

MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS IN RANONG AND TAK PROVINCES, THAILAND

July 2025

Background

As of December 2023, an estimated 4.1 million Myanmar nationals were living in Thailand, including 2.3 million registered migrant workers, most of whom are employed in elementary occupations (UNMN, 2024). Myanmar's protracted conflict and economic instability, following the military takeover in February 2021 has led to an influx of Myanmar migrants into Thailand. The majority of these migrants are of working age and play an important role in Thailand's socioeconomic development.

About this brief

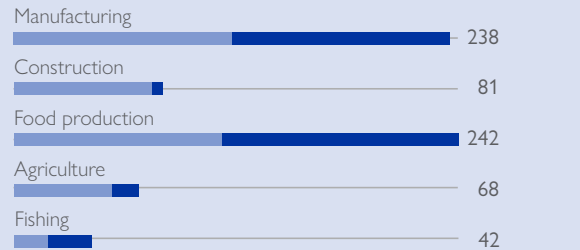
This brief presents key findings of IOM's assessment on the multi-faceted needs, challenges and risks faced by Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand's Ranong and Tak provinces, including issues related to livelihood, documentation, and working conditions. Through this brief, IOM aims to support the migrant-centered human rights due diligence efforts of the private sector, including employers in Thailand and multi-national enterprises with suppliers in Thailand. This brief supports them to enhance their insights into risks faced by Myanmar migrant workers and take action to mitigate these.

The assessment was conducted in Myanmar migrant communities in Thailand's border provinces, Ranong and Tak. Data was collected by IOM enumerators in April 2025 using a community-based approach. The information in this report should only be considered as indicative. Total figures exceeding 100 per cent reflect multiple-answer questions.

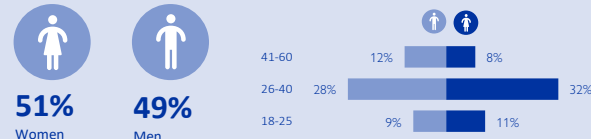


536 Myanmar migrant workers surveyed

Employment sectors of respondents

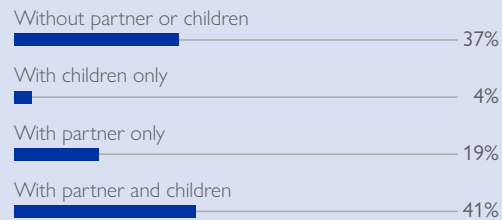


Demographics



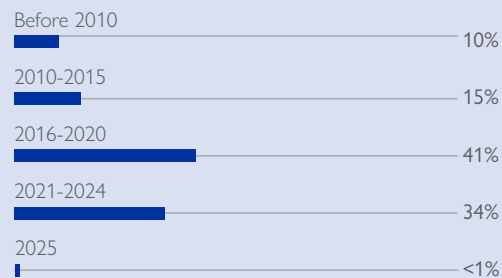
1 respondent identified as another gender

Living arrangements



Migration to Thailand

Period of arrival in Thailand

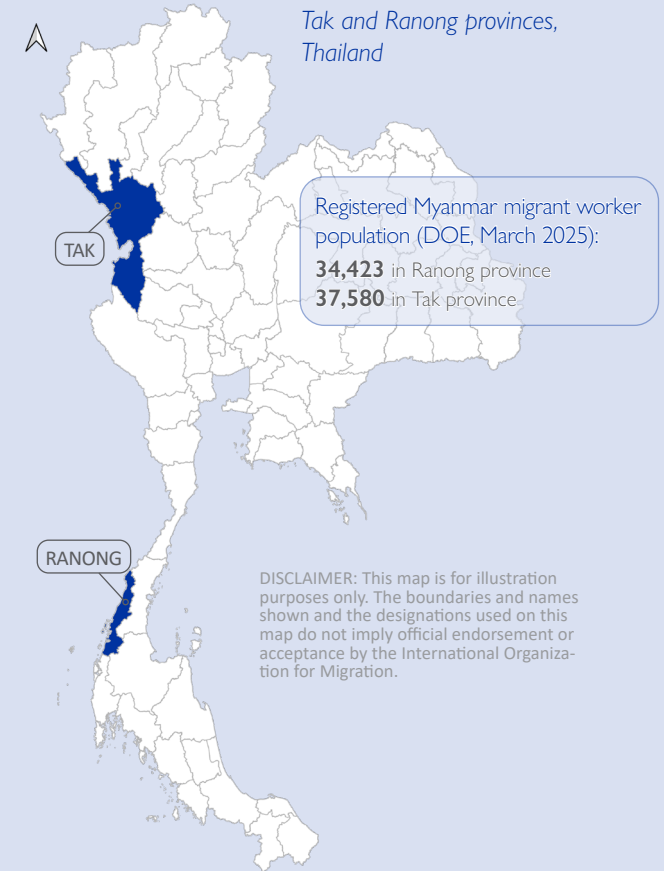
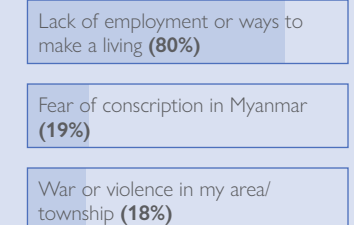


Top 3 reasons for migration to Thailand

Among all respondents



Among those who migrated after the 2021 military takeover in Myanmar



Challenges faced by Myanmar migrant workers in Ranong and Tak provinces

Top 3 challenges overall

Difficulty to get or renew documentation to live and work in Thailand (33%)

Insufficient income to cover basic needs and overwhelming debt (24%)

Difficulty to find stable employment (14%)

Top 3 challenges among men

Difficulty to get or renew documentation to live and work in Thailand (34%)

Insufficient income to cover basic needs and overwhelming debt (23%)

Difficulty to find stable employment (14%)

Top 3 challenges among women

Difficulty to get or renew documentation to live and work in Thailand (31%)

Insufficient income to cover basic needs and overwhelming debt (25%)

Difficulty to find stable employment (13%)

Challenge 1: Difficulty to get or renew documentation to live and work in Thailand

- » Limited oversight over registration and recruitment fees and related costs.
- » Complex procedures and documentation requirements.
- » Fear of approaching Myanmar authorities or returning home due to concerns over potential negative repercussions.
- » Accessibility barriers, including a lack of awareness or access to information in the language that migrant workers understand about the work permit process.
- » The complexity of the employment registration process and existing barriers have resulted in a reliance on informal intermediaries who assist both employers and migrant workers, despite operating without proper regulation.¹

Documentation status held by Myanmar migrant workers

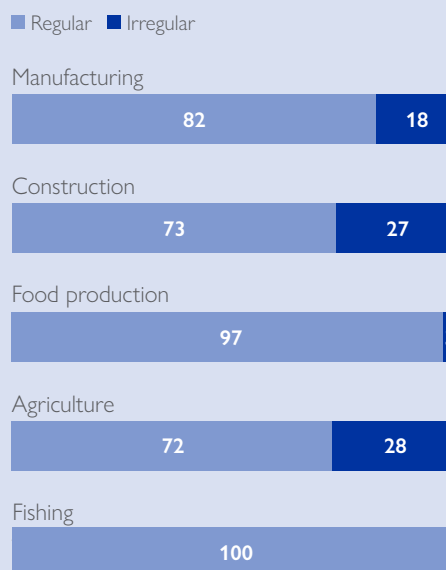
87% in regular situations²

- 3%** with Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) documentation
- 2%** with border passes

13% in irregular situations

11,000 THB (USD 328)³
Median cost for documentation

Documentation status per sector (%)



Regular migration pathways in Thailand

To be in a regular situation in Thailand, migrant workers must go through one of three official regular pathways managed by the Royal Thai Government, which facilitate the recruitment and registration of migrants workers in elementary occupations. The channels include: 1) the Memorandums of Understanding on Cooperation in the Employment of Workers (MoUs) for year-round employment; 2) the Border-Pass system for Myanmar and Cambodian workers for seasonal employment in designated border areas; and 3) ad-hoc in-country registration windows according to Cabinet Resolutions, which allow migrant workers already in Thailand, whether in regular or irregular situations, but whose documentation will soon expire, to regularize or maintain their migration status. The in-country registration channel is currently Thailand's primary migration management tool and has supported millions of migrant workers in obtaining regular status in the country. As of August 2024, over 2.4 million migrants, mostly from Myanmar, were registered under Cabinet Resolutions.⁴ Nonetheless, in-country registration for irregular migrants only takes place around once every two years, and not all can access them due to cost and lack of network.

¹ IOM, [From Policy to Practice: Lessons learned and recommendations to enhance the regularization process for migrant workers in Thailand](#), April 2025.

² Ninety-five per cent are assumed to have regularized their stay through in-country registration windows.

³ According to IOM figures, the official cost Myanmar migrant workers have to pay for regularization is up to 8,940 THB (USD 268).

⁴ IOM, [From Policy to Practice: Lessons learned and recommendations to enhance the regularization process for migrant workers in Thailand](#), April 2025.

Challenge 2: Insufficient income to cover basic needs and overwhelming debt

Wages

Migrant workers are entitled to the minimum wage payment of 347 THB (USD 10) per day in Ranong, and 352 THB (USD 10) per day in Tak, which amounts to monthly wages of 10,000 THB (USD 310), excluding overtime.

Piece-rate wage payments

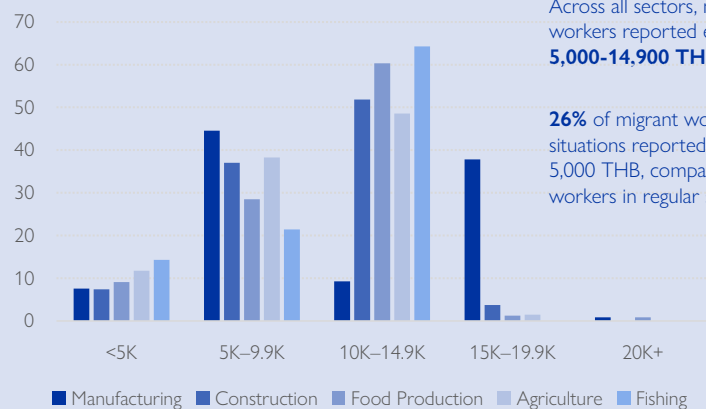
More than a third (39%) of Myanmar migrant workers are paid on a piece-rate basis (21% of women and 18% of men), meaning their income depends on the number of units or tasks completed rather than fixed hourly or daily wages. While this may incentivize productivity, it doesn't ensure minimum wage compliance. Over half (54%) who work in agriculture reported receiving piece-rate wages.



45% earn below minimum wage (mostly in manufacturing, 52% and agriculture, 50%)

56% of piece-rate workers earn below minimum wage

Wage amount (THB) by sector (%)



Across all sectors, most migrant workers reported earning between **5,000-14,900 THB (USD 137-409)**

26% of migrant workers in irregular situations reported earning below 5,000 THB, compared to **9%** of workers in regular situations

Frequency of wage payments

The frequency of wage payments varies per sector. While in most sectors, migrant workers are paid monthly, daily payments are most common in the agriculture sector, particularly among men, and weekly payments are most prevalent in the fishing and construction sectors.



46% of workers in the agriculture sector are paid daily

32% of workers in the construction sector are paid daily

40% of workers in the fishing sector are paid weekly

33% of workers in the construction sector are paid weekly

Are earned wages sufficient?

Whether the earned wages are sufficient for migrant workers and their families to satisfy their basic needs and sustain their livelihoods depends on the number of breadwinners in the household, and the family size.



62% report insufficient wages

60% of dual-breadwinner households perceive their wages as insufficient

65% of single breadwinner households perceive their wages as insufficient

Debt

Some households earn insufficient wages to sustain their livelihoods and satisfy their basic needs. This combined with the high costs for documentation causes migrant workers and their families to take on debt. In this assessment, two-thirds of respondents reported having debt, with money lenders as the most common source. Similarly, in IOM Thailand's Multi-sectoral Assessment of Needs in Tak province, the top reasons for borrowing included food, housing, and health expenses, while in Ranong province, food, housing, and migration-related costs were the main reasons.



66% have debt

30% have a debt interest rate of 10-20% per month

16,000 THB (USD 478) median debt
(equivalent to more than one month of minimum wage)

Main sources of debt:

70% money lenders

38% borrow money from family or friends

Means of debt repayment:


58% using wage from current job

23% taking another loan to cover this debt

Challenge 3: Difficulty to find stable employment

Working days

Under Thai law, workers are allowed to work six days in a row, after which they have a mandatory rest day.

-  **95%** employed full-time
- 5%** employed part-time
most prevalent in agriculture (17%) and construction (12%)
- 63%** of part-time migrant workers are in irregular situations
- 42%** of migrant workers (mostly men) in the manufacturing sector work 7 days per week

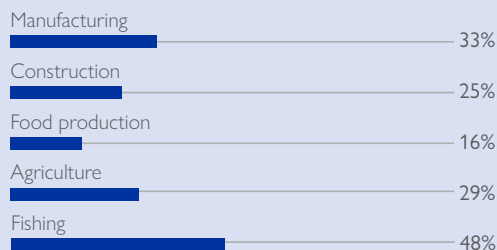
Working hours

Under Thai law, standard working hours are eight hours per day. Upon completion of eight hours, workers must have a break and can continue working overtime, against the overtime rate.

- 36%** work eight hours per day
- 60%** work more than eight hours per day
- 10%** report unpaid overtime work, including 15% among men
- 47%** of migrants working overtime in the agriculture sector report unpaid overtime work
- 18%** unaware of the legal rules regarding overtime

Overtime working hours

Proportion of respondents working more than ten hours per day (by sector)



Nearly half of migrant workers in the fishing sector reported working more than 10 hours per day



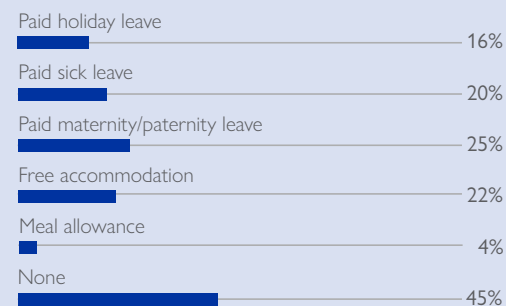
PHOTO: Mae Sot, Tak province. © IOM 2024/Elena NARANG

Social protection

Under Thailand's Labour Protection Act, all workers, including migrant workers are entitled to the same protections regarding wages and leaves. These protections should apply irrespective of status. Nonetheless, Myanmar migrant workers expressed challenges receiving employment benefits. Slight gender differences were also observed, as women reported receiving parental leave more than men (15% compared to 10%, respectively), while men received free accommodation more than women (15% compared to 7%, respectively).

Employment benefits

By type



Nearly half of migrant workers reported not receiving any benefits

More than **80%** do not have paid holiday

Social Security Fund and health insurance

Employers are obliged to enroll all workers they employ, including migrant workers in regular status, into the Social Security Fund (SSF). Whether migrant workers have health insurance (including through the Social Security Fund) varies based on whether they hold valid documentation or not. Across all sectors, migrant workers in an irregular situation are more likely to not obtain any health insurance. However, some migrant workers in regular situations reported not having access to health insurance or SSF. In addition, due to less secure contracts, part-time migrant workers are less likely (35%) to have health insurance compared to those in full-time employment (82%).

17% of migrants in regular situations do not hold health insurance, including **two-thirds** of those working in agriculture




91% of migrants in irregular situations do not hold health insurance

65% of part-time workers do not have health insurance




MIGRANT WORKER-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS TO TOP 3 CHALLENGES

Interviewed Myanmar migrant workers provided ideas to mitigate their challenges, including actions they would like to see from the government and private sector:

Top 3 Solutions to Challenge 1: Difficulty to get or renew documentation to live and work in Thailand

-  Employer support with obtaining relevant documents to live and work in Thailand
-  Make information available in migrant languages
-  Government to simplify and reduce cost of registration process

Top 3 Solutions to Challenge 2: Insufficient income to cover basic needs and overwhelming debt

-  Increase migrant workers' wages and provide more overtime opportunities
-  Provide loans at lower interest (micro-finance)
-  Ease processes for migrant workers to take out a loan

Top 3 Solutions to Challenge 3: Difficulty to find stable employment




-  Increase migrant workers' wages
-  Provide loans at lower interest (micro-finance)
-  Provide migrant workers with more overtime opportunities



PHOTO: Mae Sot, Tak province. © IOM 2024/Elena NARANG