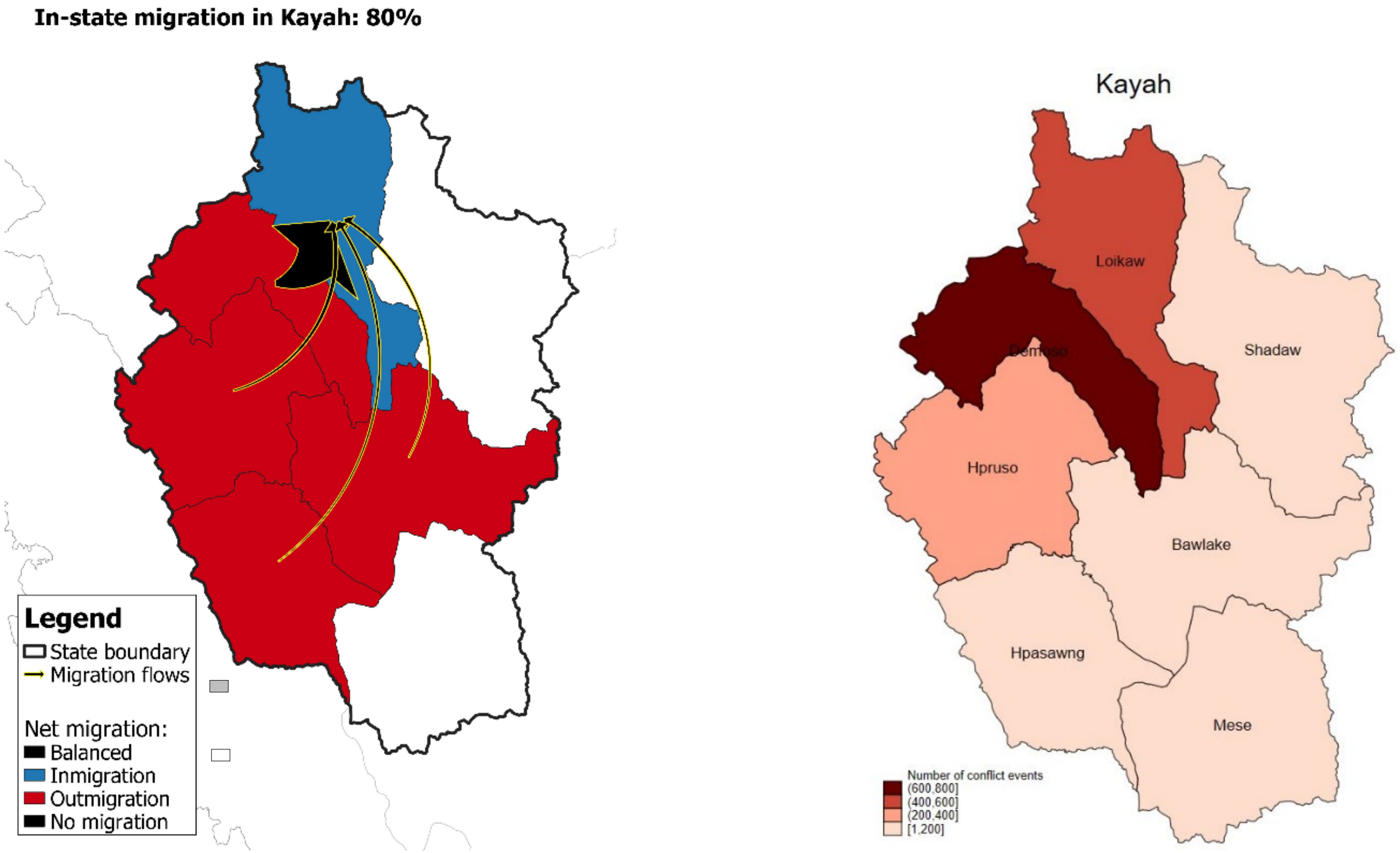
Figure 12. Migration paths in high-conflict states, February 2021-July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

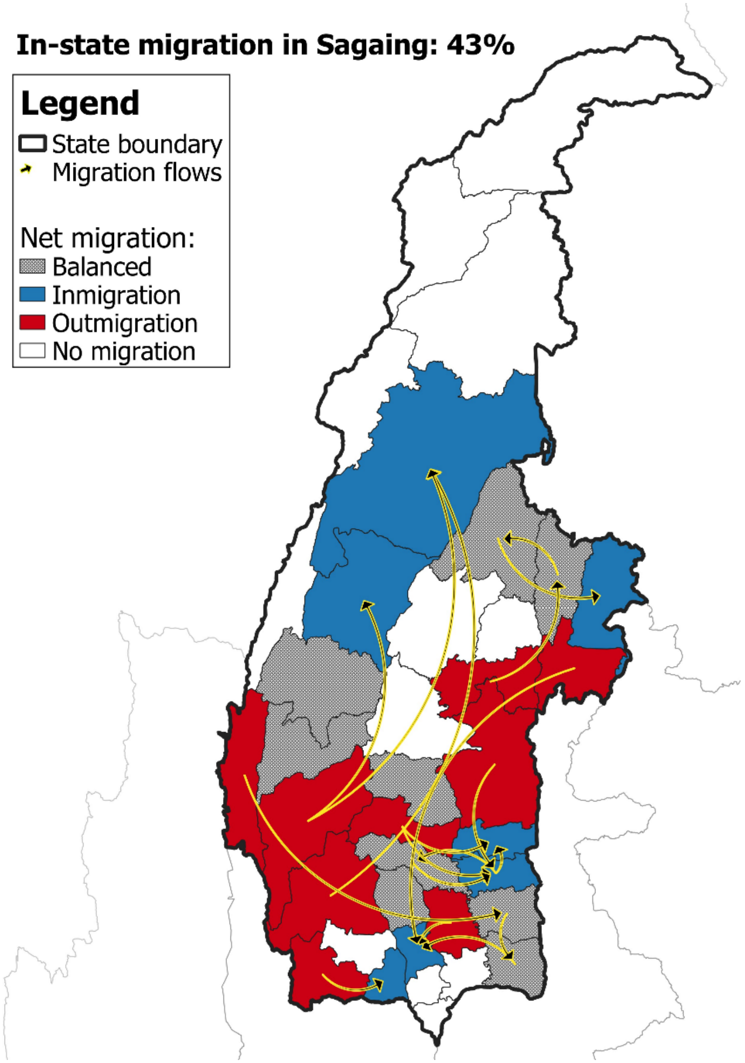
Because of the degree of migration in Chin, Sagaing, and Kayah, we also include maps of these three states/regions (Figure 13, 14, 15). In Kayah, as we mentioned above, most of the migration was within Kayah. Almost all households were moving out of Demoso township and into Loikaw township, while some flows also went to Loikaw from Hpasawng and Bawlake. In Sagaing, 43 percent of the households moved internally. Migration across the region was more widespread with households fleeing from Mingin township in the south to Paungbyin and Homalin townships in the north. But many households were also fleeing the region. Nearly 17 percent of households fleeing Sagaing moved to Hpakant township in Kachin, while some flows also went to Tanai township in Kachin. Meanwhile, 19 percent of flows went to Pyin-Oo-Lwin township in Mandalay. In Chin, 33 percent of migrating households moved internally, these flows were from Thantlang and Hakha township to Matupi township. Twenty percent of migrating households from Chin fled to Sagaing, and specifically to Kale township. Further, 27 percent moved to Saw township in Magway. Finally, some households travelled as far as Mandalay, Yangon, and Shan.

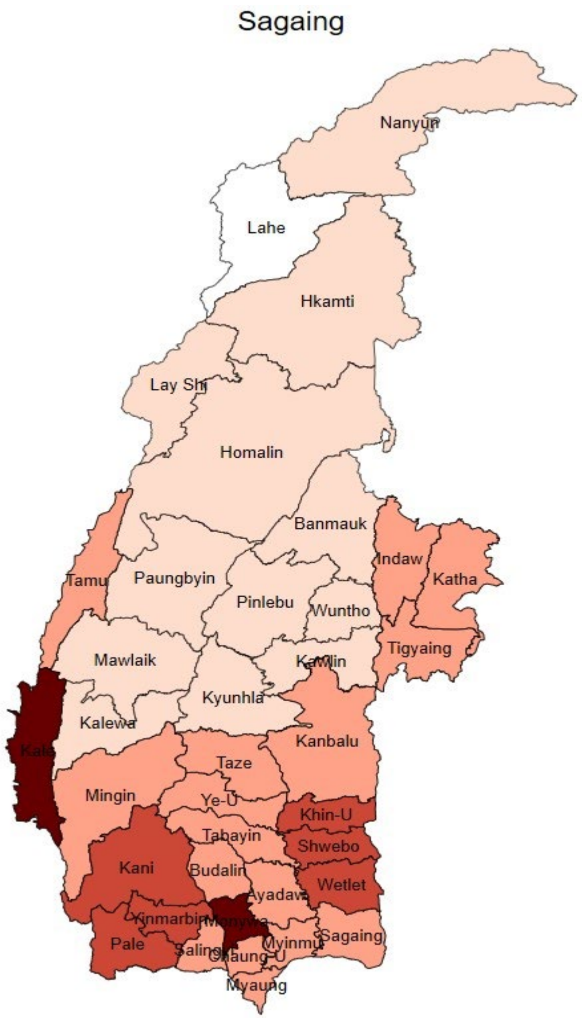
Figure 13. Migration paths and intensity of conflict in Kayah, February 2021-July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MMA and ACLED data.

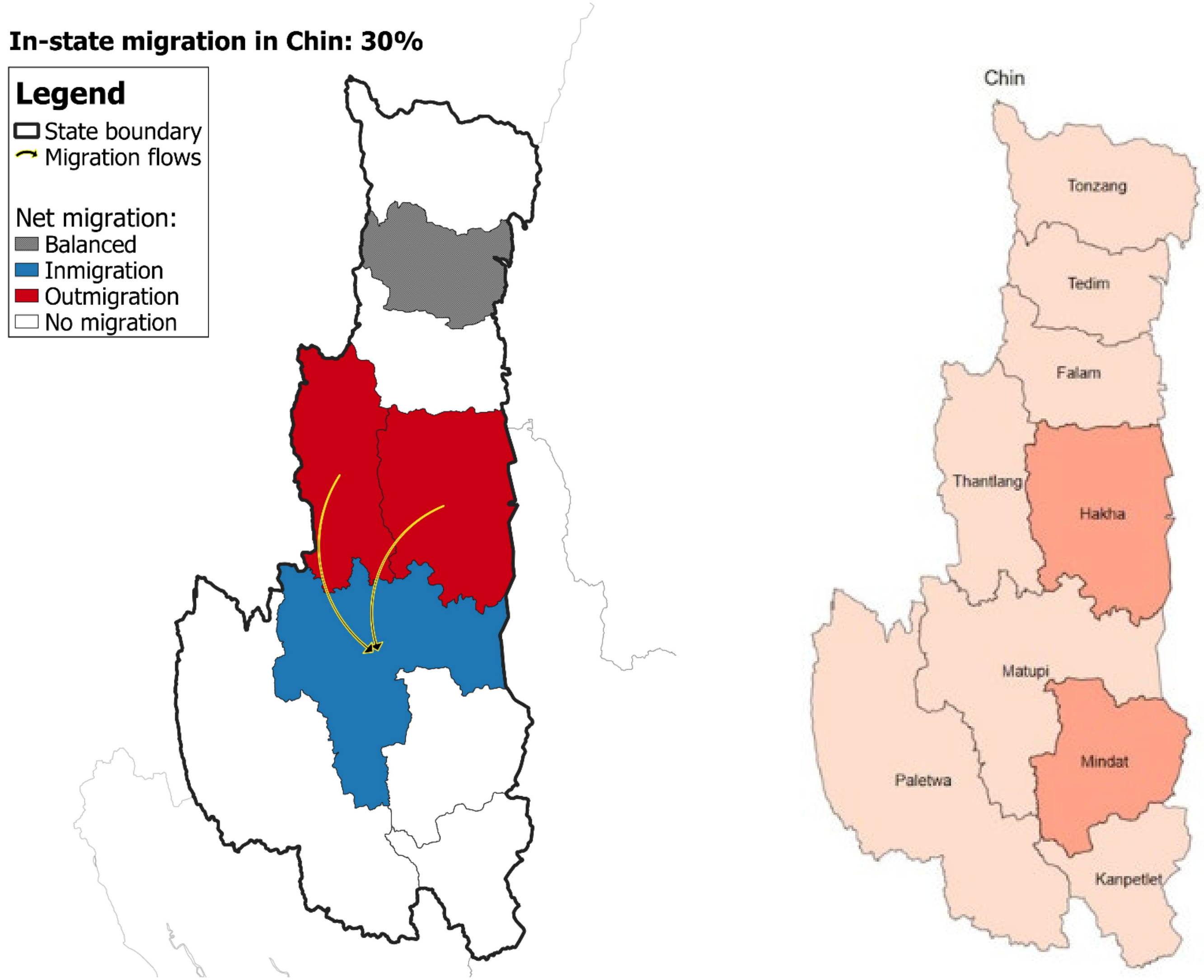
Figure 14. Migration paths and intensity of conflict events in Sagaing, February 2021-July 2023





Source: Author's calculations based on MMA and ACLED data.

Figure 15. Migration paths and intensity of conflict events in Chin, February 2021-July 2023



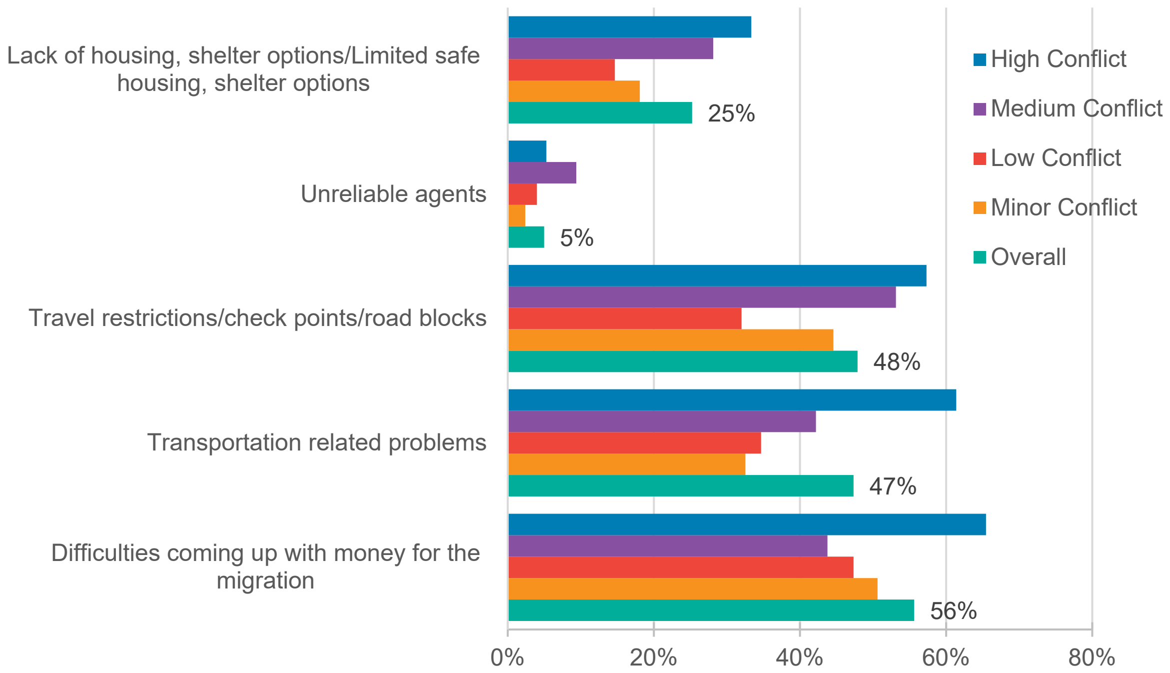
Source: Author's calculations based on MMA and ACLED data.

3.4 Challenges During Migration

When asked to share the various challenges the households faced during the migration process, more than half reported difficulties coming up with the money for migration (56 percent). During the pandemic, travel restrictions were enforced to curb the spread of COVID-19, and subsequently, checkpoints and roadblocks to manage incoming and outgoing traffic became the norm. Following the political instability in 2021, the use of curfews, checkpoints and roadblocks remained one of the ways for the state administrative council (SAC) to starve off the resistance. In conflict-affected areas, these checkpoints, heavy scrutiny of traffic, as well as looming danger of violence make it harder for private transportation services to operate efficiently. Consequently, travel restrictions, checkpoints and roadblocks were the second most common challenges (48 percent) reported by households while another 47 percent reportedly faced transportation related issues such as not being able to find reliable transport options (Figure 16). Lack of housing and/or shelter options, as well as lack of safe housing and/or shelter options were also cited as the other major hurdle (25 percent) for households.

When disaggregated by states and regions, households from heavy conflict states including Chin, Sagaing, and Kayah had the highest percentage of households reporting access to money for migration as the biggest challenge (65 percent) (Figure 16). This includes 83 percent of households in Chin and 72 percent of households in Kayah (Appendix A.3). Households in high conflict areas were also more likely to suffer from transportation related problems and travel restrictions. Further, more households who migrated in high conflict areas struggled to find a place to stay or a safe place to stay, including 40 percent of households in Chin and 61 percent of households in Kayah.

Figure 16. Challenges during migration, stratified by conflict intensity, February 2021 to July 2023



Source: Author’s calculations based on MMA data.

While most households moved within their states and regions, there are still some costs involved when it comes to moving multiple members of a household or family unit. In our survey, almost two thirds of all households (62 percent) reported funding their migration cost through savings. Relying on relatives to help fund the cost was the second most common option (14 percent). It is also alarming to see that as many as nine percent of households resorted to selling their assets to come up with money for household migration, while seven percent reached out to local lenders (Table 6). While there were no major differences for migration costs between the minor and high conflict areas, households from high conflict areas were slightly more likely to report not having substantial costs associated with the move, 11 percent compared to seven percent for low and medium conflict affected areas (Appendix Table A.6).

We further analyze the funding sources for household migration based on the motivation for migration (Table 6). While savings is a common funding source for all types of households regardless of the reason for the move, we observe some interesting patterns. For example, households moving for family related reasons were the most likely among the group to rely on local lenders (13 percent) and on friends (13 percent). On the other hand, households moving for employment, conflict, and school related reasons were equally likely to sell their assets to fund their journey (nine percent). When it comes to conflict related migration, households relied on their relatives to fund their move (19 percent) after their own savings.

Table 6. Source of funding for household migration based on the reason for migrating, February 2021 to July 2023

		Stated reasons for migration			
	Overall	Job	Conflict	Family	School
Savings (%)	62	62	62	65	59
Local Lender (%)	7	6	6	13	5
Relatives (%)	14	11	19	9	16
Friends (%)	7	8	4	13	8
Remittance	3	4	6	0	3
Institutional Lenders (Banks, NGOs etc) (%)	0	0	0	0	0
Sold Assets (%)	9	9	9	4	9
No substantial cost for move (%)	7	6	6	4	9

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

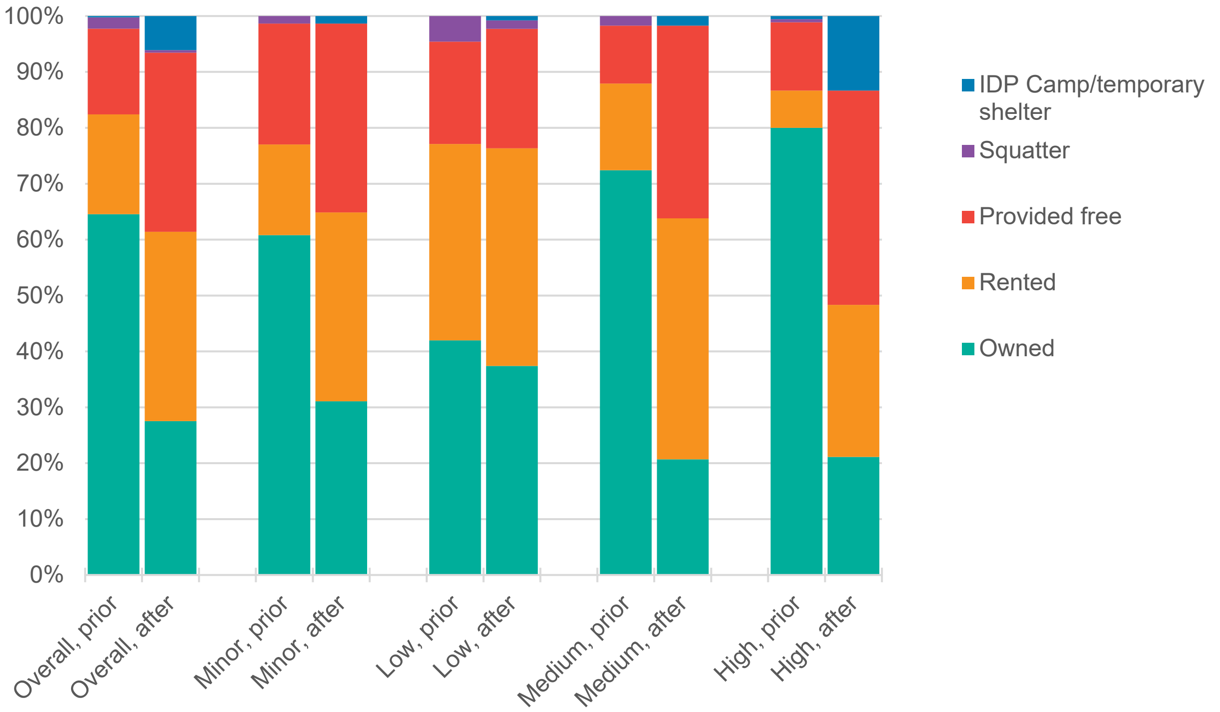
3.5 Post-Migration Outcomes

After migration, households living in their new dwelling had different sources of employment, and different living conditions. To capture changes in the housing ownership of the households, we collected data on each household's housing type and ownership before and after the move. About two thirds of households (65 percent) reported owning their dwelling prior to the move (Figure 17). Only 18 percent were renting while another 15 percent lived in housing that was provided to them free of charge by either family members or through work. Home ownership was also high among households living in the high conflict areas prior to the move (80 percent) and they were also the least likely group to rent (seven percent).

Since we collected information on households' migration history post 2021, we can also track which type of housing the households ended up in after each of their migration events. For example, a large majority were living in either rented or free housing (35 percent) after their first move (Appendix Table A.5). After their first migration event, 14 percent of households from the high conflict area ended up in IDP camps. Further, households from high conflict areas were the least likely to own their housing after the first migration event (14 percent).

We observe some drastic changes in housing ownership after households reached their last migration location. While we refer to this as the last stage of migration, we acknowledge that households could still be on the move after our migration survey. At this point in their migration journey, households were mostly either renting (34 percent), staying in housing that was provided to them for free (32 percent) or staying at their own dwelling (28 percent) (Figure 17). Apart from those living in low conflict areas (Yangon, Mandalay, and Shan and home to large urban areas), housing ownership fell tremendously after the move. In high-conflict areas, house ownership fell from 80 percent prior to the move to 21 percent after the last move. In medium conflict areas, home ownership fell from 72 percent to 21 percent. Renting homes increased significantly, from seven percent to 27 percent in high conflict areas, and from 16 percent to 43 percent in medium conflict areas. Further, staying in housing that was provided for free also increased significantly in all areas except low conflict areas. Finally, more households from high conflict areas ended up in IDP camps or temporary shelters at the end of their migration journey (14 percent). We also find that more households from the hill area, such as those in Kayah, Chin, and Shan (south) ended up in IDP camps at their last stage of migration (Appendix Table A.5).

Figure 17. Dwelling ownership prior and after internal household migration, February 2021 to July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Similar to dwelling ownership, households' income sources before and after the migration journey were also analyzed to see if there were any major shifts. After the move, households earned income from more sources. The percentage of households engaged in agricultural wage and salary work remained consistent both overall and for households experiencing different levels of conflict (Table 7). On the other hand, households earning income from non-farm wage increased significantly, both overall and for households experiencing high, minor, and low conflict. While there was no change in own farming overall, there was a significant increase in own-farming in low conflict areas (Yangon, Mandalay, and Shan) and a significant decrease in farming for households moving away from or within high-conflict areas. There was no change in the percentage of households earning income from non-farm business. Households were also found to rely significantly more on remittances (10 percent) and donations/assistance from their communities after the move (16 percent). In high-conflict areas 27 percent of houses relied on donations and assistance after their move, compared to one percent before. While households reporting to be unemployed remain almost non-existent after the move, given the noticeable reliance on community assistance, households might be using it as a coping mechanism as they adapt to the new environment to make ends meet.

Table 7. Income sources prior and after internal household migration, February 2021 to July 2023

	Prior to migration	After migration	Difference (t-test)
Number of sources	1.3	2.0	0.7***
Farm wage/salary (%)	20	20	0
Non-farm wage (%)	39	52	13***
Own farm: Farming/Livestock/Aquaculture (%)	33	31	2
Own non-farm enterprise (%)	33	36	3
Rent (%)	0	4	4***
Gifts, donations, pensions, assistance (%)	1	16	15***
Remittance (%)	0	10	10***
Unemployed (%)	2	1	1

Source: Author's calculations based on MHWS and MMA data.

In our survey, we tried to gauge if migrant households' living conditions and their access to necessities improved or worsened after the households reached their final migration destination. Overall, safety and security conditions improved (63 percent) and households found themselves having more trust in their new neighborhood (51 percent) (Table 8). Earning opportunities also increased at the new location (52 percent) and health services became more accessible (53 percent). However, certain characteristics such as having access to furniture, clothing and cooking materials did not improve for most households, 35 percent, 33 percent, and 38 percent, respectively, and instead either stayed the same, or became worse. In terms of access to safe drinking water and heath care, conditions also worsened for 29 percent and 32 percent of households, respectively.

Table 8. Living conditions and access to basic necessities after the move, February 2021 to July 2023

	More	Less	Same
Safety when going about your daily activities (%)	63	17	21
Health access (%)	53	26	21
Opportunity to earn income (%)	52	33	15
Trust in your community (%)	51	20	29
Access to safe drinking water (%)	43	22	35
Cooking materials (%)	38	29	33
Furniture (%)	35	35	29
Clothing (%)	33	27	40

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data

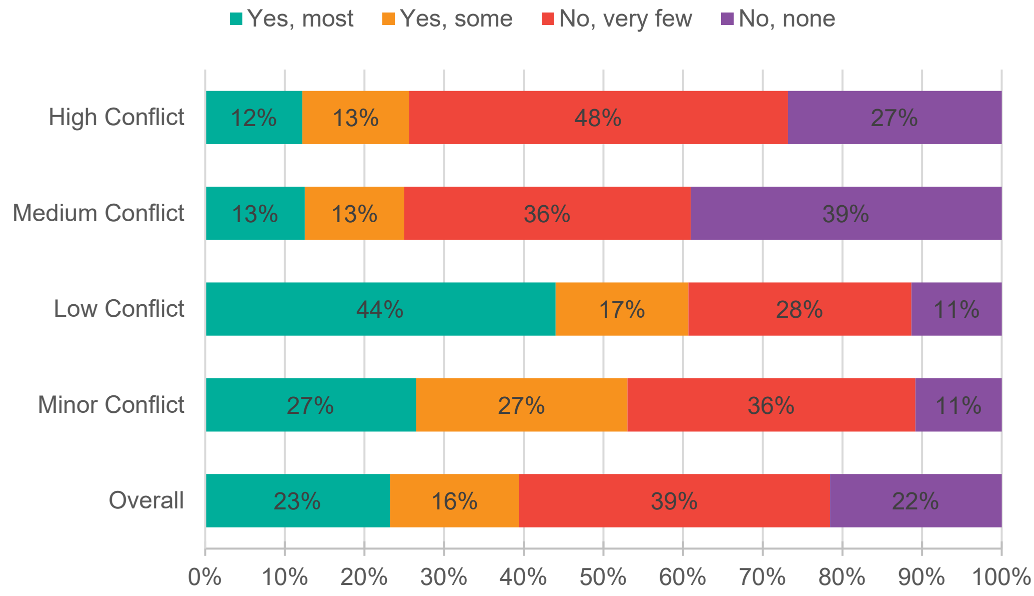
When disaggregating these changes based on the household's reason for migrating, and only looking at those households who reported worse outcomes, households who moved for schooling had less trust in their community after their move, than before their move, and less safety when going about their daily activities. Households who moved due to conflict were more likely than others to report less ability to earn income (46 percent), ownership of fewer furniture (48 percent), fewer clothing (37 percent) and fewer cooking materials (38 percent) than at their previous dwelling (Table 9). This reduced access to everyday necessary items might be due to households not being able to carry their personal and households' possessions during their move. This is evident from Figure 18, where many households reported either bringing very few households items (39 percent) or bringing no possessions at all (22 percent). Nearly half of the households from high conflict areas (48 percent) reported bringing very few items and only 12 percent brought along most of the household items when moving (Figure 18). Therefore, while conflict affected households might have moved to an area with better safety and security conditions, they continue to face major hurdles when it comes to everyday necessities and employment opportunities.

Table 9. Living conditions and access to basic necessities after internal household migration by reason of migration, February 2021 to July 2023

	Stated reasons for migration			
	Job	Family	School	Conflict
Less health access (%)	24	28	26	32
Less cooking materials (%)	23	21	26	38
Less furniture (%)	23	23	22	48
Less clothing (%)	19	19	22	37
Less trust in their community (%)	18	11	30	27
Less safety during daily activities (%)	18	23	35	19
Less opportunity to earn income (%)	15	32	26	46
Less access to safe drinking water (%)	13	28	17	29

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Figure 18. Do households bring their possessions during the migration event, February 2021 to July 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

4. CONCLUSION

Migration in Myanmar is on the rise, especially following the coup in February 2021. Between February 2021 and July 2023, every tenth household in Myanmar migrated as either a household or family unit. Migrating with more than one family member, in comparison to migrating individually, has its specific challenges and limitations but it is nevertheless primarily driven by the same reasons. We find that most households (54 percent) relocated due to employment while moving away from conflict was the second most common reason (15 percent). According to MHWS data, migration in high conflict areas such as Kayah, Chin and Sagaing were also driven by conflict, 70 percent, 47 percent, and 37 percent, respectively.

Households were more likely to move across townships within their own states and regions, with notably as much as 85 percent of households in Kachin, 77 percent in Yangon, and 72 percent in Kayah and Tanintharyi moving internally. When moving across states and regions, geographic proximity played an important role, most likely due to lower migration costs. In addition to proximity, Yangon and Mandalay regions were the most common destination choices for interstate migration. However, the cost associated with migration was still a major challenge for households (56 percent) according to our MMA data, despite a large number moving internally and within states and regions.

While households migrate mainly for security or economic reasons, migration outcomes are complex and often depend on the origin of the migrant, their socioeconomic condition, and the reason for their move. While the number of income sources increased for the moving households after the move, this was primarily driven by an increase in remittances and donations. Housing ownership fell after the move from 65 percent to 28 percent. Many households left behind household items in the move, and therefore had fewer clothing, furniture, and cooking materials after the move. Households migrating due to conflict were more likely to face worse living conditions after the move: they were more likely to have fewer earning opportunities (46 percent), have less furniture (48 percent), have less clothing (37 percent) and have less cooking materials (38 percent) after the move compared to households who moved for other reasons.

Studies on migration are disproportionately centered on individual movements across borders, overlooking the dynamics and implications of households relocating within the same country. Additionally, the risk factor associated with international migration might draw more attention due to the complexities involved in crossing borders and adapting to a new country, diverting attention away from the internal migration of households within a national context. However, internal migrants in Myanmar are still under risk of exploitation and abuse. An ILO study in 2015 found that 14 percent of migrant workers surveyed were trafficked while another 26 percent were exploited for forced labor (ILO 2015).

While the above ILO study primarily examined individual migrants, these traits are likely applicable to migrating households as well. To address such vulnerabilities, comprehensive policies are essential. Implementing secure internal recruitment mechanisms, ensuring affordable housing options, and promoting financial inclusion can collectively contribute to safeguarding migrating households from exploitation risks. Additionally, the development of targeted skill enhancement programs can empower migrants and households alike, fostering better integration into the labor market. Policymakers should also focus on facilitating access to social services and healthcare for migrating families, thereby addressing their diverse needs. These measures are particularly pertinent for households moving to escape conflict in their previous destination, necessitating a holistic approach to policy formulation that spans housing, employment, financial, and social support. Understanding migration patterns and post-migration outcomes are essential to better support these migrant communities.

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APPENDIX

Table A.1 Myanmar Migration Assessment sample by state/region of origin

	Overall (%)	Obs.
Kachin	2	7
Kayah	21	95
Kayin	3	13
Chin	3	15
Sagaing	14	63
Tanintharyi	2	10
Bago	4	19
Magway	6	27
Mandalay	6	27
Mon	2	8
Rakhine	1	5
Yangon	20	87
Shan (North)	1	4
Shan (East)	1	4
Shan (South)	2	9
Ayeyarwady	9	40
Nay Pyi Taw	2	10

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Table A.2 Reason behind choosing their next place of migration, by conflict intensity, February 2021 to July 2023

	Overall	Minor Conflict	Low Conflict	Medium Conflict	High Conflict
A family member lives there (%)	18	12	24	19	14
A friend lives there (%)	12	11	8	10	15
Village member lives there (%)	4	3	3	3	4
Heard work opportunities exist there (%)	35	59	49	26	18
Closest place to migrate to from the household (%)	5	3	4	5	6
Relatives live in that location (%)	19	12	18	21	21
Our household used to live there (%)	8	8	11	5	7
Safer than where we lived (%)	34	8	9	43	61
Good place for temporary shelter (%)	5	0	3	7	8

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Table A.3 Challenges faced during the migration process, by state/region, February 2021 to July 2023

	Difficulties coming up with money to migrate	Transportation related problems	Travel restrictions/ check points	Unreliable agents	Lack of safe housing, shelter
Kachin (%)	57	29	57	0	14
Kayah (%)	72	72	65	5	38
Kayin (%)	33	60	53	7	40
Chin (%)	83	67	67	11	61
Sagaing (%)	48	39	38	4	19
Tanintharyi (%)	67	58	42	8	33
Bago (%)	55	35	45	0	15
Magway (%)	39	36	57	11	29
Mandalay (%)	48	32	29	6	10
Mon (%)	44	11	56	11	0
Rakhine (%)	40	40	40	0	0
Yangon (%)	48	36	29	4	15
Shan (North) (%)	50	50	25	0	25
Shan (East) (%)	50	25	25	0	0
Shan (South) (%)	40	30	80	0	30
Ayeyarwady (%)	49	30	51	2	23
Nay Pyi Taw (%)	53	33	27	7	13

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Table A.4 Dwelling ownership after the first migration event, February 2021 to July 2023

	Overall	Minor Conflict	Low Conflict	Medium Conflict	High Conflict
Owned (%)	23	28	36	17	14
Rented (%)	35	35	37	43	30
Provided free (%)	35	35	25	38	41
Squatter (%)	1	0	2	0	1
IDP Camp/ temporary shelter (%)	7	1	1	2	14

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Table A.5 Dwelling ownership by state/region after the move, February 2021 to July 2023

	Owned	Rented	Provided free	Squatter	IDP Camp/ temporary shelter
Kachin (%)	29	43	29	0	0
Kayah (%)	20	14	44	0	22
Kayin (%)	15	38	46	0	0
Chin (%)	13	47	27	0	13
Sagaing (%)	24	41	33	0	2
Tanintharyi (%)	30	40	30	0	0
Bago (%)	21	32	42	0	5
Magway (%)	26	48	22	0	4
Mandalay (%)	41	26	33	0	0
Mon (%)	0	38	63	0	0
Rakhine (%)	60	20	20	0	0
Yangon (%)	39	44	15	2	0
Shan (North) (%)	50	25	25	0	0
Shan (East) (%)	50	25	25	0	0
Shan (South) (%)	0	44	44	0	11
Ayeyarwady (%)	30	38	33	0	0
Nay Pyi Taw (%)	40	30	30	0	0

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Table A.6 Source of funding for migration based on the level of conflict, February 2021 to July 2023

	Overall	Minor Conflict	Low Conflict	Medium Conflict	High Conflict
Savings (%)	62	55	76	57	57
Local Lender (%)	7	7	7	7	7
Relatives (%)	14	19	7	17	17
Friends (%)	7	9	5	7	9
Remittance (%)	3	3	3	3	3
Institutional Lenders (Banks, NGOs etc) (%)	0	0	0	0	0
Sold Assets (%)	9	8	11	14	7
No substantial cost for move (%)	7	7	4	7	11

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Table A.7 Hardships and benefits that households faced after their move based on reason for their move, percent of households who moved, February 2021 to July 2023

	Employment	Family	Education	Marriage	Conflict
No additional hardships	74.2	68.2	72.2	75.4	29.3
No additional benefits	46.2	56.4	41.7	71.9	43.7
Less work/income	10.3	15.5	8.3	16.7	35.9
More work/income	38.1	7.3	16.7	12.3	8.4
Less Physical security	2.6	1.8	2.8	1.8	7.8
More physical security	4.3	12.7	8.3	7.0	37.7
Worse housing conditions	6.0	8.2	11.1	7.0	19.8
Better housing conditions	8.6	16.4	22.2	4.4	6.6
Disruptions in food markets/food supply	6.9	6.3	5.6	7.0	28.7
Better access to food markets/food supply	4.4	6.3	11.1	3.5	10.8
More travel restrictions	1.5	7.3	2.8	1.8	15.6
Fewer travel restrictions	3.9	1.8	5.6	1.8	1.8
More telecommunications disruptions	0.9	1.8	5.6	0.9	8.9
Fewer telecommunications disruptions	2.2	1.8	11.1	2.6	1.2
Worse access to health services	0.5	0.9	0.0	0.0	10.2
Better access to health services	1.0	7.3	5.6	0.9	4.8
Worse access to other banking/finance services	0.3	0.9	0.0	0.0	1.8
Better access to other banking/finance services	0.3	0.9	0.0	0.0	1.2

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

Table A.8 Source of income prior to the move, by level of conflict February 2021 to July 2023

	Minor Conflict	Low Conflict	Medium Conflict	High Conflict
Wage work: Crop farming (%)	19	22	7	28
Wage work: Livestock (%)	0	3	0	0
Wage work: Fishing/aquaculture (%)	1	3	1	2
Wage work: Non-agriculture (%)	20	15	22	19
Salaried work: Crop farming (%)	0	0	1	0
Salaried work: Livestock (%)	1	1	1	0
Salaried work: Fishing/aquaculture (%)	0	0	0	0
Salaried work: Non-agriculture (%)	20	15	39	12
Own farm: seasonal and perennial crops (%)	30	24	9	28

Source: Author's calculations based on MMA data.

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