CHAPTER 6

Myanmar Migrants to Thailand: Economic Analysis and Implications to Myanmar Development

Supang CHANTAVANICH and Premjai VUNGSIRIPHISAL

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Chapter 6

Myanmar Migrants to Thailand: Economic Analysis and Implications for the Development of Myanmar

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Abstract

For decades, Myanmar migrants have crossed the border to work in Thailand, and only in the 2000s Thailand had launched a long-term policy, aiming to recruit formal migrants and legalize migrant workers holding temporary work permits. However, no extension would be permitted after 2012. That year, the number of registered Myanmar migrants stood at 1,186,805 Myanmar migrants, with 619,644 comprised of regular skilled and unskilled workers and another 567,161 migrants consisting of irregular unskilled workers in various labour intensive industries, agriculture, trading and services.

Recent political and economic reform in Myanmar has brought changes to the development of the country. Major labour market sectors for Myanmar migrants in Thailand include agriculture, construction, manufacturing and service which absorb large numbers of workers. In order to invite experienced, semi-skilled and skilled Myanmar migrant working in Thailand for development in Myanmar, an appealing policy in Myanmar is needed. A survey of 204 Myanmar migrants in Bangkok, Samutsakorn and Mae Sot district, Tak province, Thailand, found that majority of them realize about the changes taking place in Myanmar today. These migrants contribute millions baht of their remittent annually to support their families in Myanmar in addition to and have obtained valuable skills and experiences from working in Thailand. Some of Myanmar migrant workers plan to go back in a few years but under certain circumstances, such as having enough savings, economic opportunities, competitive wages to support a decent standard of livings as well as political stability and sufficient infrastructure in Myanmar.

1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into five parts. Part 2 provides information on the history of migration from Myanmar to Thailand, a chronology on the development of Thailand policy towards Myanmar migrants, current policy and trends, a profile of Myanmar migrants in the year 2012: number of registered migrants, working sectors and places. Part 3 is the survey result of Myanmar migrants about their attitudes and contribution to the development of Myanmar. This part concludes profile of those 204 aforementioned provincial-level samplings, which covers information about the respondents' previous occupations prior to migrating to Thailand, their current employment and income, amount of remittance, transaction channels and spending of remittance, skills they obtained in Thailand, means to contact their families, sources of news about changes in Myanmar, their plan to return and needs about jobs and income in Myanmar. Part 4 is about current events in Myanmar covering political reform and the direction of Myanmar Economic Development. And finally, concluding remarks and recommendations for policy maker is in Part 5.

2. A History of Migration from Myanmar to Thailand

Cross border migration between Myanmar and Thailand has occurred for centuries. During the initial stages of Thailand's development towards industrialization in 1970s, factories were mostly situated in Bangkok and vicinities, and labour demand was met by workers from rural Thailand, mostly from the north and northeast. However, the economic boom in the Middle East and East Asia during the 1980s pushed Thai workers to immigrate to the Gulf region. Concurrently, the expansion of the compulsory education in Thailand to nine years (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999) kept Thai children longer in school. Since then, industrial development and labour demand were not filled up by local supply. Thailand's economic growth and labour shortages in Thailand have been the pull factors and opportunity for workers from neighbouring countries. In addition to the economic and political problems in Myanmar that push their workers out of the country to search for better life security.   Migrants from Myanmar have crossed to work in Thailand for decades, especially in border areas. At the beginning, Thailand did not set any policy to manage migrant from its neighbor. The outflow of Myanmar migrant has rapidly increased after 1988 when the political unrest incident broke in Myanmar, amidst the limited economic growth of the country. Hundreds of thousand Burmese and other ethnics migrated out of their country into Thailand. On the other hand, Thailand's economic boom and pressure from Thai entrepreneurs forced Thai Government to open the Thai labour market to these migrants.

The first permission to allow unskilled migrants from neighbouring countries to work in Thailand was given in 1992 to four border provinces and later expanded to nine provinces. It was limited to only migrants from Myanmar who were already employed in those areas. Initially, only 704 migrants were registered because the registered fee was as high as Baht 5,000 (Chintayananda, et al., 1997). In 1996, the Thai Cabinet issued the resolution for the national registration of migrant workers, allowed two more nationalities, Cambodia and Laos, in addition to Myanmar, to register in 43 provinces. Over 80% of registered workers were from Myanmar. Most of them entered into Thailand and worked without formal documents. They were allowed to work in labour intensive works, in 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult) that were abandoned by Thai workers. Myanmar migrants originated from different parts of Myanmar. The official status of these migrant, though registered, was "illegal migrants pending deportation but allowed to work temporarily". The registration was on yearly basis, aiming for migrants to work only temporarily in Thailand. There were 293,652 registered migrants in 1996, lower than the actual number, which was estimated as 733,000 (Chantavanich, et al, 2007).

The limited labour protection, short period for registration (30 days) and high expense made registration not attractive, causing low registration turnout in the following years. In 1997, Thailand economy was hit by financial crisis and increased unemployment of Thai workers. In response to the situation, Thailand decided to deport approximate 300,000 migrant workers to allow more space in labour marker for local workers, but there was small number of local workers to replace the vacancies. Later, Thai Government launched another registration resolution, this time health insurance was compulsory, the quota to hire migrant workers was imposed and hiring number of migrant workers was limited.

The policy of temporary registration and residency control of migrants, issued by cabinet resolutions without long term strategy, was considered as an ad hoc and passive one (Krittiya and Pantip, 2005, cited in Chantavanich et.al., 2007). Migrants entered into country without proper documents and permission violated immigration law. They were subjected to deportation but the Thai Government permitted them to stay and worked temporary in restricted areas.

In 2001, the Government announced an "amnesty policy" to register an unlimited number of migrants, including the self-employed, throughout the country without imposing any quotas. In the meantime, the Thai Government started to negotiate with the governments of Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar and successfully signed a memorandum of understanding with the three countries in 2002-2003 in order to seek cooperation in solving the problem of employment of migrant workers.

The memorandum focuses on the formal recruitment of unskilled migrants from these three countries to work for a certain period in Thailand, to facilitate labor protection, and to set up measures against illegal employment (Memorandum of Understanding-MoU, 2002 and 2003, cited in Vungsiriphisal et al, 2009) Formal recruited migrants would be granted a two year work permit and possible another renewal.

The registration policy was then revised in 2003 to legalize irregular unskilled migrant workers. The new registration system was launched including 3 strategies: 1) Register migrants and their family members 2) Verify migrants' nationalities 3) Recruit formal migrant.

Under these strategies, unskilled migrant workers, their dependents as well as employers were required to register. A thirteen digit ID number was given to each unskilled migrant and dependent. This strategy was aimed to register as many unskilled migrant workers as possible to register with their employers and accommodators on home registrars. A total of 1,284,920 unskilled migrants showed up at the second amnesty, bringing an alert to the government of the huge number of unskilled migrants living in Thailand. The formal registration of unskilled migrant families took place in 2004 and number of 93,082 migrant children age 0-15 year old came to register. The second amnesty policy was continued in 2005, the government announced an extension of work permit for registered foreign migrant workers to come for re-registration and new registration. However, as of June 2005, the number of registered unskilled migrants decreased to 343,777 persons, the renewal registration in the following years also decreased.

=== Table 1 ===

The implementation of the aforementioned policy did not successfully meet the target. The formal recruitment of Cambodian and Laotian workers started in 2005-2006 but supply was much lower than demand because the recruitment procedure took too long and the expenses was too high (Vungsiriphisal et.al., 2009), the recruitment of Myanmar migrant was not started until 2009.

As for the nationality verification (NV) strategy, the verification procedure of Cambodians and Laotians started in 2006 because the two countries were ready to send their officers to verify their workers nationalities. For Myanmar case, in order to verify their nationality, the migrant application with personal records would be handle to Myanmar government. In fear to violation, many workers from Myanmar did not apply for the procedure. On the other hand, Myanmar Government (under the State Peace and Development Council) was inactive to send their officers, instead requested Thai Government to send approximate one million migrant to be verified in Myanmar. After long negotiation to perform the process in Thailand, Myanmar started the procedure and sent officers to Thailand in 2009. The Myanmar migrants who completed the process received temporary passport and obtain permission to work legally in Thailand.

2.1 Current Thailand Immigration Policy and Trends

Since the National Verification procedure takes time, thus leaves a lot of Myanmar migrants unable to complete the process by 2011 as the Thai Government have planned. The Thai government aimed to discontinue granting temporary registration for irregular migrant at the end of 2011 but the number of migrants in this group was still high, the deadline was extended to June 2012 and again to December 2012. However, these extensions were limited for migrants who have already applied for NV process to continue working in Thailand temporarily until their NV have been completed. The permission for temporary work permit will not be granted for migrant who have not applied for NV or new arrival.

=== Table 2 ===

2.2 Profile of Myanmar Migrants in Thailand

In 2012, the total number of 1,186,805 Myanmar migrants in Thailand is registered in different categories according to immigration criteria, as regular (legal) migrants and irregular (illegal) migrants. The regular one comprises of Myanmar migrants who are recruited, holding work permits and proper travelling documents. They are working in business or professional sectors, such as senior officials, managers, technicians, etc. The irregular group holds temporary work permits without proper travelling documents. However, there is another category of irregular migrants who have no documents at all (see Figure 1). After migrants in this group have completed verification of their nationality procedure, their status will change to regular (legal) one.

=== Figure 1 ===

Statistics from Ministry of Labour from 2010-June 2012 indicates the registered status of Myanmar migrant in four categories: *1) recruited unskilled migrant, 2) migrant completes nationality verification 3) migrant holds temporary work permit and 4) general skilled migrant.* The number of recruited unskilled migrants from Myanmar increases from 4,641 in year 2010 to 8,160 in year 2011 and 33,697 in 2012. The registered number of regular migrant who complete national verification has increased while the number of irregular migrant holding temporary work permits has decreased.

=== Table 3 ===

Table 4 shows the distribution of Myanmar workers who currently are holding temporary work permits in 10 key sectors in 2012. They are employed in labour intensive jobs in various industries, agriculture and husbandry, trading and services.

The highest concentration is in construction (89,883 persons), followed by agriculture and husbandry (83,822 persons), services (52,502 persons), fishery related (52,502 persons), agriculture related (47,133 persons), garment production and sales (45,813 persons), domestic work (38,220 persons), selling food and drink (25,084 persons), whole sale, retail trade and vendor (24,689 persons) and husbandry related (21,674 persons).

=== Table 4 ===

The statistic shows that the highest registered number of migrants is in central region of Thailand where a lot of manufacturing situate, northern, southern, eastern and northern regions (see map). Table 5 shows top 10 ten provinces where they are working: Bangkok, Samutsakorn, Tak, Samutprakan, Ranong, Pathum Thani, Surat Thani, Songkhla, Phuket and Chon Buri.

=== Table 5 ===

=== Map 1 ===

3. Sampling Profile from Survey

After years of working in Thailand, Myanmar migrant now are thinking about returning to their home country due to political changes and economic development in Myanmar. A Survey of 204 workers living in three provinces: Bangkok, Samutsakorn and Mae Sot District in Tak, reflects information about their attitude, their interest to contribute to development in Myanmar.

3.1 Profile

3.1.1 Age Group and Gender

The respondents comprise of 53.4% male and 46.6% female. In terms of age group, the young people are the biggest proportion as 38.2% is between 18-25 years, 31.3% is between 26-35 years, 25% is over 35 years and 3.4% is under 18 years, the youngest is 15 years (see Figure 2).

=== Figure 2 ===

3.1.2 Place of Origin and Ethnic Background

The respondents come from different areas of Myanmar. More than half of the respondents 116 (56.9%) originated from Mawlamyhine, 22 (10.8%) came from Yangon, 22 (10.8%) came from Karen state, 16 (7.8%) came from Taninthayi, 8 (3.9%) came from Ayeyarwady, 8 (3.9%) came from Shan state, the rest 12 (6%) came from Mandalay, Kachin, Chin and Rakhine.

In term of ethnicity, the majority 44.1% was Burman, followed by 31.9% Mon, 13.7% Karen, 7.4% Shan, 2% Rakhine and 1% Rohingya. The majority (40.8%) of the age group 18-25 years was Mon, followed by Burmese, Karen and Shan. For the age group 25-35 years, majority was Burmese, followed by Karen, Mon and Shan respectively.

3.1.3 Marital and Legal Status

In term of their marital status, the majority of them are married, among this group, 41.7% has their spouse living together in Thailand, 7.8% married but their spouse stay in Myanmar, 9% was married but divorced, 46.1% is single. The proportion of married and single marital status is almost the same (Figure 3).

=== Figure 3 ===

With regard to legal status in Thailand, the proportion of migrants that hold temporary passports which is obtained from National Verification and legal work permits is the highest (71.6%). The second largest group (17.6%) is those working without work permit, which means they are illegal. The last group is the one who hold one year temporary work permit (9.8%) (see Figure 4).

=== Figure 4 ===

3.1.4 Education Background and Previous Jobs

Considering their education background, 9.8% of the respondents had no schooling, one third or 26.3% of them finished elementary level (grade 3), 32.8% finished secondary level (grade 8), 12.7% finished high school (grade 10) but some of them 8.3% finished tertiary level (Figure 5). This correlates to their occupation in Thailand. Those who are university graduated are mainly professionals: teachers in migrant learning centers, staff of non-governmental organizations, social workers, etc., but some of them are also found working in factories. While those with elementary and secondary education background are employed in the less-skilled positions.

=== Figure 5 ===

The education background of respondents is not consistent with UNFPA (2007) statistics (cited in Kudo, 2010) which indicated that the literacy rate in Myanmar is as high as 89.9% and enrolment at the primary level is at 99.6%. Probably because many respondents originate from rural areas where, in general, have lower enrolment rates.

Unemployment is generally one of the main reasons for migration. According to a survey by Asian research Center for Migration in 2006, more than two third of 600 samplings was unemployed before coming to Thailand (Chantavanich et. al., 2007). In this survey, one third of the respondents (38.1%) were unemployed before migrating to Thailand, 35.3% were farmer but among this group, only 24.5% worked on their own land, 10.8% was landless farmer. For the rest, 9.3% of them worked in trading sector, 5.4% was teachers, 3.4% worked in services sector, 4.9% worked in factories, 2% worked as mechanics and 1% worked in construction and 0.5% worked in fishery (see Figure 6).

=== Figure 6 ===

Among the respondents, the unemployed and landless farmer are the two groups with financial insecurity that drive them to migrate, though there is demand for labour but low wages in Myanmar is anther cause for worker to migrate to Thailand (Kudo, 2010: 314). Although the number of landless people is decreasing and population under poverty line is declined from 32.1% to 25.6% according to the Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA) report (2010), the unemployment rate of Myanmar population (15 years and above) has increased from 33.9% in year 2005 to 37.5% in year 2010, (Nishino and Koehler, 2011). Unless the labour market in Myanmar can absorb more workers and better income can be generated, migration of workers from Myanmar will continue.

3.1.5 Period of Staying in Thailand and Thai Language Fluency

More than half of the respondents (57.8%) have been staying in Thailand longer than 5 years, 25% have been staying between 2-5 years, and the rest 9.8% for 1-2 years and 8.3% have stayed less than a year in the country (Figure 7). Almost half of the respondents (45.1%) have no working experience before and the current jobs are their first jobs, the rest has experienced working in other areas/sectors before. Among those who have working experiences, 11.3% moved from another provinces.

=== Figure 7 ===

Relevant to their long period of residency in Thailand, more than half of them are able to communicate in the Thai language and some can also read and write Thai.

3.2 Current Employment and Income

The respondents in the survey are working in several sectors: agriculture 10.8%, construction 1.5%, garment and plastic factory 36.8%, seafood processing 22.5%, interpreter and health personnel 10.3%, teaching 5.4%, services (housekeeper, clerk, baby sitter) 11.8% and housewife 1%. They are working in the main sectors that majority of Myanmar migrant workers are hired according to the national statistic.

Since the late 2011, the minimum wage in Thailand has increased to Baht 300 (or USD 10) in certain provinces, including Bangkok and Samutsakorn. Almost half of the respondents receive daily wages at this rate and some even receive higher. For instance, 27.5% received Baht 300-500, 22.1% received Baht 7,500 monthly salary or Baht 250-

300 daily, 44.6% received Baht 100-300 Baht but 3.9% received less than Baht 100 daily.

Almost one third of them (31.9%), earn monthly income (including overtime pay) more than Baht 10,000, 26.5% earn between Baht 8,000-10,000, 19.6% earn between Baht 5,000-8,000 and the rest 16.7% receive between Baht 3,000-5,000 but there is 5.4% who receive less than Baht 3,000.

The income of Myanmar migrants who completed their nationality verification varies, 76.1% earn more than Baht 8,000 monthly, 16.6% earn between Baht 5,000-8,000 but there is 7.4% earn less than Baht 5,000. While 35% of migrant who are holding temporary annual work permit can earn between Baht 3,000 to 5,000, 35% earn Baht 5,000-8,000, 30% receive more than Baht 8,000. For migrant who have no work permit, 25% of them can earn between Baht 5,000-8,000, 50% of them earn between Baht 3,000 to 5,000 and 25% earn less than Baht 3,000 monthly (Table 6). In comparison, the income of those who work without proper permission is lower than the other two groups.

There are some migrant who earned higher income in Myanmar and elsewhere before migrating to Thailand. In total, 8.3% of the respondents received higher income in Myanmar and in other countries than what they are currently receiving. There were several reasons that push them to migrate to Thailand: working contracts in another country were expired, political conflict in Myanmar, searching for more experiences, etc.

=== Table 6 ===

When analyze the respondents' income with legal status, those who have legal status and proper documents especially those who completed their NV receive the highest income while those with no legal status receive the lowest income (Baht <3,000-5,000). Therefore, legal status has direct impact on wages of migrant workers.

If we look at income and type of employment (Table 7), almost one third of respondents (30.4%) earn more than Baht 10,000 per month. The high demand for labour in manufacturing sector provides migrants with higher incomes than in other sectors. Those migrants working in seafood processing and factories earn the highest income between Baht 8,000 to more than 10,000, followed by respondents working with humanitarian organizations at second place for income between Baht 5,000 to 8,000 and working as shop clerks at third place. The incomes of teachers in learning centers is between Baht 3,000 to 10,000 while those working in the agriculture sector receive income between Baht <3,000 to 5,000 only, as same as working in some seafood related sectors.

=== Table 7 ===

3.3 Contact with Family in Myanmar and News Consumption

The majority of the respondents contact their families in Myanmar regularly, more than half (58.3%) contact their families once or twice every month, 20.6% make the contact one or two times a year. The rest seldom or never contact their families, mainly because they have no close family members left in Myanmar. In term of gender, majority of the respondents or 90.5% of female migrant and 88% of male migrant contact their families in Myanmar.

With the convenience of communication technologies, 86.8% use mobile phones as their primary means to contact their families in Myanmar, only a few of respondents who make their contact through personal networks like relatives, friends and brokers. Two thirds of them or 69.1% receive news about Myanmar. Among them, 32.8% learn about situation in Myanmar through Thai television, 11.3% learn from their working fellows , 6.9% heard from cable television , 5.4% heard from radio, 4.9% learn from family and friend in Myanmar, 4.4% learn from newspaper (Burmese language) and 3.4% learn through internet (see Figure 8).

=== Figure 8 ===

For those who regularly receive news about their home country, 61% assure that they learn about development opportunity and changes in Myanmar, but there is more than one third as of 38.7% do not know about the changes.

The survey reflects that most of the respondents keep regular contact with the host country, there are many respondents who pay regular visit to their families as of 23% go back every year, 12.7% go back every 2 years, 28.9% answered that they seldom go back because they want to save the money instead of paying travelling cost.

3.4 Remittances: Amount, Transaction Channels and Usages

3.4.1 Remittances, Amount and Transaction Channels

According to Turnell et.al, informal remittances from overseas were three to four times higher than formal remittances. The International Monetary Fund (IMF, cited in Turnell et al., 2008) indicated that Myanmar received USD 81.3 million of formal remittances in 2004. The remittance figure from Myanmar migrants working overseas should reach approximately USD 240-320 million if we use the IMF estimation.

Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit survey (2009) about remittances of migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar and found that among 3 nationalities, Myanmar migrants remitted the highest amount between Baht 1,500 to 324,000 annually. The average remittance was Baht 34,000.

This survey finds that majority of respondents (73.5%) send back the remittance, only one fourth or 26.5% do not send any remittance, because their family members are living with them in Thailand.

Considering the amount of their remittance, two thirds of the respondents (66.7%) who send back remittances send more than Baht 10,000 annually, 11.3% send between Baht 5,000 to 8,000, 8% send between 8,000 to 10,000, 7.3% send Baht 3,000 to 5,000 and 6.7% send less than Baht 3,000 (see Figure 9). The statistics show a high discrepancy between the group of respondents who remit more than Baht 10,000 is larger than the group remit less than Baht 3,000. The regular amount of remittance is started from Baht 5,000 and more. In this study, the group who remit less than Baht 5,000 because they only remit to some distant relatives occasionally when pays a visit to Myanmar.

If we calculate the amount of remittances send by the 204 respondents, using the average of each level, the total amount they remit annually will be Baht 1,282,500, thus the average amount of remittance will be Baht 6,286. To apply this amount to the number of 1,186,805 registered Myanmar migrant (year 2012), the total remittance will be Baht 7,460 million or USD 248 million which may be the lowest calculation, in comparison to other studies. In Turnell, Vicary and Bradford's study of 524 Myanmar migrants (2009), the average remittance was Baht 19,000, while in Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit's study, the average amount was Baht 34,000.

We can conclude that the remittances sent by Myanmar migrants in Thailand will be between Baht 7,460 to 37,400 million (USD 248-1,248 million). The amount can be even bigger if we consider the "unregistered" or undocumented Myanmar migrants working in Thailand which is estimated to be at least double the registered number.

=== Figure 9 ===

AMC & MMN (cited in Khine, 2007: 13) states that the legal status of Myanmar migrants affect accessibility to the money transaction mechanism as well as their living and working conditions. Khine pointed out that status of migrant workers registered with one year temporary work were still recognized as illegal, since they had no proper travelling documents, thus it was not possible for them to transfer their remittance through formal transaction channel. In Khine's study, most migrant sent remittance through informal channels or brokers services. Using informal channel to remit money back home was also found as the most common channel in Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit's study. Sending remittance with relatives and friends who visit Myanmar was another channel.

In the past, migrants who sent back remittances through brokers had to risk losing their money with unreliable brokers, often not full amount were delivered. To reduce the risk, migrants have to choose reliable service providers to send their money, sometimes they had to remit through the brokers who found jobs in Thailand for them (Punpuing et al., 2006). In some cases, the brokers could benefit from the exchange rate and did not charge migrants any fees for sending money. But in many cases, the service fees were charged in addition to the exchange rate benefit, the fees were deducted from the remittance. As some brokers were migrants themselves, they usually gave discounts or gave better exchange rates to the senders who were their friends.

According to earlier study, a small number of migrants transferred remittances through the banking system, but not through international transaction which was not familiar to them and there was no service at that time. To open a bank account is possible for the registered migrant who work in manufacturing because their salary or payment usually have been paid through their bank accounts. The study of Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit found that many local banks: Bangkok Bank, Krung Thai Bank, Siam Commercial Bank, Thai farmer Bank, etc. provide services to migrants. Some migrants including those without work permits perceive that they are not eligible to open their own bank accounts without proper documents. The other reasons to choosing informal channels are convenient and time saving. The broker could come to collect remittance at the migrants' places instead of migrants to go to transfer money at the banks by themselves. The timely and convenience of mobile phone communication can be the Also, migrants could use mobile phone to assure their families phone is the fast and timely checking to assure that their money reach their families. The fees collected from sending remittance become a very good source of income. The increasing number and competition among service providers pressure them to improve reliability to gain popularity among migrants. The cost for remittance services are varied according to the amount and areas, the fees start from 5% to 10% of remitting amount, Kyat 500 to 600 for every Kyat 100,000 remitted from border area or Kyat 2,400 to 3,100 for every Kyat 100,000 remitted from Bangkok (Khine, 2007; Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit, 2009). Sometime the services are charged at destination, from providing telephone services for migrants families in Myanmar.

In this study, the migrant who send back remittances, they choose several channels to send them, 51.3% choose to send remittances through brokers because it is the most convenient method. The money will be collected at the workplace or at home. The amount will be delivered to their families, deducted by the broker fees. Most of respondents in this study cannot tell the exact amount they are charged when sending the remittance each time. Some 20.7% send remittances through their relatives or friends, 20.7% transfer the money through their bank accounts or relatives' at the border areas who will later deliver to their families and 7.3% carry back the money themselves when visiting their families.

=== Figure 10 ===

3.4.2 Remittance Usage: Main Source of Family Income

Remittances from overseas migrants are viewed as an important source of income to developing countries and are considered to be international aid. It is accepted that remittances contribute to alleviate poverty and gain positive economy impact to countries of origin. The remittance can be used for investment capital, daily consumption and social services expenses.

Many studies, Osaki, K. (2003), Punpuing et al. (2006), Khine (2007), Turnell, confirm that remittances are an important source of income to families of migrants in Myanmar. The amount can be used to pay back the debt migrants borrowed for their emigration expenses, for their families' daily consumption or education for their siblings or children and also for future investment.

In consistent to the earlier studies, this survey finds that the highest proportion of remittance (76.7%) sent to migrants' families is utilized for daily consumption, 10% is used for children education, 8% is for savings, 3.3% is used to pay debt and 2% is for healthcare.

=== Figure 11 ===

Human capital is an important factor for workers to be recruited in a job. Such capital covers both work skills and language skills. Considering work skills, migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand who presently are hired in the manufacturing, seafood processing, agricultural, service, construction, domestic work, etc. (see Table 7). Majority of the respondents or 78.4% reply that they have learnt skills from their current jobs, and some migrants have gained other skills as well from working elsewhere in Thailand. The skills that they have learnt can be classified in Table 8. Only 21.6% of the respondents reflect that they do not learn any skills.

=== Table 8 ===

From Table 8, the employment sectors that workers learn new skills the most is factory work (54 out of 75 cases), followed by seafood processing (31 out of 45 cases), seafood processing (30 out of 46 cases), humanitarian/social work (24 out of 32 cases) agriculture (15 out of 22 cases), services (8 out of 14 cases), clerk (5 out of 7 cases), construction(3 out of 4) and domestic work (3 out of 7).

To conclude, Myanmar migrants have acquired skills from working in Thailand which will increase their human capital. The major skills are factory work, seafood processing, social work which they have learnt about the process in doing their jobs, regulation and work discipline.

Half of the respondents (50.5%) answered that the experiences and skills obtained from Thailand will enable them to find jobs in Myanmar, while 43.6% think that there are no jobs in Myanmar which require similar skills (see Figure 12).

=== Figure 12 ===

Among those migrants who think that skills obtained in Thailand can definitely help them to find jobs in Myanmar, the reasons given are work experience, language skills (Thai), broader job opportunities, knowledge and techniques acquired and flexibility of employment. Those who answer "no", mention their limited knowledge and limited job opportunities in Myanmar.

Language skill is another capital which workers can accumulate while working in Thailand. More than half of the respondents (53.9%) can communicate in Thai fluently. Among those who can speak Thai, 10.8% of the respondents are fluent in speaking, reading and writing Thai which is the highest language skills. On the other hand, another 44.6% of migrants are unable to speak Thai. Those who can speak Thai will have more chance to work in various sectors in Thailand because employers prefer workers who can speak Thai.

Thai language skills can also allow some migrants to be recruited by some Thai businesses invested in Myanmar, for example, Thai FDI in energy and agro business sectors. The Dawei Deep Seaport Development Project is currently hiring Burmese workers who can speak Thai and offering them the same wage as the minimum wage in Thailand which is Baht 300 or Kyat 7,000. This wage is almost double of the wage for workers who are not able to speak Thai.

However, though they have experiences and skills that benefit them to get jobs in Myanmar. More than half of the respondents (59.3%) believe that they can find suitable jobs when going back to Myanmar but details of their answers are quite interesting. Some of them will open their own business in Myanmar with the savings they collect in Thailand, some respondent will use their savings to buy land, some will look for work with Thai company in Myanmar. For those who think they will have difficulty finding jobs in Myanmar, one reason mentioned by 36.8% who do not think they can find suitable jobs is their education background because they believe that basic requirement for job placements in Myanmar requires high level of education. Other reasons are: having no network, jobs availability are only in urban areas, and high cost of living in big cities where there are jobs opportunities, etc.

3.5 Return Plan and Needs

3.5.1 Return Plan

Survey results indicate that workers have ambivalent ideas about their return plan. Figure 13 shows that 21.1 % have no plan or have not thought about returning (10.8%). On the other hand, the rest express some interest to return but at different degrees. Those who have a concrete plan to return within this year (2012) constitute 10.3% of all respondents. The majority (54.9%) plan to return within 1-2 years (21.1%), within 2-3 years (17.6%) and longer than 3 years (16.2%).

Among the groups who plan to go back to Myanmar, many will go for a short visit. Those who plan to settle down in Myanmar are waiting to accumulate enough savings to start their own business. Almost half of the respondents who have no plan or not thought about returning have already settled down here and had all family members with them. Some are comfortable with their present work and life. Many of the respondents still doubt about changes in Myanmar and some of them are unsure about jobs opportunity there.

=== Figure 13 ===

Apart from their own plan, more than half or 55.4% of the respondents have heard of their colleagues and friends' plan to go back to Myanmar in the near future, some for vacation, some for long term settlement. The rest (44.6%) have not heard about anyone's plan to go back. In this survey, we find that in the near future, not many respondents definitely plan to repatriate back to Myanmar and settle down.

In Figure 14, more than half of the respondents (53.4%) think that they easily can find a job if they go back home. On the other hand, another 42.6% do not think so. The projection of possibility is almost half-half. When asked about the suitability of jobs in Myanmar if they return, 59.3% think that they can find suitable jobs because they have their own land and want to do farm work, they have Thai language skills or they have friends who can help them to find good job. Some mention that they do not have a job preference, therefore any job will be suitable for them. As for the rest (36.8%) who think that they will not find a suitable job give as reasons that there is unemployment in Myanmar and they are not sure what kind of job they can find there. When we compare this data about their projection of employment in Myanmar and data on their plan to return, the tendency is that not many migrants will really return. Many just have plans and prolong their stay in Thailand.

=== Figure 14 ===

=== Figure 15 ===

Among 47.5% of respondents who were farmer and still own land in Myanmar, some of them will go back to work on their land with good equipment they plan to buy with savings from their current work.

If they make decision to go back, 69.6% of the respondents prefer to work in their places of origin, only 15.2% of them will look for jobs in big cities, 12.3% can work anywhere where they can get jobs, 2% are still not sure and 0.5% think of going to Singapore or Malaysia.

To encourage workers to repatriate also needs investment to improve productivity in the agricultural sector as well as to create jobs, not only in the big cities where the cost of living is high, but also in rural areas where a lot of Myanmar migrants originated.

Not all migrants are expecting the same kind of wages they received in Thailand, but the majority are still hoping for good wages, one third of the respondents (34.3%) in this survey require the same income they are having here if they return to Myanmar, 18.6% of them require to have at least two third of the current income, while 16.2% of them can accept if they can get only half of what they are receiving and 28.9% of them only need income that is enough for them to survive (see Figure 16).

=== Figure 16 ===

It is not easy to picture what level of income they will get in Myanmar, 16.2% indicate that they want to start their own business, 27% of them will take any jobs with good pay and good working condition, 16.2% will take any jobs with good working condition though the payment is less than their current income, 15.7% will look for the same kind of jobs they are doing in Thailand, 8.8% will take any jobs with good pay though working condition is poor, and 2.9% give no answer (Figure 17).

=== Figure 17 ===

3.5.2 Reasons to Return and to Stay

Asking about conditions that motivate Myanmar migrants to return home, 36.3% of the respondents give reason to be with family as the first priority, 15.2 % prioritize jobs opportunity anywhere, 14.2% prioritize stable politic situation, 13.2% consider good jobs with good income as their priority, 9.3% concern of sufficient infrastructure, 7.8% prioritize jobs opportunity in place of origin, 3.9% prioritize clear and promising economic development that provide good jobs and good income.

=== Figure 18 ===

On the other hand, reasons that will discourage Myanmar migrant to return comprise of insufficient jobs with suitable income in Myanmar (53.5%), job opportunity (26.5%), concerns about political situation (14.2%), and lack of job with good working condition (5.9%).

=== Figure 19 ===

Consequently, these responses reflect that the majority of workers are not yet ready to return to Myanmar despite the current political and economic changes taking place in the country. But a significant minority is inclined to return. If we look at their previous employment status in Myanmar before migrating to Thailand, we can see that 60.8% of respondents were unemployed and 24% were farmers (Figure 6). With such occupation background, they will not plan to return to Myanmar without reliable information about job opportunities there. In Thailand, 71.6% of them could get their first job within less than a week. Economic opportunity and demand of jobs in Myanmar are thus the most important conditions for return.

4. Current Development in Myanmar and Implication of Migrants to Development

Political and economic reforms in Myanmar are ongoing and the world is watching how they can bring development to Myanmar. This section will discuss these political and economic changes and their impact upon the return of migrants.

4.1 Political Reform

After taking office in 2011, the new civilian-led government of Myanmar has been through a significant transition which is reflected in the reform of the legislature, the judiciary, the armed forces and political parties. In the political process, there is an increase in participation from different political forces, an attempt to end armed conflicts with ethnic minorities, the by-election in which Aung San Suu Kyi and other 40 NLD MPs were elected in April 2012 and the abolition of media censorship by the Ministry of Information. At present, legislative reforms are ongoing with many important laws like Foreign Investment, Land reform and Environment. We can also observe the respect to human rights by the authorities and the end of human rights abuses.

In terms of foreign policy, the new Myanmar government has adopted a more open, independent and non-aligned foreign policy and continues to consider China as a long-time true friend to Myanmar. On the other hand, the U.S. recently lifted trade sanctions against Myanmar and is in the process of easing financial restrictions. The emergence of a civil society is another positive sign of political openness. The Myanmar government increases its spending in the public-private partnership. With such scenario, some of the exiled political forces start to come back home with dignity (Kin Maung Nyo, 2012). Although the path to democracy is long and challenging, Myanmar has proofed that it is committed to pursue the route.

4.2 The Implication of Political Changes in Myanmar to Migrants in Thailand

Political changes in Myanmar have both direct and indirect implications for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. Myanmar migrants follow news from Myanmar as 68% of the respondents in the survey indicate that they receive news about their country and learn about changing situations through various channels (media, family and relatives, friends), 61% of them also indicate that they know about development in Myanmar. Therefore, more than haft of the sampling are interested to know about changes. Political reform gives migrants a chance to reconsider their lives economic opportunity. It is important to note that among migrant workers who come to Thailand, there are people who escaped from impoverishment as well as political conflicts as UNHCR calls the group “mixed flows” (Chantavanich, 2011). This mixed group will have an interest to know about political changes. Once the peace process policy which the MM. government is conducting with most minority groups is settled; the ending of armed conflicts and stop of fighting will allow prospects for repatriation of these political migrants too.

As for the development of Myanmar, political reforms have had obvious impacts upon economic arena of the country. Reforms of the legislature, the judiciary and an attempt to limit human rights abuses have given way to new economic opportunities. The U.S. and the EU have lifted their trade sanctions against Myanmar. This confirms that both Washington and Brussels consider the country’s process of reform to be genuine. ASEAN is also waiting to see democratic reform in MM and expecting it to be an active member in the regional community. More investments and development aids are in the process to reach Myanmar once the international community is reassured of the real democratic movement in this country. As the United Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry (UMFCCI) indicated that Myanmar is going through a process of revision of major laws such as Investment, Trade and Commerce and Environment so that the government and Myanmar people will "work together and grow together" (U Hla Maung Shwe, UMFCEI Vice President, Interview, 17 May 2012 in Yangon).

4.3 Direction of Myanmar Economic Development

Myanmar economic performance in relation to labour migration can be seen in the sectors of production, foreign direct investment (FDI) and GDP growth rate.

4.3.1 Development in the Sector of Production

If we look at economic reform within Myanmar, the abundance of *natural resources* (natural gas, timber, precious stones and hydropower) can be important platforms for national economic development, such as local consumption and exportation. Thailand has invested in the exploration and the purchase of natural gas fields in Myanmar through the Thailand Petro-Chemical and Petroleum Company (TPP). The gas pipeline from Yadana links across border through Kanchanaburi and reaches Rachaburi province in Western Thailand. In this sector, gems, particularly jade, has overtaken gas in 2010-11, making an estimated amount of USD 3.5 billion in exportation (UMFCCI, 2011). If migrant workers and asylum seekers from border areas who have been trained in gems cutting skills return to MM, They can be a good productive force to give value added to the existing precious stones trades and exportation.

In addition to natural resources, development of the *agricultural sector,* according to the Myanmar Government Development Strategy, is in progress. It will increase the production of existing cash crops like rice, maize, tapioca and bean. Palm oil is another local product with good prospects concerning consumption within Myanmar as well as for export. Thailand's Charoen Pokphand Group (CP) has its operation in contract farming for chicken and eggs in Myanmar. It also plans to expand to frozen food and convenience store business. Agricultural development and can create more employment opportunities to local and migrant workers. Agricultural work requires less skill from workers. In addition, 30.9% of respondents in the survey had farm background when they lived in MM. Development in this sector will certainly provide job opportunities to workers if they want to return to farm work. The number of migrant workers in agriculture and agro-related is as high as 242,776 persons.

In the *industrial sector*, progress can be seen in the establishment of many new Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in Thilawa (North of Yangon), Magway, Rakhine, Sagaing Dawei and other regions and states (Min and Kudo, 2012; Aung Min 2012 in this same volume). SEZs will attract more foreign direct investment into Myanmar. Many Thai businessmen in Tak province are interested in investing in the SEZ of Myanmar. This will include both horizontal and vertical economic connectivity between the two countries and lead to the employment of migrant workers in the SEZs. The construction of land links between Thailand and Myanmar, especially the Dawei-Phu Nam Ron Road link in Kanchanaburi province, which will provide transport and trade in Mainland Southeast Asia (See Map 2), will be another employment opportunity for migrant workers in Thailand. Currently, 600 Myanmar workers who can speak Thai are hired in the project. They are paid a daily wage of Kyat 7,000 (USD 10) while local workers receive Kyat 4,000 from subcontractor employers. More 2,000 workers will be needed for the deep seaport. It is expected that more workers will come back from Thailand to receive the international wage in Myanmar and to stay with family in this area.

=== Map 2 ===

The *service sector*, especially tourism and tourism-related services (hotels, restaurants, logistics and sales), will bring a change significantly economy of Myanmar. Together with the opening of the country and the end of trade sanctions, more tourists and investors will come to Myanmar. Global and regional events e.g. The SEAS Games, the World Economic Forum will be held in the country. More accommodations are needed. In the near future, more construction work for new hotels and more public transport services will be created, meaning more employment. At the earlier stage, it is expected that existing local labour force will enter the labour market in construction and transport work. Some skills training will be needed. Among migrants in the survey, many of them have learned skills and can become middle managers in the factories and act as foreman and supervisors as well as service workers in hotel and tourism business. They expect a suitable wage which does not need to be as high as in Thailand, but should be suitable and "enough to survive" If the wage is too low or fixed at a single rate for all sectors, migrant workers many not consider returning for such work. The minimum wage in Myanmar is a significant issue and a determining variable for migrant workers to return to their country of origin. Once the service sector develops more, semi skilled and skilled work like IT, sales, accountancy and managerial will be needed with higher wages. At that stage, some more workers with skills will return.

In terms of SEZ distribution, if we look at the locations of most these industrialized zones in Myanmar, we will find that they are concentrated in lower Myanmar and in "dry zone" areas. In this respect, states where ethnic people live will not attract their people economically because of low employment opportunities. The government will need to make good priorities in investment to ensure equal access to employment.

4.3.2 Foreign Direct Investment and the New Labour Market

In 2012, the Myanmar government launched a campaign to attract more FDI. It organized "the New Myanmar Investment Summit" in July 2012. Three hundred foreign companies were invited to attend the summit. Myanmar's new foreign investment law presently is under amendment. Agriculture, oil and gas, mining, electrical power and manufacturing are key economic sectors that the government wants investors to consider. Currently, power, oil and gas, mining, manufacturing and hotel and tourism are major types of foreign investment in MM in 2011 as shown in Table.9

=== Table 9 ===

=== Table 10 ===

It is apparent from Table 10 that most investment in Myanmar originates from Asian Countries, such as China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and

Malaysia. In fact, China, Thailand and Hong Kong are the largest investors at 26.6%, 26.5% and 17.5 % respectively. The UK is the only non-Asian investor listed in the Table and its share is not big (7.4%).

The investment sectors that can create the most employment opportunities will be in manufacturing and tourism/hotel industry. In this respect, migrant workers who are now employed in Thailand in the same sector constitutes up to 36.3% of all respondents in the survey. With the skills they obtain while working, they will be a good productive work force for such investment. The new investment law can allow more chances for workers to enjoy a fair wage in its protection clauses. As for hotel and tourism, migrant workers in the construction sector (as many as 135,473 persons) will be a source of extra supplies apart from local work forces. Some workers can perform at middle manager level based on skills. Workers in the services and sales can also be another entry point to contribute to the fast growing services sector in Myanmar.

Regionally, when looking at the economic reforms taking place in Myanmar this year, it is increasingly clear that the reforms will sustain while ASEAN economic integration is ongoing and the ASEAN Economic Community is scheduled within three years, these changes will be sustained while ASEAN economic integration is unfolding and will be actualized as the ASEAN Economic Community by 2016. The liberalization and deregulation of labour mobility, especially the professionals including medical doctor, dentist, nurse, engineer, architect and accountant are in progress. The Mutually Recognized Agreements (MRAs) for all professions were signed by Ministers of Trade from all ASEAN members. Myanmar has agreed to the required measures which will be achieved in 2016. Nonetheless, a Myanmar expert indicates that AEC can bring special dangers to its low income members including Myanmar. It can lead to "economic polarization" whereby the most talented people leave the country for better jobs and the promise of higher rewards in the more advanced member countries of ASEAN. Therefore, there are initiatives to strengthen the CLMV countries in order for them to play a more positive role in AEC and to increase their prospects of benefitting from AEC participation (Myint, 2011). In this respect, Thailand can contribute to Myanmar economic development by providing experienced migrant workers from Myanmar who have been trained in Thailand for many years.

4.3.3 GDP Growth

Theoretically, GDP is an indicator of labour migration. GDP growth rate in Myanmar as compared to other ASEAN countries can predict the direction of labour movement as migrant workers usually move from countries with low GDPs to countries with higher GDPs. Also, this migrant labour force tends to gravitate towards global cities through global networks (Massey et al, 1994; Sassen 2002). They also look for broader labour markets and plentiful employment opportunities. In 2006, when flows of migrant workers from MM arrived countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore; Myanmar's GDP per capita was only USD 983 which is the lowest in selected Asian Countries (see Table 11). In that same year, per capita GDP in Singapore was almost the highest (USD 47,776), followed by Malaysia USD 12,222 and Thailand USD 7,038. Other Mekong Countries (CLMV) also had low per capita GDP. Such an indicator can tell us about the direction of labour migration from Myanmar towards Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Due to the fact that Thailand shares a long land border with Myanmar, a large number of workers from Myanmar cross over to look for employment in Thailand. In 2009 GDP growth rate for selected ASEAN countries shows an increasing trend including Myanmar. However, real amount of national income is still low when compared with other neighboring countries. Therefore, limited reverse flows of migrant workers are expected due to GDP as pull factor because it remains the lowest in the region. Nonetheless, other pull factors, both economic and non-economic, may influence decision to return as 36% of respondents indicate that the condition of being with the family is the prime motivation for them to go back home. So, GDP only may not be adequate to predict labour return flows of Myanmar migrants.

=== Table 11 ===

4.4 Implication of Myanmar Migrant Worker to Myanmar Development

Given the economic reform in Myanmar which will flourish within the next five years. Key questions related to outbound labour migration to Thailand (and Malaysia and Singapore) will be whether migrant workers, both skilled and less skilled, will remain in destination countries or consider to return home. In the past, average household incomes of families were inadequate to meet daily consumption expenditures (the Household Income and Expenditure survey, 1997). Consequently, the search for higher paying jobs in Thailand became an attractive option to explore. Now that economic restructuring is in progress and labour demands for economic, social and political development in Myanmar are obvious, migrant workers will consider to return. But this will depend on two major conditions: political stability and democratic freedom on the one hand, and economic opportunities on the other. Political conditions are important because some migrants in the past have decided to stay and work in Thailand due to the lack of democratic reforms. Less skilled workers were also adversely affected by Myanmar's authoritarian regime in the form of corruption, forced labour, forced relocation and armed conflict. Both groups will have a serious consideration to return when they are assured of stability.

Economic opportunities are manifested in job availability according to migrants' occupational skills and the existence of fair wages and fair working conditions. Some realistic professionals said that "If wage in Myanmar is not too different from here [Thailand], I don't mind receiving a wage a little bit lower than what I receive now. But I expect an enabling working environment there." As for less skilled workers, daily wages in some SEZ like the Dawei Deep Seaport Project are up to Kyat 7,000 offered by Italian-Thai Development Co. (ITD) while local subcontractors only offer Kyat 4,000. The recognized range of minimum wages is thus an important factor for consideration to return. The tendency is that workers will compare wages and costs of living to find and equilibrium between income and expenditures. If an adequate standard of living can be maintained and daily household expenditures covered with the wage received then migrants will decide to return to Myanmar. Survey results reveal that 10% of workers plan to come back to Myanmar within a year and another 38% plan to come back within 1-3 years. This will depend a lot on policies of the Myanmar government to invite workers to return and to make use of their skills and experiences. Such a policy direction will encourage more workers to come back.

Among skills that migrant workers learned spontaneously while working in Thailand, construction, agriculture, services and manufacturing works are the most relevant to economic reform in Myanmar. Those in the services and sale sectors including hotels and tourism can develop work skills that will be useful if they return home. The management aspect to match workers' skills and human resources to current and future demands in Myanmar labour market will be an important task. Once more employment opportunities are created, competitive minimum wages and acceptable working conditions will be determining factors for return. In this regard, fair wages can also prevent talented local professionals from leaving the country to pursue careers abroad thereby causing a brain drain. In addition, an attempt to make income distribution among states and division more equal is important, as many migrant workers are ethnic minorities and people from poor divisions who may have limited chance to benefit from the development.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This paper presents the historical evolution of labour migration from Myanmar to Thailand which started in the 1990s and continues until the present day. Thailand has attempted to adopt a comprehensive labour management policy which can accommodate both the demand for labour necessary for economic development and concerns for labour protection. And national security as related to the massive arrivals of irregular flows across the borders on the other hand. The three measures of annual registration of migrant worker from Cambodia, Lao and Myanmar, the process of national verification (NV) by the countries of origin, and the attempt to develop a government to goverment formal labour recruitment are major policy implementation which has been partially successful. Currently, approximately 1.3 million Myanmar migrants are employed legally in Thailand. Of this number, less skilled workers from Myanmar are employed in primary employed in sectors such as agriculture, construction, fishery related, agriculture related and service-related work.

The profile of migrant workers from Myanmar in the survey of 204 cases shows that they are employed in the major sectors as stated, they came from various ethnic background and various places of origins. The majority have been working for more than 2 years, had farm work background or unemployed. They could easily find a job within a week with the assistance of relatives and friend in Thailand. Almost half of workers are paid lower (Baht 100-300) than Thai minimum wage while another one fourth receive higher wages. Most of them have fair working conditions, can make savings and send remittances. But money sent back was mainly spent for daily household expenditures. Also, more than half of all migrants never or seldom go back to Myanmar but receive regular news of their home country via Thai media and personal networks. Equally important, two-thirds have learned valuable work skills in Thailand. Worker have obtained new skills and become employees with some human capital.

Return prospect of workers are positive but not definite. Although only 65.2% replied that they plan to go back home, only 10.3% has a concrete plan to return within this year; The rest plan to return within 1-3 years (38.7%). Another 34.8% has no plan to return. This answer shows that most workers are interested to come back home but want to know more about current changes in Myanmar and the government policy about migrants. The main reason for return is job opportunities as half of them think that they can easily find jobs there. One third replies that they will go back if they have enough savings but it is not clear when savings will be enough. Another one fourth refers to family decision. What most people want are jobs with good pay and good working conditions or same jobs and same wage as in Thailand. They want to go back to place of origin, especially those with farm work background who still have their own land in Myanmar. Remittance is another important aspect of labour migration as most workers sent a significant amount of money back home. The remittance was mainly for daily consumption by their families in Myanmar. If workers return, this remittance will disappear, migrant families will need to find another source of income, especially from good wages.

Political and economic reforms in Myanmar can have an impact on migrants in various ways. Political reform as reflected in the transformation in the legislation, judiciary, armed forces and political parties will give chances to workers who follow news about Myanmar to consider to return. This is applicable to both economic migrants and political asylum seekers. In the past, poverty, under-development, political instability and human rights abuses human rights abuses were factors that drove people to leave Myanmar. Changes in such overlapping root causes will affect migrants to reconsider their migration decision. Although they will not make an immediate decision to return now, political reform already has given them some information for further consideration. In a speech given during a visit to a migrant worker community in Thailand in May 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi announced that she would bring those people (whom she considered as her sons and daughters) back home once reforms in Myanmar have been completed. The lifting of trade sanctions by the US and the EU also will have implications for the development of Myanmar and the prospect of return for migrant workers.

As for economic development, which is the focus of the paper, an analysis of economic growth, development in each economic sectors and FDI were explored. The analysis of GDP per capita and its change between 2006 and 2009 indicates that Myanmar is still the lowest GDP per capita in ASEAN and workers may continue to migrate to neighboring counties with high GDP. In this aspect, migrants will not return unless they can receive equal wages and have the same working conditions in Myanmar as in Thailand. These observations have been confirmed by the survey responses.

When analyze the details of development in each economic sectors and FDI, agriculture and agriculture related, construction, manufacturing and service sectors are the most promising areas where migrants can contribute if they return. Agricultural work is the biggest sector. Migrants who own land can return and work as farmers. Furthermore, some sort of capacity building policy, production strategy and seed money assistance during the first 3 to 5 years of farming or subcontract farming model should be introduced. The construction and service sectors will develop together as tourism and hotels are intertwined industries. Construction workers will be needed during the initial phase for the building of hotels and facilities. Yet, it seems that local workers can fill this labour market demand. Construction within the Special Economic Zones and of mega-development projects like the Dawei Deep Sea Port may need more workers in the future and Myanmar migrants may want to return if wages and working conditions are fair enough. At a later phase, semi-skilled workers will be needed and migrants who presently are employed in the services sector may be more interested to head back to Myanmar and to fill these posts. Manufacturing is another attractive sector for possible return. Since some migrant workers in this sector have obtained skills while work in

Thailand, they will be competent to perform semi skills work in Myanmar. Again, the wages and working conditions are major conditions of the decision.

To conclude, political and economic reforms in Myanmar will have an impact upon migrant workers from that country in Thailand. But they will not bring about a sudden change in cross-border migration flows to Thailand within a year. Many migrant workers are aware of the reforms and they want to be sure about the availability of economic opportunities in Myanmar, the adjustment of local wages and that working conditions are compatible to the ones they experienced in Thailand. Major sectors of the Myanmar economy that can absorb a large number of returnees include agriculture, construction, manufacturing and service workers. A comprehensive national policy to invite Myanmar migrants to come back and to contribute to the development of the Myanmar economy is essential if the government wants to benefit from the skills and experiences of these human resources.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are for consideration:

1. Due to the various occupational backgrounds of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand, which include garment and plastic factory work (36.8%), seafood processing (22.5%), agriculture (10%), and other services work (housekeeping, office clerks, baby sitters, health personnel) (up to more than 20%), more employment opportunities should be created in Myanmar with consideration to the existing work experiences and skills of these workers. Employment can include manufacturing, services sectors as well as agricultural related, so that the new economy can benefit from the obtained skills (78% acquired skills from working in Thailand). In the arena of national economic development, Myanmar will need more "middle manager" level manpower; and skilled migrant workers from Thailand can fill these posts. They can occupy the roles of supervisors and foremen in the manufacturing sector. This will include construction materials, food processing, garments, and services, especially in the hotel industry. With regards to vertical connectivity, Myanmar will need supply chain cooperation from Thailand automotive for spare parts, food processing, and souvenirs for tourists. This cooperation will require standardization to facilitate

investment. Middle management personnel among skilled returnees can accelerate economic growth and ensure standardization thereby assisting more bilateral connectivity between Myanmar and Thailand.

2. Decent work with good wages and good working conditions can attract migrant workers to return. Currently, the minimum wage in Thailand is 300 baht (USD 10) while in Myanmar wages vary according to sector and location ranging from USD 3 to USD 7. Survey respondents are keen on receiving wages in Myanmar at a lower rate than what they receive in Thailand. While 36% prefer to have the same income as in Thailand, 29% would accept wages that are enough to survive in Myanmar and 35% would agree to receive one-half or two-thirds of their current income received in Thailand if they could go back home and have the same job. Therefore a diverse range of minimum wages at USD 5-7 depending on cognition and recognition in various sectors and sub-sectors, not only one standard, should be seriously considered in the new law.

3. Thai investors who plan to invest in Myanmar should consider inviting their current Myanmar employees to continue to work with them on their FDI projects in order to comply with the country's new FDI Law. In the agricultural sector, where one finds the highest concentration of migrants, cross-border investment can benefit both Thai agro-business concerns and returnees who own land in subcontract farming. Some sort of capacity building policy and production strategy for this group are recommended. Moreover, a high level government plan to invite migrant workers to come back and to contribute to the local economy should be announced immediately.

4. Information about employment opportunities in Myanmar should be disseminated to migrant workers in Thailand. These notices should cover wages, employment requirements, and job openings. It must be mentioned that more than half of all respondents contact their families in Myanmar regularly to update themselves about the situation in and the changes unfolding across the country. However, their major source of information is Thai radio and television. Only 16% could obtain or access news from newspapers, radio or TV in Myanmar (official language of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar). As for professionals and semi-skilled workers, improved infrastructure and environment e.g. public transport, housing and stable politics will encourage more returnees. Survey results show that 21% of respondents

have university and high school education. They work as teacher, NGO worker, social worker and supervisor in manufacturing sector in Thailand. This group of migrants can be excellent entry point who can increase competitiveness in the MM economic development, especially in the service-related business if they return home.

5. A balanced economic development plan focusing on the inclusion of all ethnic groups to participate in and benefit from the reform process should be promoted. The establishment of Special Economic Zones in states where there formerly were armed conflicts should be accelerated.

6. The Ministry of Labour of Myanmar can play a vital role in recruiting returnees and placing them into the right economic sectors according to their background, skills, experiences and interests. When considering their background, 35% of migrant workers were employed in agriculture, 38% were unemployed and the rest were in services, trade, and factory work (skilled and semi-skilled). After having acquired new career experiences and skills in Thailand, almost 60% think that they can find a suitable job in Myanmar. However, they are now unsure whether there will be enough well-paying jobs for them back home. It must be said that matching workers' interest with existing employment openings is thus a challenge. Accordingly, the United Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) should be consulted intensively because it has an important role to play in the labour market. At present, the business core in Tak Chamber of Commerce (Thailand) is planning to issue certificate or letter of recognition to its migrant workers and cooperate with its counterpart in Myanmar in a "chamber to chamber" platform to maximize the benefit of migrant workers if they return.

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Table 1: Myanmar Migrant Registration from 1992 to 2007

Year	Number of registered Myanmar migrant
1992	706
1996	263,782
2001	451,335
2002	340,029
2003	247,791
2004	610,106
2005	705,293 (Re-registered 343,777)
2006	568,878
2007	489,282

Source: Vungsiriphisal (2009) adapted from Chantavanich et.al., (2007)

Table 2: Chronology of Thailand Policies toward Myanmar Migrant

Year	Activities
1992	Permission to hire migrant from Myanmar in 9 provinces
1996	Formal National registration of 3 nationalities migrant, with quota in 7 industries, 43 provinces
2001	Setting up Committee on Illegal Migrant Workers Administration
2001	Registration in all provinces, all jobs including self-employment
2003	Signing MOU between Thailand and Myanmar on labour issue
2003	Revision of registration policy to legalize migrant
2004	Registration of migrant dependents
2009-present	Formal recruitment of Myanmar migrant
2009-present	Nationality verification

Source: Chantavanich et al, (2007), Paitoonpong and Chalamwong, (2012), Department of Employment

Table 3: Myanmar Migrant Registration in Year 2010-2012

	2010	2011	2012*
Formal recruitment with 2 years work permit	4,641	8,160	33,697
Completed nationality verification(NV) holding passport and 2 years work permit	122,751	395,848	584,702
Temporary registration with 1 year work permit	812,984	905,573	567,161
General skilled worker	1,315	1,250	1,245
Total	941,691	1,310,831	1,186,805

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, December, 2011 and June, 2012*. Available online from www.doe.go.th/sites/default/files/statistic

Table 4: Myanmar Migrant in Top 10 Working Sectors

	Male	Female	Total
Construction	57241	32,642	89,883
Agriculture and husbandry	52,008	31,814	83,822
Services	29,832	22,576	52,408
Fishery related(seafood product)	25,917	26,585	52,502
Agriculture related	29,301	17,832	47,133
Garment production and sales	16,572	29,241	45,813
Domestic work	7,314	30,906	38,220
Selling food and drink	13,399	11,685	25,084
Whole sale, retail trade and vendor	15,251	9,438	24,689
Husbandry related	12,389	9,285	21,674

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour (as of May, 2012)

Table 5: Myanmar Migrant in Top 10 Provinces

Provinces	Male	Female	Total
Bangkok	50,052	51,437	101,489
Samutsakorn	40,154	33,071	73,225
Tak	12,733	22,902	35,635
Samutprakan	16,522	11,606	28,128
Ranong	12,959	10,029	22,988
Pathum Thani	13,436	9,155	22,591
Surat Thani	13,009	8,219	21,228
Songkhla	11,832	7,474	19,306
Phuket	11,335	7,900	19,235
Chon Buri	11,144	7,281	18,425

Source: Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour (as of May, 2012)

Table 6: Income of Respondents with Different Categories

	Annual temporary registered	NV with 2 years passport	Formal recruited	No work permit	Total(%)
Less than B 3,000	0	2	0	9	11 (5.4)
B 3000-5000	7	9	0	18	34 (16.7)
B 5000-8000	7	24	0	9	40 (19.6)
B 8000-10000	1	53	0	0	54 (26.5)
More than B10000	5	59	1	0	65 (31.9)
Total	20	147	1	36	204 (100)

Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Table 7: Income of Respondents in Different Working Sectors

Baht

	< 3,000	3000-5000	5000-8000	8000-10000	> 10000
Agriculture	6	9	7	-	-
Construction	-	-	2	1	-
Clerk	-	-	3	3	1
Domestic work	-	-	3	2	-
Humanitarian Org.	-	7	5	12	8
Factories(garment,plastic,etc.)	-	13	16	19	27
Seafood processing	6	1	2	15	22
Services	-	4	2	2	4
Other	-	2	-	-	-
Total	12	36	40	54	62
% in total population	5.9%	17.6%	19.6%	26.5%	30.4%

Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Table 8: Acquired Experiences/Skills from Working in Thailand by Type of Job

	Type of Job								
	Factory	Seafood processing	Humanitarian/ social work	Agriculture	Service	Clerk	Domestic work	Construction	Total (%)
Skills from current work	54	31	24	15	8	5	2	3	142 (69.6%
Skills from other work	4	2	5	2	4	-	1	-	18 (8.8%)
Not acquired skill	17	12	1	5	2	2	4	1	44 (21.6%)
Total	75	45	32	22	14	7	7	4	204 (100%)

Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Table 9: Foreign Investment by Key Sector 2011

Sector	No. of Project	% of total
Manufacturing	159	4.8
Oil and gas	104	38.6
Mining	64	7.8
Hotel and tourism	45	3.0
Power	4	40.3

Source: Adapted from UMFCCI (2011)

Table 10: Foreign Investment by Major Country 2011

Country	No. of Project	% of total
PRC	32	26.6
Thailand	61	26.5
Hongkong	38	17.5
UK	51	7.4
Singapore	74	5.0
Korea	47	8.0
Malaysia	30	2.7

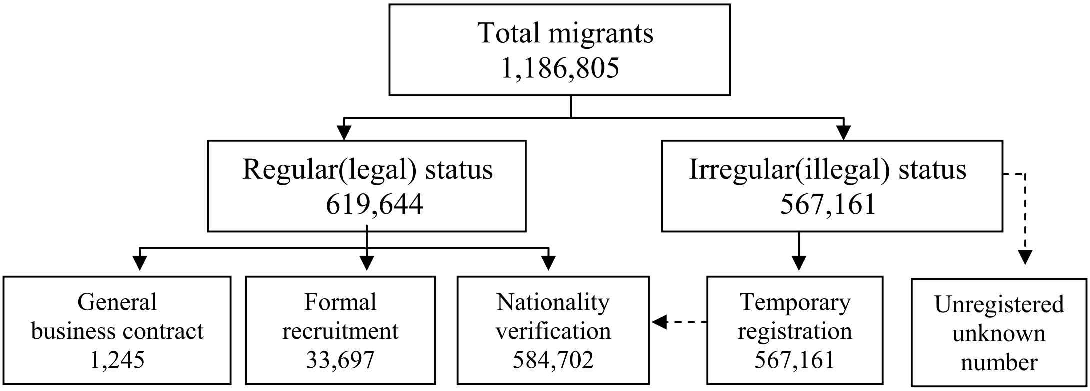
Source: Adapted from UMFCCI (2011)

Table 11: Selected ASEAN Economies Per Capita GDP 2006 & 2009

HDI Rank NO.	Economy	Per Capita GDP 2006	2009
26	Singapore	47,776	45,978
61	Malaysia	12,222	12,724
103	Thailand	7,038	7,260
128	Vietnam	2,291	2,682
138	Laos	1,761	2,048
139	Cambodia	1,583	1,739
149	Myanmar	983	1,200*

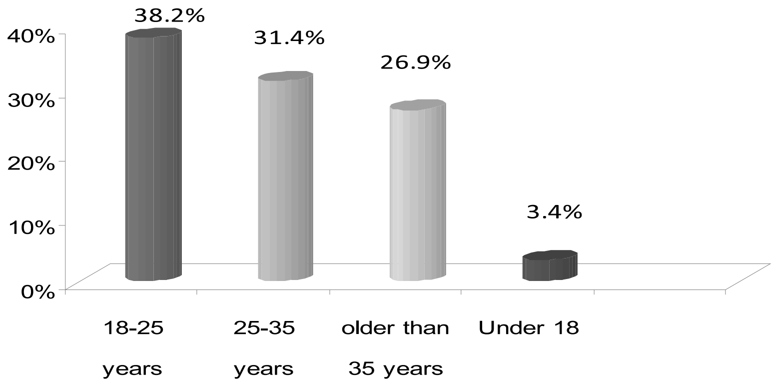
Source: International Human Development Indicators 2011
Note: *Index Mundi 2012

Figure 1: Myanmar Migrant by Categories



Source: Vungsiriphisal, adapted from statistic of Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, December 2011 and June 2012

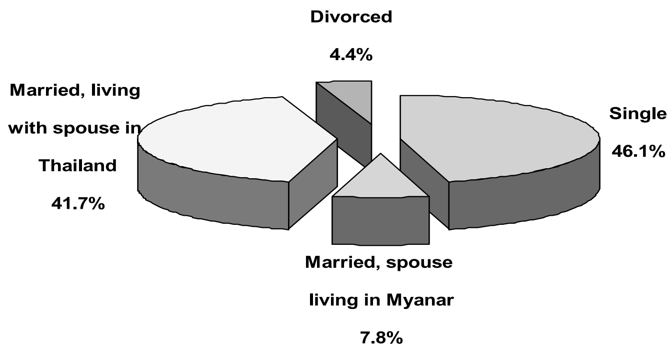
Figure 2: Age Groups of Respondent *



Source: Own Survey in 2012.

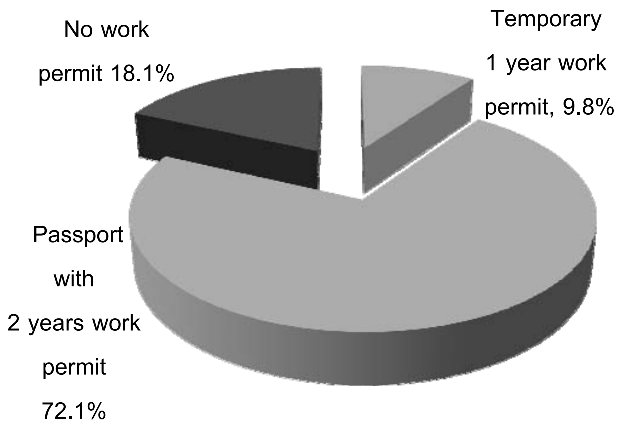
*Except from other indicated sources, all charts and tables in this article are adapted from Vungsiriphisal, Jitpong and Yothinneerana (2012). A Study on Socio-Economic Profile of Myanmar Migrants in Thailand.

Figure 3: Marital Status of The Respondents



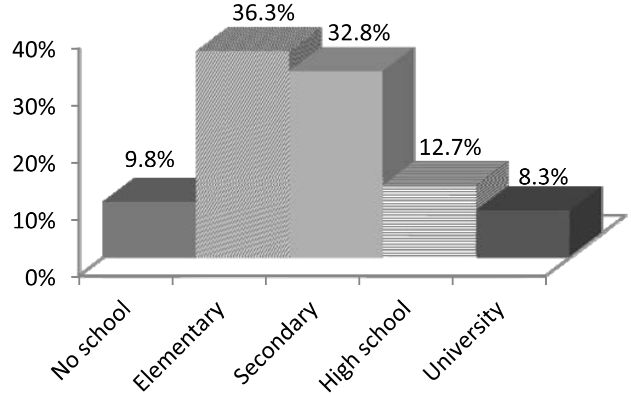
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 4: Legal Status of Respondents



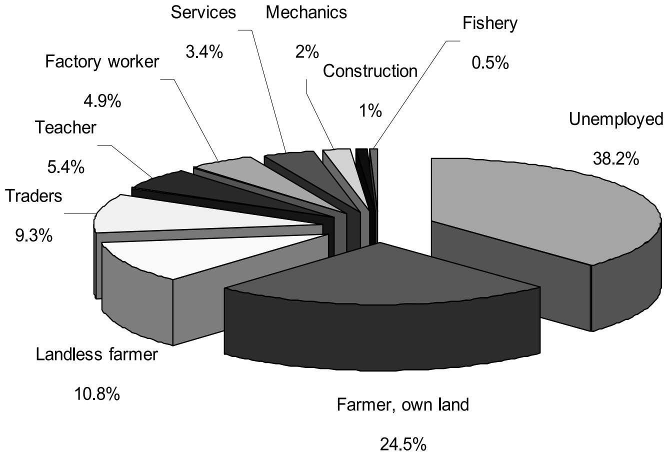
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 5: Education Background of Migrants



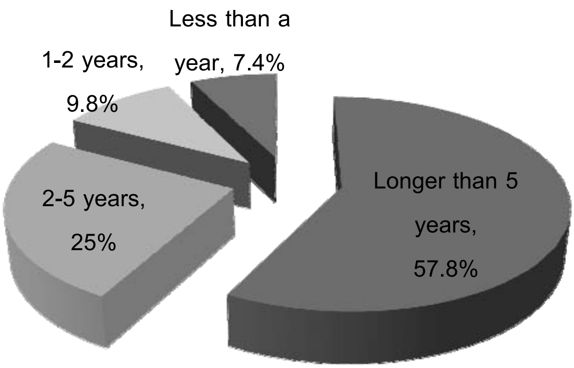
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 6: Respondents' Previous Employment in Myanmar



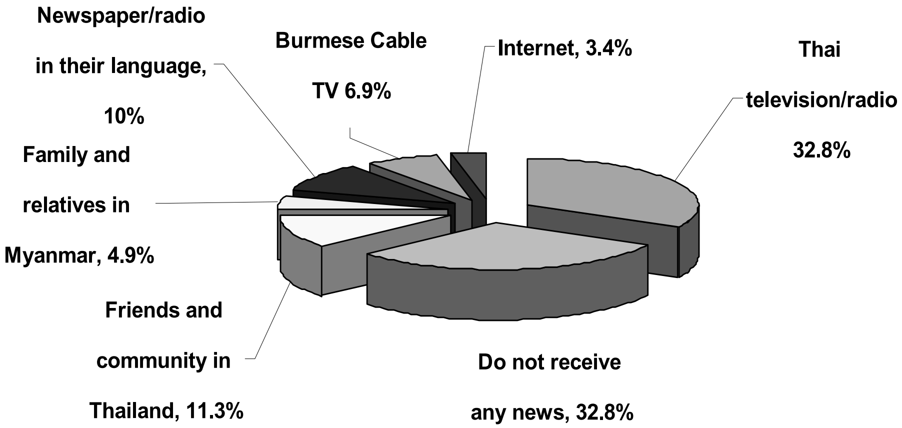
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 7: The Period of Residency in Thailand



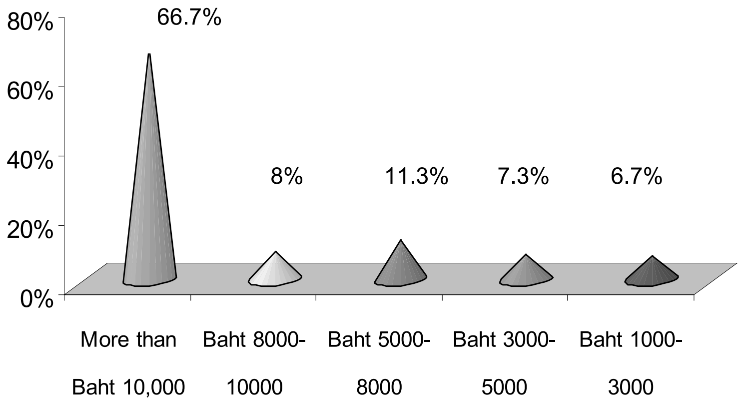
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 8: Sources of Information/News about Myanmar



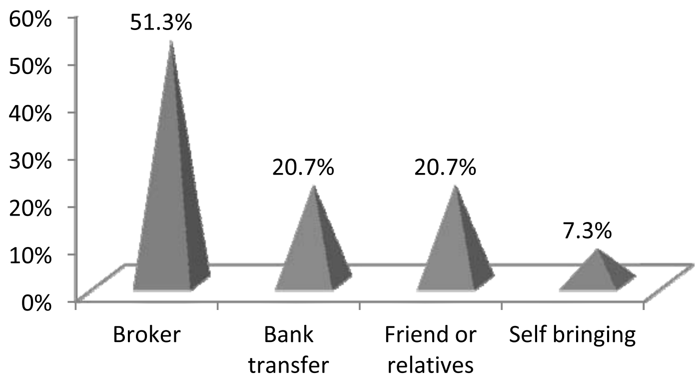
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 9: Amount of Remittances Sent Back Annually by Respondents



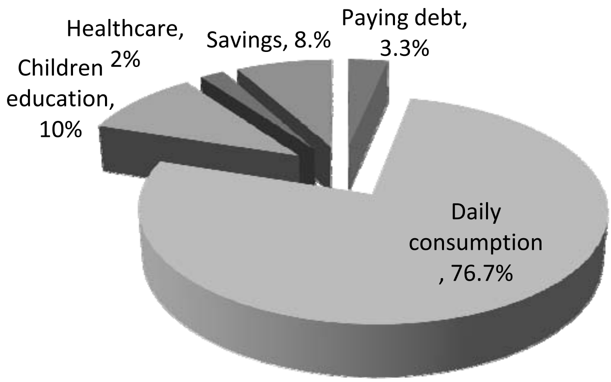
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 10: Remittance Transaction Channels



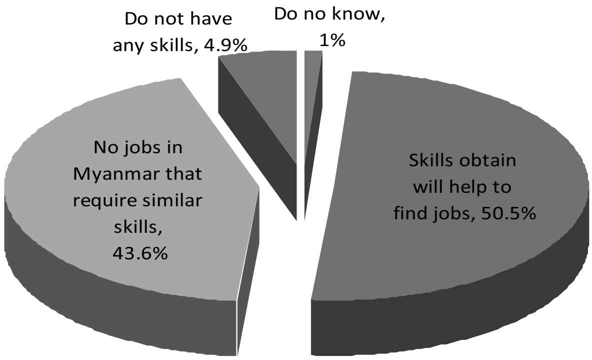
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 11: Remittances Used in Myanmar



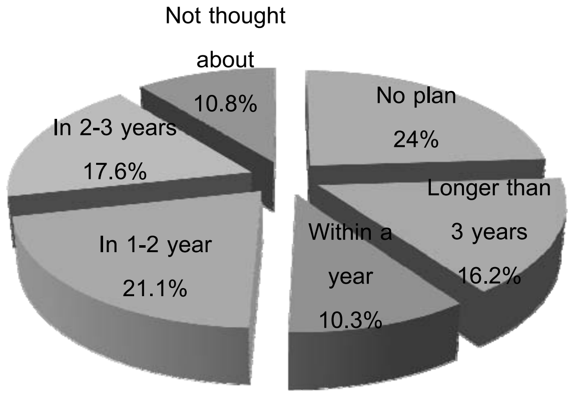
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 12: Skills Obtained in Thailand and Their Benefit



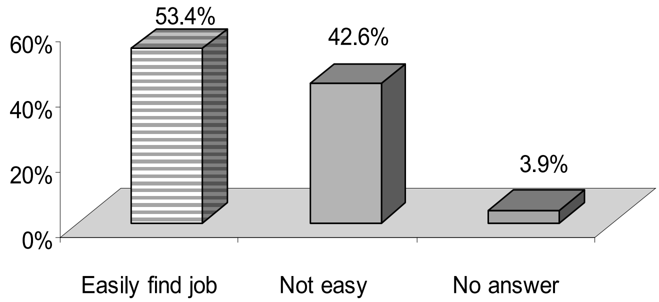
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 13: Plans of Going Back to Myanmar



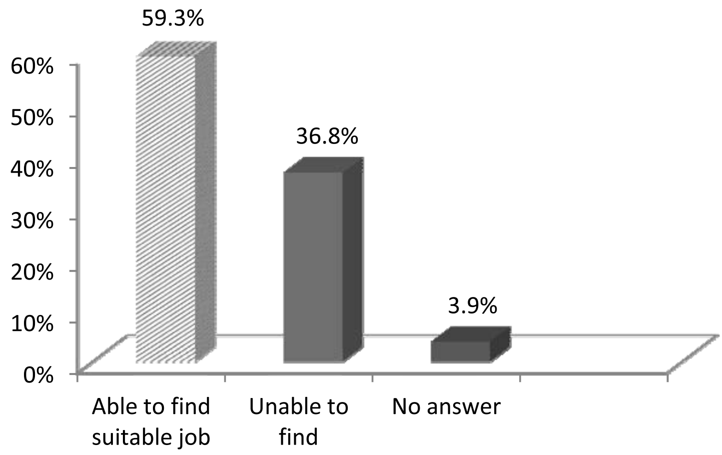
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 14: Possibility to Find Jobs in Myanmar



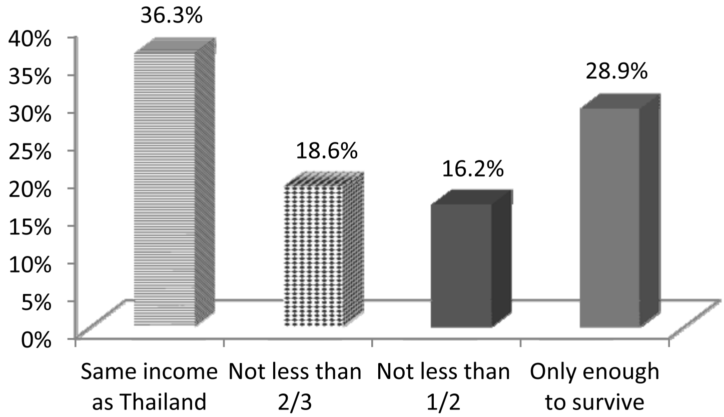
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 15: Possibility to Find Suitable Jobs in Myanmar



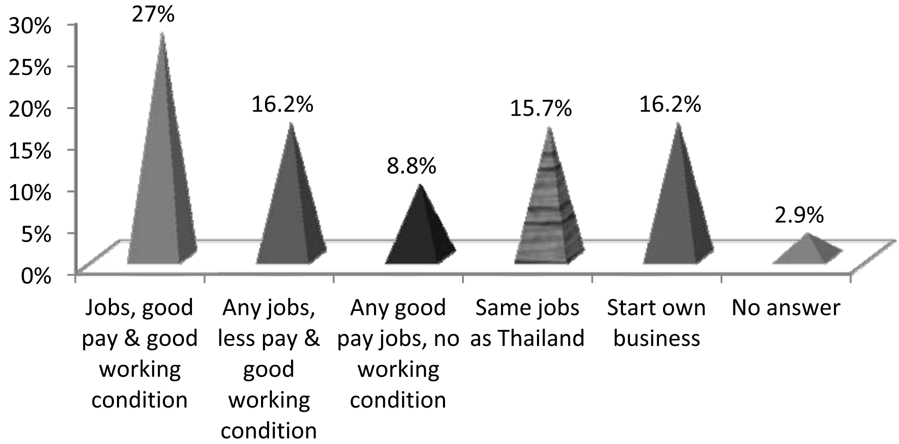
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 16: Preferable Future Income, Compared to Thailand



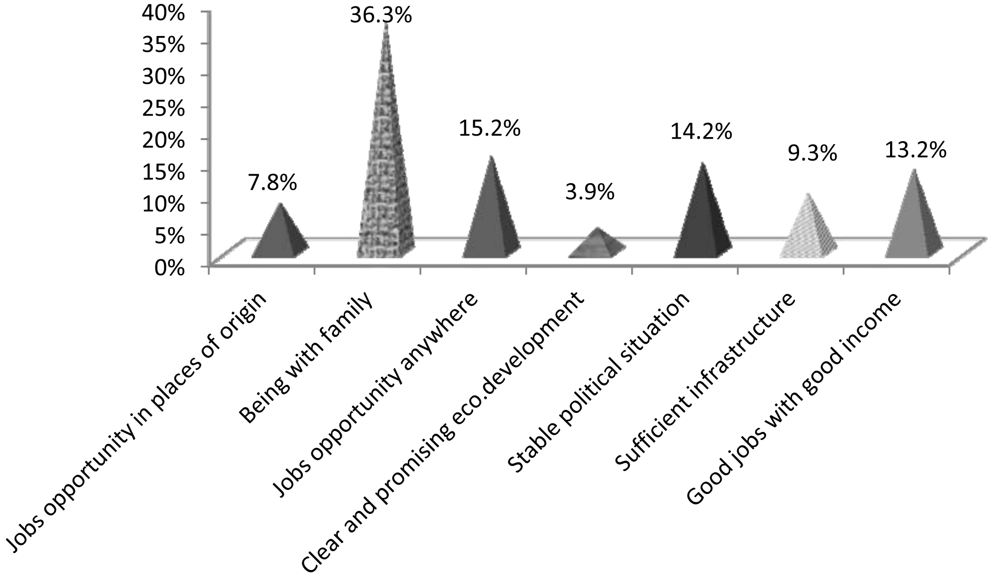
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 17: Preferable Jobs in Myanmar



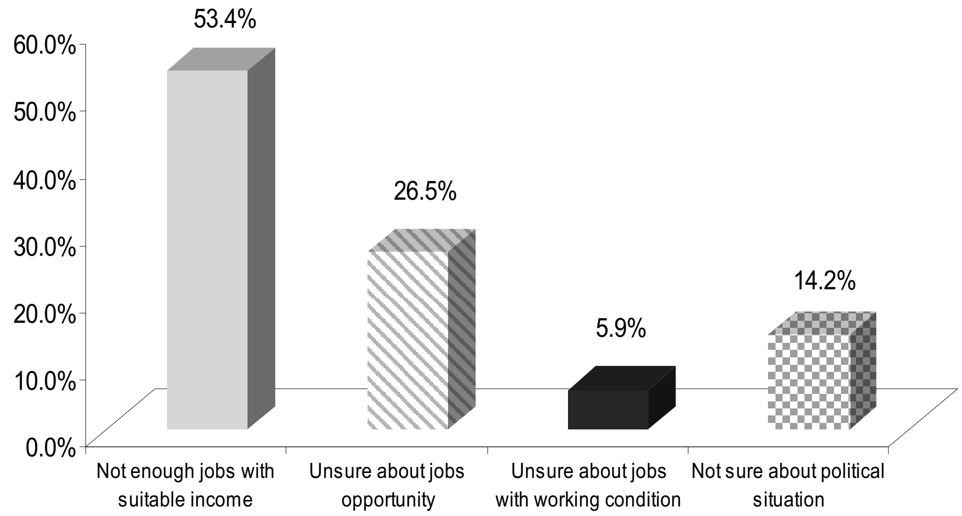
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 18: Conditions to Motivate Myanmar Migrants to Return Home



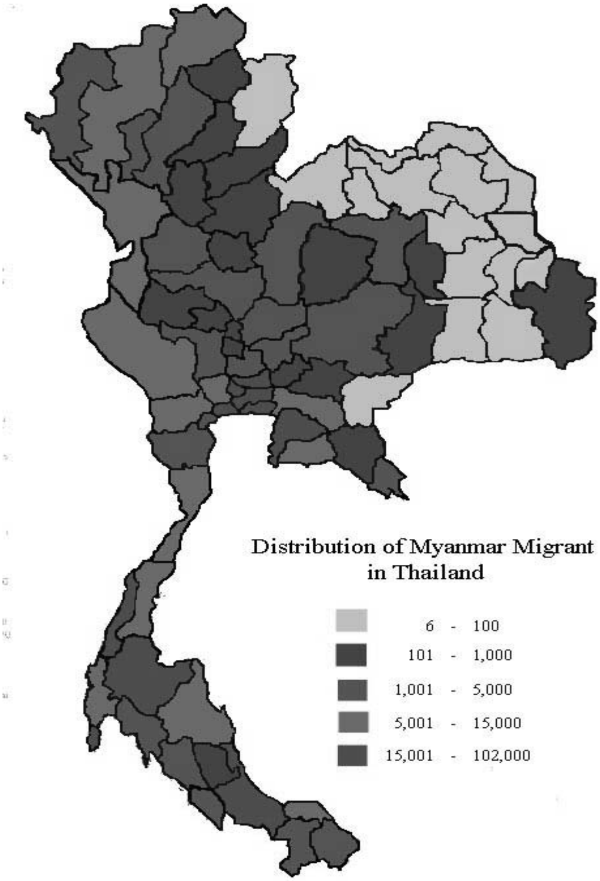
Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Figure 19: Conditions that Discourage Myanmar to Return Home



Source: Own Survey in 2012.

Map 1: Distribution of Myanmar Migrant



Source: Vungsiriphisal et al., (2012) adapted from Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, May, 2012

Map 2: South Economic Corridor

Source: Asian Development Bank (2012) ASEAN “Greater Mekong subregion” Flag Ship Initiative: East-West Economic Corridor 2002-2012.