



© Shutterstock/Catastrophe OL

Overview of Internal Migration in Myanmar



©UNESCO/R.Manovalalao

Myanmar Context

- Myanmar's total population, as recorded by UNESCAP in 2016, stands at over 52 million.
- Despite being the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia, Myanmar has one of the lowest population densities in the region, with only 81.0 people per sq.km (World Bank 2017). It has an annual population growth rate of 0.9% and a total fertility rate of 2.2 (UNESCAP 2016).
- Myanmar is a highly rural and agrarian society. Just under 65% of the Myanmar population live in rural areas (ibid.). In 2014-2015 agriculture accounted for 27.9% of GDP, industry 34.4%, and services 37.7%, which represents a rapid decline in agriculture's share from 2010-2011, when it accounted for 36.8% of GDP (Central Statistical Organization 2015). 42.3% of the employed population work in the primary sector (agriculture, forestry, and fishing) (Department of Population 2015).
- The great majority of Myanmar's poor live in rural areas, creating important rural-urban and rural-rural disparities, with the states of Ayeyarwady and Magway being among the poorest (IOM 2016).
- Since the launch of comprehensive economic and political reforms in 2011, the country has witnessed a slight move away from the primary sector towards industry and services. This may mark the start of a structural conversion from a rural, agriculture-based economy towards a more urban, industry and service-based one (ibid.).



- Internal migrants in Myanmar constitute a significant population. The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census listed them at over 9 million in 2015, equivalent to almost 20% of Myanmar's total population (Department of Population 2015).¹ This significantly outstrips international migration in Myanmar, with just below 2.9 million Myanmar nationals living abroad (UNDESA 2017). Nonetheless, the Ministry of Immigration and Population considers the Census numbers to be underreported, and has provided an unofficial estimate of 4.25 million (IOM 2016).
- The 2013-2014 Formal Sector Survey found that 38.9% of formal sector workers had migrated from one State/Region to another for work, with the figure rising to 48.7% when intra-regional migration was included (LIFT 2014).
- Internal migration in Myanmar is of two types: *across states/regions*, representing 51% of all internal migration in the country, and *within a state/region*, making up the additional 49% (Department of Population 2015). When considering only labour migration, inter-state/regional migration increased up to 62% while intra-state/regional migration constituted the remaining 38% (ILO 2015).²
- Migration within a state/region is mainly rural-rural or urban-urban, whereas rural-urban migration is more common in migration across states/regions (ILO 2015).
- Only 4 in 10 states/regions have a net in-migration, namely Yangon, Shan, Kayah and Kachin, while the main out-migration states/regions are the Dry Zone (Magway and Mandalay), Ayeyarwady, and Bago. Yangon and Mandalay are the primary urban destinations (Helvetas 2015). 71% of all formal sector migrants are from Ayeyarwady, Yangon, Mandalay and Bago (LIFT 2014).

Migrants' Characteristics

- Women migrate at a higher rate than men, constituting 53% of all internal migrants (Department of Population 2015).
- Most male and female migrants move during their 20s. Women tend to migrate at slightly younger ages (IOM 2016). 70.6% of all internal migrants are aged below 35 (Department of Population 2016).
- Male migrants are more likely to be married than female migrants. Unmarried migrants generally move alone while married migrants tend to move with their families (ibid.)

¹ The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census defines internal migration as inter-township movement of more than six months.

² Note: The ILO study was based on a sample size of 7,295 internal migrant workers. It used a non-probability sampling method, and statistical findings related to this research cannot be said to represent the entire population.



©UNESCO/R.Manowalailao

- Landless households are more likely to have family members migrating. Internal migration involves the poorest sections of communities that are unable to afford to migrate internationally (ibid.)
- Migrants, especially women, are increasingly educated. About 1 in 2 female migrants had no education in 1991, compared to 1 in 10 in 2007 (Department of Population 2007).
- Social networks at the destination play an important role in inciting migration. An ILO study (2015) indicated that 73% of potential labour migrants consider friends and family as the most reliable source of information about migration. In a small-scale study by the Livelihoods and Securities trust Fund (LIFT 2016)³, of the 75 migrants interviewed, 67 had friends or family in that location prior to moving, and 52 considered these networks the main reason for their destination choice.
- Internal migrants in Myanmar consider following family (40.8%) and employment-related purposes (34.3%) as the main motivation for migration, followed by marriage (15.7%), education (2.2%) and conflict (0.7%). However, men are more likely to move for employment purposes (47% compared to 23% for women) and women to follow family (49% compared to 32% for men). Such differences can be explained by the under-representation of women in the labour force (50.5% compared to 85% for men) (Department of Population 2015).

Working and Living Conditions in the New Setting

- Male migrants mainly work in construction, transportation, brick factories, mines, fishing or rubber plantations. Women migrants work in tea plantations and other agricultural sectors, garment factories, food/beverage services, as domestic helpers, or in the sex industry (IOM 2016).
- Male migrant workers earn higher salaries than female migrant workers (an average of MMK 121,775 or US\$90 per month, compared to MMK 82,319 or US\$60 for women). In all industries, female migrants earn less than male migrants, with the sole exception of the hotels industry (ILO 2015).
- 54% of jobs are arranged prior to moving, and 46% upon arrival in the destination (ibid.).
- Most migrant workers (72%) receive some type of recruitment assistance from another person, such as a relative, friend or labour broker (ibid.).
- Only 7% of migrant workers had a written working contract in 2015. The predominance of the informal sector exposes migrants to systemic risk of exploitation and abuse (ibid.).

³ The LIFT study was conducted in the regions of Ayeyarwady and Magway only and counted a total of 345 respondents. It used a non-probability sampling method, and statistical findings related to this research cannot be said to represent the entire population.



- Nearly 60% of migrant workers work 7 days a week, and 33% work 11 to 15 hours per day. Only 60% of migrant workers benefit from some time off per month, and of these, only 35% receive paid time off. 41% of migrant workers are required to work overtime. Of these, 40% are not paid extra for their overtime work. Migrant workers also often work in unhealthy and unsafe conditions. They are commonly exposed to extremely cold or hot air temperatures, dust, fumes, loud noises or vibrations and sometimes toxic chemicals (ibid.).
- Although formal channels of internal migration are increasingly available to the Myanmar population, risk of exploitation and abuse persist. 26% of the migrant workers surveyed by the 2015 ILO study were in a situation of forced labour, and 14% in a situation of trafficking for forced labour. Rates of forced labour and trafficking were highest among the 15-17 age group (34% of all forced labour), those who had only completed lower secondary education, and among individuals from large families or families where fewer than four were earning money (ibid.).
- Forced labour and trafficking were especially prevalent among domestic work (40.0% and 24.4%), fishing (39.2% and 26.2%), wholesale/retail trade (35.0% and 16.5%), food/beverage services (33.1% and 16.0%) and mining (32.1% and 19.4%) (ibid.).
- Other working and living arrangements that correlated strongly with exploitation were migrating to Ayeyarwady, Kayin or Sagaing, being in debt to one's employer (which 8% of internal migrants were), and, surprisingly, having a written rather than verbal contract (since the contract could be abused) (ibid.).
- In general, access to information on how to migrate safely, knowledge on working conditions and migrant workers' rights and entitlements is very poor among migrants (IOM 2016).
- Migrants generally settle in "clusters" characterised by remoteness, lack of integration with host communities and poor access to public services (ibid.).
- A majority of migrant workers (65%), especially women, live in housing provided by their employer (ILO 2015).
- Migrants who cannot purchase a home are forced to build their own informal accommodation, often located close their workplace. Often they are forced into bribing authorities to avoid the demolition of their houses (ibid.).
- Migrant workers are reluctant to report abuse by employers or recruiters to labour authorities or police, as they believe that doing so might have negative consequences for them, such as losing their job (ibid.).
- Migrants in situations of forced labour or trafficking are over twice as likely to earn less than MMK 50,000 (US\$37) per month than non-exploited migrants. They also work for longer hours, and are more likely to rely on employer-provided housing and to be in consensual debt to an employer (ibid.).



The Impact of Internal Migration on Those Who Stay Behind

- The 2013-2014 Formal Sector Survey found that 78% of all formal sector migrants sent back remittances. Remittance rates were highest amongst migrants from Ayeyarwady Region and workers working in the Dry Zone (though migrants to Ayeyarwady remitted little – 19.6% of them remitted, compared to 91.7% of migrants to the Dry Zone and 78.8% of those in Yangon). Younger men were more likely to send back remittances than older men and unmarried women were more likely to send back remittances than married women. Overall, remittance rates were highest for younger, unmarried migrants (LIFT 2014).
- A small-scale study found that internal migrants remit less than international migrants. While almost all Myanmar nationals migrating abroad remit, only 55% of migrants in Magway and 69% in Ayeyarwady remit, and mostly only once or twice per year. This may be because internal migrants moving from agricultural employment to low-skilled employment only benefit from slight earning differentials (LIFT 2016).
- Although the median amount for internal remittances over a 12-month period is MMK 250,000 (US\$185), the mean is close to twice that amount (MMK 415,800 or US\$310) (ibid.).
- Remittances are mainly used to supplement food expenses. Very few households are able to invest remittances in education, health, home improvements or productive assets (ibid.).
- Research suggests that in Ayeyarwady and Magway, most migrants do not trust formal banking services when remitting. They mainly rely on friends and relatives to carry cash back to their households or, to a smaller extent, carry it back personally. The closer the migration destination is to the village of origin the more likely it is for the remittance method to be informal, with seasonal migrants within the same state/region most likely to remit themselves (ibid.).
- Migration impacts role distribution within migrant-sending households, as for one-third of migrant-sending households, those who stay behind take on more responsibilities (ibid.).
- Increased access to mobile phones has improved communications; the vast majority of migrants contact their household at least monthly (ibid.). However, compared to Thailand, older individuals are much less likely to have phone contact with children living away and less likely to receive visits (Knodel and Pothsiri 2014).
- Data from the 2012 Myanmar Survey of Older Persons indicates that 4.1% of those aged 60 and above live with just their grandchildren in “skip-generation households”, with 1.9% living with a grandchild aged below 10. Generally, grandparents in these do not view their childcare duties as a burden: 60.1% enjoy childcare, and only 5.4% find it a burden (Knodel and Ngyuen 2015).



- Out-migration has created shortages of labour, as farmers in both regions report difficulties hiring sufficient workers during farming seasons. On the other hand, return migrants are perceived as bringing new skills, knowledge, attitudes and perceptions (LIFT 2016).

References

- Central Statistical Organization (2015). *Statistical Year Book 2015*. [online] Naypyitaw: Ministry of Planning and Economic Development. Available at: http://www.mmsis.gov.mm/sub_menu/statistics/fileDb.jsp?code_code=001
- Helvetas (2015). *Internal Migration Labour Study in the Dry Zone, Shan State, and the Southeast of Myanmar*. [online] Available at: https://assets.helvetas.org/downloads/helvetas_myanmar_internal_migration_study_feb2015_final.pdf
- Knodel, J. and Ngyuen, M. (2015). Grandparents and grandchildren: care and support in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. *Ageing and Society*, 35(09), pp.1960-1988.
- Knodel, J. and Pothisiri, W. (2014). Intergenerational Living Arrangements in Myanmar and Thailand: A Comparative Analysis. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, [online] 30(1), pp.1-20. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10823-014-9254-5>.
- Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) (2014). *Formal Sector Internal Migration in Myanmar*. [online] Available at: <https://www.lift-fund.org/sites/lift-fund.org/files/publication/Formal%20sector%20internal%20migration%20in%20Myanmar.pdf>
- LIFT (2016). *A Country On The Move: A Qualitative Social and Economic Monitoring (QSEM) thematic study Domestic Migration in Two Regions of Myanmar*. [online] Available at: <https://www.lift-fund.org/sites/lift-fund.org/files/publication/Internal%20Migration%20FINAL%20ENG.pdf>
- Department of Population (2007). *Myanmar Fertility and Reproductive Health Survey 2007*. [online] Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. Available at <http://myanmar.unfpa.org/publications/country-report-2007-fertility-and-reproductive-health-survey>
- Department of Population (2015). *The 2014 Myanmar Population & Housing Census*. [online] Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. Available at http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Census_Atlas_Myanmar_the_2014_Myanmar_Population_and_Housing_Census.pdf
- Department of Population (2016). *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Migration and Urbanization*. [online] Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. [online] Available at: http://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Migration_insidepages_FINAL_lowrespreview.pdf



International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015). *Internal Labour Migration in Myanmar: Building an Evidence-Based on Patterns in Migration, Human Trafficking and Forced Labour*. Yangon: International Labour Organization, ILO Liaison Officer for Myanmar.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Internal presentation (2016). Internal Document.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2017). *International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision*. [online] Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml>

United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) (2016), Statistical Database. Available from www.unescap.org/stat/data/statdb/DataExplorer.aspx.

World Bank (2017), World Development Indicators: Population Density. Available from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=EN.POP.DNST&country=MMR>.

This brief is part of a series of Policy Briefs on Internal Migration in Southeast Asia jointly produced by UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, and UN-Habitat. These briefs are part of an initiative aimed at researching and responding to internal migration in the region. The full set of briefs can be found at <http://bangkok.unesco.org/content/policy-briefs-internal-migration-southeast-asia>