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Labour
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Final Report

Assessment Study on the Skills of Returned Myanmar Migrants

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Assessment Study on the Skills of Returned Myanmar Migrants

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Foreword

Labour migration has been an important source of employment and livelihoods for Myanmar workers and their communities for many decades. Most migrants are working abroad in manual work and the service sector on temporary contracts and will return to Myanmar when their contracts expire. Attention has focused on the pre-migration phases of the migration cycle: setting up recruitment and deployment procedures, ensuring migrants have access to information and pre-departure orientation, and reforming the laws and policies governing migration. There has however been less focus on the return and reintegration phase of the migration cycle. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this gap has been further highlighted. Over 150,000 Myanmar migrants lost their jobs due to the pandemic and have returned to Myanmar with little prospect of re-migrating in the near future due to the closure of borders and the global economic downturn. Crucial to successful re-integration is the ability of returning migrants to find employment and livelihoods in Myanmar.

While the situation caused by the pandemic has brought this issue into focus, the importance of programmes addressing the return and reintegration of migrants has long been recognized by the ILO and is addressed in international standards, including the Migration for Employment Convention, (No. 97) and its Recommendation (No. 86), 1949; and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Regionally, the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2017) also highlights the need for policies and programmes to assist in the reintegration of returned migrants.

This paper was prepared prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, but is even more important in the light of the current situation. It focuses on one aspect of return: exploring the skills that Myanmar migrants gained while working overseas, mostly in Thailand, whether those skills are recognized in Myanmar on their return, and if the skills gained assist the migrants in finding employment back home. Where this has not been the case the paper identifies barriers and proposes pathways to greater recognition of skills and greater access to further skills training, certification and job creation.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Myanmar Survey Research (MSR) team for their excellent work in conducting the interviews with returned migrants and relevant stakeholders and preparing this paper. I would also like to thank all colleagues who reviewed the paper and provided further insights and input. Special thanks go to Nilim Baruah, Senior Labour Migration Specialist, Bangkok, Piyamal Pichaiwongse, Deputy Liaison Officer, Myanmar, as well as Anna Olsen, Rebecca Napier-Moore, and Catherine Laws. I also want to thank the officials of the Myanmar Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population who provided feedback and suggestions on the paper at the online validation meeting on 27 May 2020. This paper was developed under the ILO Developing International and Internal Labour Migration Governance (DIILM) project, which has been supported by the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) since 2016.



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Abbreviations

AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BEAM	Bridging Educational Access to Migrants
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
COD	Country of Destination
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DoL	Department of Labour
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-depth Interview
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IT	Information Technology
LEO	Labour Exchange Office
LIFT	Livelihood and Food Security Fund
LO	Labour Organization
MMK	Myanmar Kyat (currency)
MOEAF	Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation
MOLIP	Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Migrants Resource Centre
MRS	Mutual Recognition of Skills
MSR	Myanmar Survey Research
MWG	Migrant Working Group
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSSA	National Skill Standards Authority
SIYB	Start and Improve Your Business
THB	- Thai Baht
UMFCCI	Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

Background

Myanmar's rural communities have long depended on remittances from migrant workers for their livelihoods. Over four million Myanmar citizens live abroad, 70 per cent of them in Thailand. Other destinations with significant numbers include Malaysia, (15 per cent), China (4.6 per cent) and Singapore (3.9 per cent) (2014 Population Census). According to the census, 34 per cent stay overseas longer than five years. Since the start of the Covid pandemic, over 150,000 migrants have returned. But what happens when they return? Without the remittances, are the communities' basic needs no longer met? Or with the return of the migrants, with new skills and experiences, do the communities thrive? Is the return of the migrants a gain for or a drain on the country, and for the individual migrants is return painful or gainful?

There have been very few studies or statistics on the situation of returned migrant workers in Myanmar. It is hence difficult to develop informed and effective policies that can respond to their needs and which can ensure positive outcomes, a task assigned to the Supervisory Committee under the Law Relating to Overseas Employment (1999).¹

This study was conducted in November 2019 prior to the return of Myanmar workers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time, finding returned migrants to interview was a challenge. Nevertheless, the findings of the study are still relevant in the climate of Covid-19 and the urgent need to act on the recommendations is even greater. The study focuses on the skills of returning migrants, assessing to what extent the skills and experience that migrants gained in the countries of destination are recognized on their return and to what extent they are a pathway to new jobs and experiences. The study explores the existing barriers to optimizing the full utilization of these skills, providing a gendered perspective, and provides a set of recommendations to address these barriers.

The study is based on quantitative data from a survey with 150 returned migrants (76 men and 74 women) who had worked in aquaculture, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, services or sales and had returned to Myanmar within the last two years. Four Focus Group discussions (FGDs) with returned migrants were also conducted. Some 87 per cent of the respondents had returned from Thailand, 13 per cent from Malaysia, and 3 per cent from Singapore. One respondent had returned from China and one from the Republic of Korea. Respondents self-identified their ethnicity as Bamar, Indian, Kayin, Mon and Shan. All respondents could speak the Myanmar language. Respondents' age ranged from 14 to 64; seven of the interviewees – all male – were aged between 14 and 19, but most were between 20 and 34 years old. The majority of respondents had received only a basic education, while 3 per cent (4 respondents) had completed further education. In total, 59 per cent of respondents had migrated irregularly. Twelve in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, such as government officials, labour organizations (LOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and international organizations working on migration issues were also conducted to understand different perspectives on the skills of returned migrants.

¹ Section 8(j), which created the Overseas Employment Supervisory Committee. "Giving assistance for facilitating the systematic utilization within the country of the experience, knowledge, and skills gained in the respective overseas employment."

Key findings

1. Respondents received little formal training abroad and on return their skills were not always recognized in Myanmar

Most returned migrants respondents did not have any kind of formal proof of the skills gained as they have no letter of reference from their employer or training certificates. Most respondents were trained on the job informally by co-workers.

Where formal training had been available in the country of destination, most respondents could not attend due to time and money constraints or because of their irregular migration status.

When proof of training did exist, in the form of photo records, certificates, awards, reference letters or employment contracts, they were not always considered valid in Myanmar.

2. All respondents gained a range of skills overseas

Most of the respondents stated that they had learnt new skills and competences abroad. These included hard skills specific to their work sector and soft skills such as language, people management, time management, teamwork, problem solving and communication.

For work sector skills, respondents self-assessed their skills for each task before and after migration, using the following score levels: 1) no skill; 2) basic; 3) intermediate; and 4) advanced, so a respondent with a score of 1 before migration and a score of 3 after migration has an overall improvement score of 2. The most marked improvement was in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors, with an average improvement of 2.65. This is closely followed by the vehicle, window, laundry and other hand cleaning workers,² with an average improvement of 2.60; the market gardeners and crop growers had an average improvement of 2.43; garment and related trades workers had an average improvement of 2.42 and food preparation assistants 2.40. Other jobs showed greater improvement, but the number of mentions and respondents is too low to draw conclusive findings.

3. There is a mismatch between the skills gained overseas and jobs available in Myanmar

In many cases, discussed in the FGDs and interviews, the skills learned abroad could not be used in Myanmar simply because the techniques used were different.

In some cases, migrants had learnt to use equipment that was not generally available in Myanmar. Without recognition of their newly acquired skills, the returnees were forced to take jobs or positions of a lower skill level and therefore received very low wages, especially when compared with their wages overseas.

4. One-third of respondents started their own businesses because of the lack of jobs

Due to the lack of available jobs, 31 per cent of the returnees decided to start their own businesses. Prior to return, only 10 per cent had planned to do so.

² Unit Group 9129: this unit group includes cleaning workers not classified elsewhere, including those who clean surfaces, materials and objects such as carpets, walls, swimming pools and cooling towers, using specialized cleaning equipment and chemicals. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_172572.pdf

Certain skills gained overseas provided better pathways to self-employment. For example, male construction workers, in particular carpenters, were more likely to find work as self-employed labourers.

5. Gender discrimination meant women had a harder time finding work they wanted on return

Women with specialized skills struggled in sectors like construction due to traditional gender expectations of workplace participation in Myanmar. Based on a discussion in one FGD, skilled women in the construction sector found it difficult to find jobs in the sector in Myanmar because their skills were not recognized. More specifically, they were not considered as capable in a profession where certain tasks require a lot of physical strength.

Women had particular difficulties in finding paid jobs on return to their families, and were expected to do unpaid work looking after the family. They therefore had to look for paid work that was compatible with their unpaid work.

Key recommendations

Migration should be a gateway to workers increasing their skills and experience and having access to a wider choice of jobs on return. Information from respondents suggests that migrant workers are stagnating, without recognition of either their skills or education when they migrate or of their newly acquired skills and experience when they return.

In order for the skills of returning migrants to be recognized and for returning migrants to be able to secure decent work and have a choice of employment, this study concludes with the following recommendations, based on the ILO Human Resources Development Recommendation 2004 (No. 195).

To the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP)

- Recognize workplace learning, including formal and non-formal learning and work experience (ILO Human Resource Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195), paragraph 9(e)).
- Encourage countries of destination to request employers to provide reference letters for returning migrants including the type and level of skills performed in the job, regardless of their migration status. Noting the good example of the “Happy Return Programme” launched by the Korean government to facilitate business and employment prospects of migrants under the Employment Permit System wherein migrants are provided training prior to returning to their country of origin.
- Promote awareness of the services offered by Labour Exchange Offices (LEO) and Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) among potential and returned migrant workers by distributing information leaflets through township GADs and CSOs working with migrants. In addition, design a campaign to run at border gates informing returning migrants about LEOs and MRCs.
- Build the capacity of LEO staff, including those with MRCs, to provide job matching services (locally and overseas) for returned migrants. Provide training on skills recognition, National Skills Standards, and career counselling to LEO staff.

-
- Connect migrants with LEOs and MRCs through expanded use of technology, or mobile apps, to provide returned migrants with targeted information and up-to-date job notice boards and job matching services.
 - Consider making use of the ILO's *General practical guidance on promoting coherence among employment, education/training and labour migration policies*³ in order to maximize the developmental benefits of both migration and skills related policies.
 - Develop a labour market information system to collect data on skills availability and current and future needs in the local labour market in line with the National Plan of Action on Labour Migration (2018 -2022).
 - Develop integrated labour market skills needs assessments (Myanmar and destination labour markets) including assessing the ASEAN Economic Community Mutual Recognition Agreements and tailoring the development of vocational training courses to respond to current and forecast needs.
 - Promote decent work for all in the Myanmar labour market and progressively expand legal and social protection to the informal economy. Of particular importance for returning migrant workers will be domestic and care work, agriculture, fishing, and construction.⁴

To the Ministry of Education

- Measures should be adopted in collaboration with MOLIP and the social partners and using a national qualification framework, to promote the development, implementation and financing of a transparent mechanism for the assessment, certification and recognition of skills, including prior learning and previous experience, irrespective of the countries where they were acquired and whether acquired formally or informally. Special provisions should be designed to ensure recognition and certification of skills and qualifications of migrant workers (ILO Recommendation No. 195, paragraph 11).
- In collaboration with MOLIP, develop agreements with countries of destination on mutual recognition of skills certification.
- Build on initiatives such as the National Skills Standards Authority (NSSA) and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) “to facilitate lifelong learning, assist enterprises and employment agencies to match skills demand with supply, guide individuals on their choice of training and career and facilitate the recognition of prior learning and previously acquired skills, competencies and experience.”⁵

³ N. Popova and F. Panizica ILO, 2017. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_614314/lang--en/index.htm

⁴ ILO Human Resources Development Recommendation 2004 (No.195) para. 3(d): “[...] policies and programmes should be developed with the aim of creating decent jobs and opportunities for education and training, as well as validating prior learning and skills gained to assist workers and employers to move into the formal economy.”

⁵ Ibid., para. 5(e).

To financial institutions and development partners

- Provide guidance on access to credit and financial institutions to returning migrants who want to start their own businesses.
- Support the provision of credit for micro and small entrepreneurs, which could build on existing programmes by the International Finance Corporation (IFC, the financial arm of the World Bank), ILO and Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC, a development organization based in Bangladesh with offices in Myanmar).
- Improve data collection mechanisms on the skills and experience of migrant workers. This would require the establishment of a centralized data system and/or data systems in Myanmar states and regions that would help workers to find a job, provide employers with a database of skills, help the design of training and inform policies.

To all stakeholders

The last set of recommendations seeks to mitigate the gender disparity in the workforce of Myanmar.

- Considering the amount of unpaid work women perform in the home, which limits their time available to develop paid career opportunities, solutions are needed to ensure equal opportunities. These may involve public campaigns for greater recognition of the value of unpaid and paid work traditionally done by women, for greater participation of men in unpaid household work, as well as recognition of the skills needed to successfully manage a household. It could also include the extension of social assistance benefits targeting families and young children, or the development of carers' benefits for those taking time out of the paid workforce to take care of sick or elderly family members, to compensate for loss of income to the household, and to recognize the social and economic value of these hitherto unrecognized forms of work.
- Promote equal opportunities for women and men in education, skills training and lifelong learning (ILO Recommendation No. 195, 5(g)).
- Promote workplace equality for women in terms of opportunity, salary and seniority, including through legal recognition of all sectors, such as domestic work, heavily dominated by women, as well as increased inspection and penalties for discrimination in the workplace.

1. Introduction

ILO Yangon is implementing the Developing International and Internal Labour Migration Governance partnership (Feb 2016–June 2021) supported by the Livelihood and Food Security Fund (LIFT), with four key policy outcomes:

1. Key international labour migration legislation and policies are adopted in line with relevant international labour standards, the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration, and in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.
2. National and regional policies or mechanisms are adopted to promote decent work for migrants, including those working in the informal sector.
3. Policies are strengthened to protect and promote fundamental aspects of decent work for internal, international and returned migrants, including social protection coverage, increased recognition of skills, and more effective labour disputes settlement mechanisms.
4. ILO contributes to a migration knowledge platform in Myanmar.

Policy Outcome 3 focuses on three aspects of decent work, including skills, and aims to ensure that national legislation provides increased recognition and certification of the skills gained through migration for internal, international and returned migrants.

The small number of studies on the characteristics of returned Myanmar migrant workers who have been working in manual labour or the service industry in other countries, makes it difficult to develop informed and effective policies that recognize, build on and utilize these skills. Without an evidence base for policy, and in view of the limited availability of relevant skilled jobs, the reintegration and livelihoods of returned migrants can suffer.

Migrants who have gained skills working overseas may have little choice but to take jobs below their skill level and pay grade, or to re-migrate. It may also be the case that some migrant workers are deskilled in the migration process and have to accept jobs below their qualifications on return because they have missed years of work experience commensurate with their skills. Knowledge of these trends and patterns are important for policy decisions on labour migration governance, the expansion of skills development courses, and increasing the range of skills accredited under the National Occupational Competency Standards.

With those points in mind, the objective of this study is to improve understanding of the skills of returned migrants gained from their experience working overseas, and the extent to which these are recognized on their return. The study examines the experiences of men and women regarding skill recognition, identifying when it happens and the differences they encounter.

2. Background

Migration has become a livelihood strategy for many Myanmar people, for the migrants themselves, as well as the families who receive remittances at home. Over four million Myanmar citizens live abroad, 70 per cent of them in Thailand. Other destinations with significant numbers include Malaysia, (15 per cent), China (4.6 per cent) and Singapore (3.9 per cent) (2014 Population Census). According to the census, 34 per cent stay overseas longer than five years. Official remittance flows increased to

US\$2.8 billion in 2019, making up 4.3 per cent of GDP. ⁶ The Ministry of Labour Immigration and Population (Molip) estimates unofficial remittance flows to be significantly higher, up to \$8 billion, or 13 per cent of GDP. ⁷

Skills are part of a package of developmental benefits that accompany well governed migration. Migration increases the size of the labour pool and the availability of a range of skills, leading to better jobs matching and higher productivity.⁸ Conversely skills shortages constrain economic growth. To enable workers to meet labour market demands, and businesses to meet consumer demands a dynamic process is needed involving responsive changes to national skills and educational systems to meet changing technological and societal needs.⁹

Most Myanmar international migrants work abroad in low-skilled jobs, and the overwhelming majority have migrated through irregular channels, ending up in informal jobs, at greater risk of exploitation across the migration cycle and with lower chances of finding decent work. With limited skills, migrants can struggle to fill labour market gaps, or to move upwards out of the least skilled positions. While in the absence of skills recognition infrastructures, some migrants take jobs below their skill level, leading to brain waste and eventually deskilling. This personal waste of potential has a compounded effect of driving down business productivity and dampening economic growth.

Migrant workers face a number of challenges in accessing education, skills and training throughout the migration cycle, including geographical distance of training sites, timing of classes which may clash with work or family duties, prohibitive cost of training, language barriers, gender or ethnic discrimination, or concerns about exposure of migration status. Facilitating access to training, as well as promoting recognition or acknowledgement are both necessary tools.

The Covid-19 pandemic has starkly highlighted the need to invest further into education training and skills in Myanmar, which has the lowest spending on education among ASEAN counterparts at under 1 per cent of GDP. ¹⁰ Over 150,000 Myanmar migrants have returned home as a result of the pandemic and face an uncertain future. Myanmar's growth forecast was downgraded from 6.4 per cent to 0.5 per cent in the 2019/2020 financial year¹¹ with all sectors of the economy hit. Without skills recognition, returning migrants face additional hurdles in an already contracted labour market, putting them and their families at higher risk of falling into poverty. The importance of skills was noted by the Myanmar Government in its 2020 response to the Voluntary Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular

⁶ World Bank, 2020

⁷ R. Akee, D. Kapur. (2017). Myanmar remittances. International Growth Centre (IGC). Available at: <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Akee-and-Kapur-2017-Final-report.pdf> [25 Nov 2020]

⁸ ILO. (2018). Skills for migration and employment. Policy brief (Geneva). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_651238.pdf [25 Nov 2020]

⁹ ILO. (2018). Skills for migration and employment. Policy brief (Geneva). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_651238.pdf [25 Nov 2020]

¹⁰ ILO and ADB: ASEAN Community 2015: Managing integration for better jobs and shared prosperity (Bangkok, 2014). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_300672/lang--en/index.htm [25 Nov 2020]

¹¹ World Bank. (2020). Myanmar Economic Monitor: Myanmar in the Time of Covid-19 (June 2020). Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar/publication/myanmar-economic-monitor-june-2020-myanmar-in-the-time-of-covid-19> [25 Nov 2020]

Migration (GCM) review, where it noted that investment in skills development and mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies was one of its top priorities in implementing the GCM.¹²

The ILO has been at the forefront of efforts to promote better policy coherence in the area of skills and migration. In 2017, the ILO published *General practical guidance on promoting coherence among employment, education/training and labour migration policies* in order to promote the positive contribution of migration to development. The paper notes the vertical layers of coherence, from international, to regional, national and local, as well as horizontal coherence between policy areas. It also raises the issue of coherence throughout the policy cycle from design, to implementation and evaluation to enable policy impacts to match their designed intention.

At the international level, the GCM was signed by 164 nations in 2018. Objective 18 includes aims to invest in skills development including by promoting vocational training, partnerships and productive employment creation, in line with labour market needs. The ILO Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195) promotes access to education, training and lifelong learning for migrant workers, including in the informal economy. The ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (2006) also promotes the recognition and accreditation of migrant workers skills and qualifications. The report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work proposed an increased investment in people's capabilities as part of a human-centred agenda for the future of work. The Commission called for a universal entitlement to lifelong learning as well as increased investments in education and training institutions, policies and strategies.

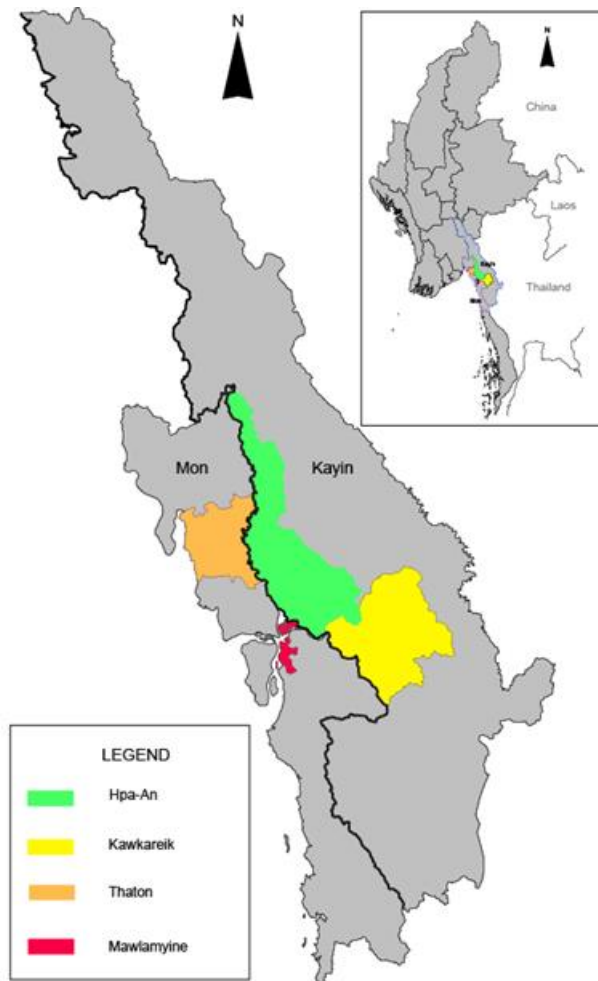
In the Asia Pacific Region, the ILO has worked with Member States on skills standards systems, ultimately developing Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) which lead to an Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) agreement on four levels of competency. In 2007, an Economic Community Blueprint was adopted by ASEAN Member States to promote the free flow of trade in services and movement of professional people, however this excludes the majority of low-skilled migrant workers. Progress in coordinating on skills recognition has been slow. To promote the formal recognition of newly acquired skills of returned migrant workers, the ILO Regional Skills and Employability Programme in Asia and the Pacific (SKILLS AP programme), a partnership initiative with the Korean Government, developed guidelines for recognizing the skills of returning migrant workers. The guidelines can be used in conjunction with the RMCS which describe the skills of workers and outline a set of actions to enable workers to map their own skills while abroad and receive formal recognition on return to their country of origin.

3. Methodological approach

The quantitative survey was conducted by a team of researchers from the Myanmar Survey Research (MSR) from 14 to 22 November 2019 with 150 returned workers in the states of Kayin and Mon which, according to the 2014 Population Census, have the highest outward migration of all states and regions in Myanmar. In order to provide quantitative and qualitative data, the survey comprised a quantitative survey, Focus Group discussions (FGDs), and in-depth interviews (IDI).

¹² UN ESCAP and UN Network on Migration. (2020). *Voluntary GCM Review: Survey conducted to inform the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, Bangkok, (18-20 November 2020). Available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Myanmar_Voluntary%20GCM%20Survey%20Report.pdf

Map: Sample areas



3.1 Quantitative survey of returned workers

A total of 150 respondents were interviewed face to face. The respondents were categorized into five different working sectors according to their experience while working abroad: aquaculture; agriculture; construction; manufacturing; and service and sales. The initial aim was to collect an equal sample size for each sector and gender, but in practice the numbers varied according to the availability of returned workers in the sampled areas.

3.2 Focus Group discussions (FGD)

A total of four FGDs were conducted between 23 and 28 November 2019 with people from all sectors. The FGDs were conducted with returned workers from the following sectors:

- aquaculture and agriculture;
- manufacturing;
- construction;
- services and sales.

The type of FGD conducted in each township was based on the number of returned migrants interviewed for each sector in each township. Up to six respondents, previously identified and interviewed as part of the quantitative survey, were invited to participate in each FGD. The duration of the FGDs varied from 64 to 107 minutes.

3.3 In-depth interviews (IDI)

A total of 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted as part of the survey with the organizations listed below between 22 November 2019 and 23 January 2020.

The IDIs were conducted in Kayin, Mon, Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon. The interviews in Nay Pyi Taw were conducted because it is the administrative capital of the country; Yangon is a secondary hub for government offices and organizations. With the ILO technical team guidance, interviews with government personnel were scheduled through the relevant ministries. Non-government interviews were scheduled independently by ILO and MSR.

The following organizations participated in in-depth interviews:

- Department of Labour, Migration Division (Nay Pyi Taw)
- National Employment and Skills Development Division (Nay Pyi Taw)
- Department of Border Affairs (Nay Pyi Taw)
- Labour Exchange Office Township (Hpa-an)
- Migration Resources Centre, Department of Labour (Mawlamyine)
- Mon Youth Educator Organization/ Mon Women Organization (Mawlamyine)
- Local Resource Centre (Hpa-an)
- Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI)
- Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF) (for Thailand)
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Migrant Working Group (MWG) in Thailand
- BEAM (Bridging Educational Access to Migrants) Education Foundation in Thailand.

3.4 Sampling procedure

The survey was conducted in the four districts with the highest level of outward migration according to the 2014 census: Hpa-an and Kawkaik in Kayin State, and Mawlamyine and Thaton in Mon State. The survey data collection was conducted in the urban centres of the townships because there are more job opportunities and more industries operating in urban centres and the expectation was that returned migrants were more likely to be found there. Returning migrants who met the following criteria were eligible for the survey:

- they had worked abroad for more than one year
- they had worked in one of the five selected sectors
- they had returned in the last two years

-
- they had migrated through regular and/or irregular channels.

Participants in the qualitative survey (FGDs) were selected based on the sector in which they worked, and their availability and willingness to participate.

4. Limitations of the study

As the survey took place in Myanmar, it did not include views of migrants who had decided to remain abroad. It also took place in only two key locations within Myanmar and therefore does not include the views of migrants returning to other parts of the country. The study was conducted before the return of over 150,000 migrants due to the Covid-19 pandemic at a time when migrants returned to Myanmar in small numbers.

During fieldwork, finding respondents eligible for the survey was difficult. As mentioned before, only returned migrants who had worked at least one year abroad and returned to Myanmar in the last two years were eligible for the survey. These requirements were difficult to meet, as many migrants had returned more than two years ago. This forced the teams to expand the areas of recruitment to include additional wards/village tracts within the townships selected, in an attempt to reach the target.

Although the initial target was to have equal sample sizes across all five sectors, this was not possible. The number of respondents achieved for agriculture, aquaculture and construction was very low. In Kawkareik and Mawlamyine, there were no respondents in the aquaculture sector. Through regular contact with the field teams and adjustment of targets, MSR ensured that each sector was represented in the survey, though the number of respondents in aquaculture was relatively low. The sampling approach called for the same number of women and men. While this was achieved in the overall sample, the proportion of male and female respondents varied according to the sector concerned, which may reflect the gender breakdown of those sectors.

The main issue encountered in the qualitative study was the re-engagement of the survey respondents for the FGDs, particularly of women. Respondents declined to participate as they were busy with work or they were not interested in discussing the topic, despite answering positively when asked about their willingness to take part in a qualitative discussion after the quantitative survey was completed. Other respondents were away from their homes at the time the FGDs were to be completed. For the FGD with service workers, two additional respondents who had not taken part in the quantitative survey were screened, making a total of eight participants. For the FGDs with aquaculture, agriculture and construction workers, the number of respondents required for the FGD was reduced to five.

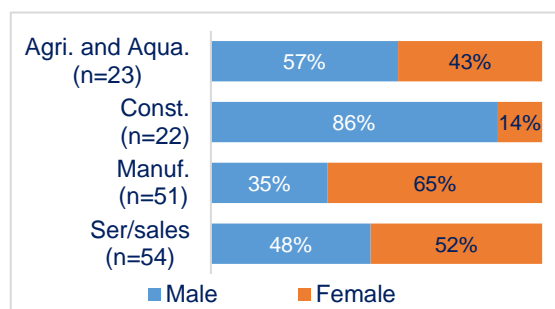
5. Analysis and findings

5.1 Respondent profile

This section examines key demographic characteristics of respondents and their relation to other variables. Gender was the most relevant independent variable, as it was correlated to respondents' work sector, reasons for returning to Myanmar, and employment on return (sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). Migrants' main sector of work while abroad was another important variable, and in order to allow for comparisons, migrants' job categories were grouped into agriculture (for the purpose of the analysis, aquaculture is included in this group), construction, manufacturing, and services and sales. In cases

where respondents held different jobs, the sector selected was based on the main job the migrant had performed while abroad. Any statistically significant difference between genders or sectors have been included in the report. Only overall proportions are given where there were no significant statistical differences between male and female respondents or sectors. Please note that all figures in the report have been rounded, and totals hence may not exactly equal 100 per cent.

Chart 1: Migrants' work sector and gender



The sample had nearly equal numbers of men and women, 76 and 74 respectively, as the recruitment aimed for even distribution to allow for gender analysis. Distribution of gender within the targeted sectors was rather uneven, with more men working in construction or agriculture and aquaculture, and more women in manufacturing or services and sales as their main working sector while abroad (Chart 1).

In total, 68 per cent of respondents were married (80 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men), and 25 per cent single (15 per cent female and 34 per cent male). The remaining 8 per cent were widowed (2 per cent), divorced (5 per cent), or separated (1 per cent). There was no correlation between marital status and the work sector, and it is unknown whether migrants chose to migrate with their spouse or alone.

The main ethnic groups to which interviewees belonged were Bamar (43 per cent), Kayin (20 per cent), Indian (17 per cent), Mon (11 per cent) and Shan (7 per cent). Ethnicity had no correlation with the type of work performed in the country of destination (COD), job skill level, or pay.

All respondents were able to speak, write and read the Myanmar language, regardless of their ethnic background. A total of 89 per cent of all respondents said Myanmar was their first language. Thai is spoken by 85 per cent of respondents, nearly all of whom learned it while working abroad (in this study Thailand was the main country of destination (COD), accounting for 87 per cent of interviewees). However, only 15 per cent of respondents could read Thai, and only 10 per cent could write it.

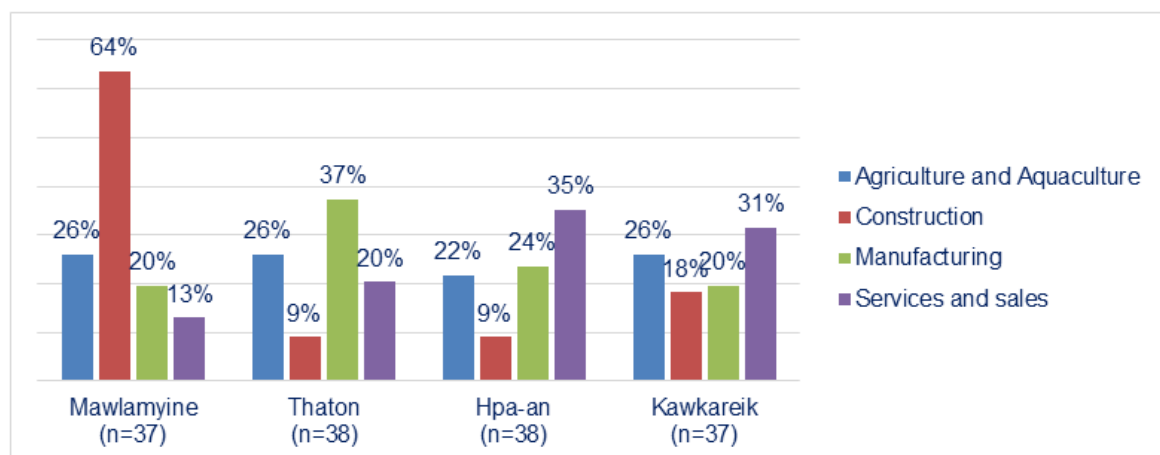
In terms of age, 38 per cent of the respondents were 20 to 29 years old at the time of the interview, the largest age segment in this study. A breakdown of ages by gender is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' age at time of interview

Female	Age group	Male
0%	14 - 19 years	5%
14%	20 - 24 years	14%
19%	25 - 29 years	29%
30%	30 - 34 years	9%
15%	35 - 39 years	22%
12%	40 - 44 years	11%
4%	45 - 49 years	4%
4%	50 - 54 years	4%
3%	55 - 59 years	0%
0%	60 - 64 years	1%

The largest group of those working in construction came from Mawlamyine (Mon State). There appears to be a relationship between township and migrating to work in construction. The correlations between townships and the other sectors were not so pronounced or were zero (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Township of origin and main employment sector abroad



In terms of countries of destination, nearly all, however, migrated to Thailand only. In total, 87 per cent migrated to Thailand, followed by Malaysia (13 per cent), and Singapore (3 per cent). One respondent went to China and one to the Republic of Korea. Five respondents went to work in more than one country, one of whom migrated to three different CODs for work.

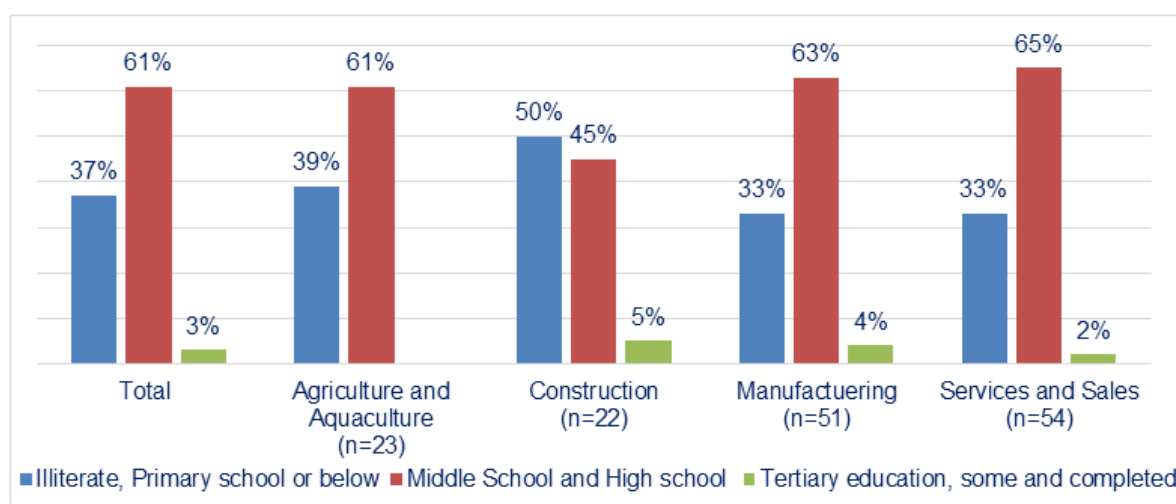
Respondents spent a considerable amount of time abroad, with 71 per cent spending more than six years away (73 per cent of women and 69 per cent of men); over 13 per cent were away for more than 16 years (Table 2). For the purpose of this survey migrants who were abroad for less than one year were excluded from the sample.

Table 2: Time spent working abroad

Years	Total (n=150)	Female (n=74)	Male (n=76)
1 – 6	29%	27%	32%
6 – 11	36%	45%	28%
11 – 16	22%	19%	25%
16 – 21	9%	7%	11%
21 – 26	3%	1%	4%
26 – 31	1%	1%	1%

A weak correlation was found between years in education and the main sector that respondents worked in. People with fewer years of schooling were more likely to work in agriculture or construction, and those with more years of schooling more likely to work in manufacturing or sales and services. Workers in construction were significantly less likely to have secondary or higher education (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Migrants' education level and work sector



Less than 3 per cent of respondents had completed college or university education (Table 3). However, during FGDs, participants noted that education was not important to find a job in Thailand. While respondents said that migrants with a degree could get better jobs, the reality for the educated migrants in our study is that they took jobs below their competency level.

In Thailand, they don't need education standard and they just need workers who can work very hard.

– Female participant from manufacturing FGD

Table 3: Education level of interviewees

Education level	Total (n=150)	Male (n=76)	Female (n=74)
Illiterate	1%	3%	0%
Literate but no formal/ school education	2%	4%	0%
Grade I – IV	33%	32%	35%
Grade V – VIII	42%	41%	43%
Grade IX and above	21%	21%	22%

The gap between qualifications gained in Myanmar and jobs done abroad is illustrated by a male FGD participant who had trained as a head waiter but worked as a cleaner in a hotel in Thailand because he could not speak Thai.

It would be convenient if we knew what kind of job we were going to do there [in the COD] in advance. If not, we do not know what kind of training to take.

– Male participant from services and sales FGD

In the FGDs there were several migrants who had started working as cleaners and after some time were promoted to waiters, supervisors or managers. The route, however, is not easy.

One respondent commented, for example, that they had only a few minutes for lunch. Those working in factories had their salaries reduced if they were late or did not meet production targets.

In our quilt factory ... we also had a fingerprint system [used to clock in and out]. They gave only three minutes to rest and we ate our lunch within three minutes and had to start work again.

– Male participant from manufacturing FGD

The hardships of life in the COD are illustrated by the comments of a female migrant worker who participated in the manufacturing FGD. She first worked in a factory earning 8,500 baht per month. She then moved jobs and started working in a market. Her shift started at 2 pm and finished at least 12 hours later, at 2 am or 3 am. She did not have any time to rest during those hours and earned 500 Thai baht (THB) per day (USD 16.50), with a 500 THB bonus every 10 days.

5.2 Working history of the respondents before migration

In the next sections *informal training* refers to on-the-job learning without structured orientation or accredited certification. This might have been acquired independently or with help from colleagues, supervisors, managers or employers. *Formal training* refers to structured orientation which could have taken place at work or elsewhere.

Working history prior to migration

Participants shared information on their work history before migration. Overall, women were more likely to have worked in services and sales and men in agriculture, craft and elementary jobs prior to migration. Most roles in all sectors involved elementary jobs or services and sales, and only a very small number of respondents had worked as managers or professionals.

Respondents mentioned 66 types of job that they had held prior to migrating abroad. Based on the ILO's International Standard Classification of Occupations, most were at skill level 1, defined as any occupation with simple and routine manual tasks, may require physical strength and/or endurance, and completion of primary education or basic education may be required, or some on-the-job training. These jobs included farming, cooking, delivery, sewing, making salads, porters, and making candles. Only 12 per cent of the jobs mentioned would be classified as level 2: teaching English, electrical devices repair, cashier, brokering, and clerks.

The basic nature (level 1) of work done by respondents before migrating is highlighted by the fact that 84 per cent of jobs required no qualifications. Men were more likely to have jobs that did not require qualifications (89 per cent) than women (78 per cent). To some extent, this reflects the sector in which they worked, as only 12 per cent of jobs in agriculture required training, compared to 20 per cent in manufacturing. The most common skills and experience required were communication with customers (5 per cent), paddy plants transplanting (4 per cent), and ability to use a sewing machine (3 per cent).

There were some gender differences related to the type of contracts women and men had prior to migration, with more men appearing to have longer, more stable contracts. Overall, 51 per cent of women and 44 per cent of men were paid daily, while 24 per cent of women and 33 per cent of men were paid monthly. The remaining were paid weekly (2 per cent of women and 8 per cent of men), on a project basis (8 per cent of women and 7 per cent of men), or at regular intervals of between 2 and 15 days (6 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men).

Regarding employment type, 55 per cent were employed full time on an ongoing basis, 15 per cent on a casual basis (14 per cent casual labouring and 1 per cent project-based), and 20 per cent had their own

business (6 per cent with employees and 14 per cent with none). The remaining 19 per cent were engaged as unpaid family workers.

Vocational training and training courses in Myanmar

A total of 12 per cent had attended a vocational training school or received formal training before migrating (14 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men). The breakdown in formal training by sector shows some wide variation, with 18 per cent of those in construction having received formal training prior to migration, and 15 per cent of those in services and sales, while only 12 per cent of those in manufacturing and none of the respondents who worked in agriculture or aquaculture had received any training or attended a course before migrating. Among those who received some training prior to migration, 83 per cent completed one training course in Myanmar. Training courses were practical, the most common being sewing (33 per cent), making furniture (11 per cent), computers (11 per cent), and English language (11 per cent). All were basic courses lasting from one to three months. According to most respondents, the courses completed were relevant to the jobs they held in Myanmar prior to going abroad. Others took courses not immediately relevant to their current work at the time, as they worked on the family farm. The research, however, did not clarify who provided the training.

Of the respondents who attended a training or vocational school before migrating, only 27 per cent received any certification, potentially limiting their ability to find jobs that require the skills learned. Certificates were provided by training schools as well as regional, national or international institutions, though the research did not collect the specific institutional names. In many cases, however, admission to these schools is limited to those with some formal education. According to the UMFCCI,¹³ only those who have completed at least middle-school level or who have experience working in the sector concerned are accepted to attend their courses. UMFCCI training is recognized by local employers and other countries, as UMFCCI has recognition with Chambers of Commerce in other countries.

Only 28 per cent of those who attended a course found it useful while working abroad, regardless of certification. The training courses the respondents found useful in the destination country were English language (mentioned by three respondents), sewing (mentioned by two respondents) computers, business management and nursing (mentioned by one respondent each). The remaining respondents said the courses they had completed in Myanmar were not relevant to the work they performed abroad. The findings indicate that the problem is not the quality of training, but the fact that they did not match the type of work migrants found in the COD.

None of the respondents had attended other certified training available in Myanmar, which includes a 3-week course on modern motor sewing provided by the Department of Labour (DoL), Ministry of Labour Immigration and Population (MOLIP) and the Myanmar Garment Federation, which is certified by the National Skills Standards Authority (NSSA). Graduates from this course can get jobs in the garment industry. The Ministry of Tourism provides hotel service training together with partner hotels. Outstanding graduates of this course are supported to attend NSSA Level One training and upon completion are awarded the ASEAN standard certificate. In 2014, ASEAN Economic Ministers endorsed the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework (AQRF) to complement Mutual Skills

¹³ Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Recognition Arrangements by providing guidelines for comparing qualifications between Member States, with voluntary referencing.¹⁴

We attend many meetings to discuss the certification and qualification processes [of migrant workers] with the ministries. My concern is the lack of information and knowledge among workers. It would be useful if the information is shared to the workers by organizations.

– Deputy Director, Department of National Employment and Skill Development

The Education and Training Department under the Ministry of Border Affairs operates three types of training schools; first, schools for the development of young people from ethnic nationalities in border areas (45 schools); secondly, technical schools for the same group (9 schools); and third, vocational training schools of domestic science for women (45 schools). The first two types of schools are open to both men and women, while the latter is for women only. According to the interviewee, however, only three women have completed the mechanics course offered in Mechanical Schools operated by the Education and Training Department of the Ministry of Border Affairs.

Another initiative by the Ministry of Border Affairs is to support recognition by the NSSA of foreign training certificates held by returning migrant workers. The NSSA was formed in 2007, and bases its work on the ASEAN Qualification Framework to regulate, lead and establish competency standards and conduct assessments for workforce development in Myanmar. According to the Deputy Director General of the Education and Training Department, workers can get better jobs and salaries with a certificate issued by the NSSA. The survey, however, showed that only 11 per cent of the respondents knew about the NSSA and that none had contacted them. According to a representative of the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation (MOEAF), the NSSA only issues certificates to a few sectors and does not have certified courses for sectors in which migrants often work, such as domestic work. In addition, in an in-depth interview the Director of BEAM, a non-governmental school for Myanmar migrants in Thailand, explained that it is not realistic to expect workers in Kayin or Mon to travel and spend three days in Yangon to take the NSSA test and obtain a certificate. Currently the system is administered nationally from Yangon and it is not possible to obtain certificates from regional centres.

Migrants are from remote areas like Ngayote Kaung in Ayeyarwady. Also, in Kayin state, the migrants come from rural areas. There is no way that they can go and get the certificates in the office on the Kabar Aye Pagoda Road in Yangon.

– Director, BEAM Education Foundation, Thailand

The Director also explained that even if migrants have specialized training, they cannot apply these skills abroad because the jobs available to migrants are mostly entry-level low-skill positions.

Pre-departure training for migrants

According to interviews with representatives of Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) and Labour Exchange Offices (LEOs) in Myanmar, before departing, workers can receive training on how to calculate their salary and information about the sector in which they plan to work. For example, construction workers can receive training on building foundations, digging soil and other aspects of building structures. Pre-departure information for migrants is provided through the 15 MRCs supported by the ILO and IOM in LEOs around the country, and in over 10 Migrant Centres run by CSOs and

¹⁴ Yue, C., R. Shreshtha, F. Kimura, and D. Ha (2019), ‘Skills Mobility and Development in ASEAN’, in Intal, P. and M. Pangestu, Integrated and Connected Seamless ASEAN Economic Community, Jakarta, ERIA, pp. 77-95, available at https://www.eria.org/uploads/media/9.AV2040_VOL4_Skills_Mobility.pdf

LOs. According to the Deputy Director of the Migration Division under MOLIP, the department provides free pre-departure orientation in Mandalay and Yangon. The training is provided twice a week and each course takes three days. The pre-departure orientation focuses on “dos and don’ts” as a migrant worker, video clips about the types of work, the wage migrants might expect to receive based on MOLIP’s calculations, and how to transfer money using banks. The training also includes a presentation by the Anti-Human-Trafficking Police Force. The pre-departure courses in Yangon are usually attended by large numbers of people preparing to migrate. The environment is challenging for learning, with between 300 and 600 migrant workers attending each training course in a building with inadequate ventilation. The setting is impersonal and those attending may struggle to concentrate.¹⁵ Had the migrants going to Thailand been included in the training, the total number attending would have been too large for the course to be effective. The only interaction interviewed migrants had had prior to departure to Thailand was with the administrative body that issues their documents for travel and work abroad. According to the MOEAF representative, “Migrants going to Thailand are kept downstairs [the training room is upstairs] where they are issued with documents for travel and work and provided little information.” Space constraints mean only migrants going to destination countries other than Thailand, who are far fewer in number, can fit into the available space for pre-departure orientation. This helps to explain why none of the respondents of the survey attended the training courses, and only interacted with the government organization to receive their documentation. The research findings indicate that migrants were not aware of the services provided by the Migrant Resource Centres either prior to migration or after their return to Myanmar.

5.3 Skills and experience developed abroad

If you have zero knowledge, you must start from basic level, and then become an expert. I learnt from a senior who is an expert, I asked questions if I did not know... and practised. I had to invest a lot of time.

– Male participant from construction FGD

This section discusses the experience of migrants abroad, with a focus on the jobs in which migrants learnt the most, the improvements made, and the training received.

Skills acquisition in country of destination

[after migrating] ... I can fix phones and can use Gmail, Facebook and add Myanmar font to phones. Before I went to Malaysia, I could not speak English but after coming back, I can speak a little but not much.

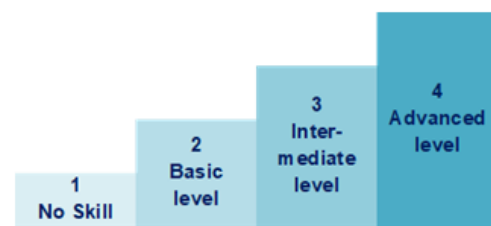
– Male participant from manufacturing FGD

Respondents were asked to list the three jobs they learned the most while working abroad. Given the high number of respondents who worked in the manufacturing sector, manufacturing labour is often mentioned as one of the top three. Others mentioned service workers; mining and construction work; domestic, hotel and office cleaners and helpers; agricultural, forestry and fishery labourers; and food preparation assistants.

¹⁵ Interview with ILO.

For each job mentioned by respondents, they were asked to list the tasks completed in that job and self-assess their skill level before and after migrating. Respondents choose between four steps: 1) no skill; 2) basic skill; 3) intermediate; and 4) advanced. The difference between the step before and after migration is counted as the level of improvement for that task. For example, if a respondent has a basic skill level in bricklaying before migration, and intermediate skill in the same task after, that respondent has improved by one step in that task. As tasks performed within jobs can vary between respondents, the average across all tasks mentioned within a job category has been calculated to assess the improvement in migrants' skills.

Chart 4: Self-classified skill levels



In this study no correlation was observed between the country of destination and opportunity to learn at work, with migrants reporting good learning experiences in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Overall, 82 per cent of jobs where respondents learnt the most did not require qualifications for recruitment, highlighting the fact that many migrants enter low-skilled jobs and are able to learn a wide range of skills. Respondents tended to stay longer in jobs where they learnt more about the tasks directly related to their job as well as other skills, including the language in the destination country. With experience, it is possible to move to better paid jobs, in the same or different sectors.

Examination of the development of task-based skills learned shows very high levels of learning. It is important to note that most respondents had no knowledge of the tasks before they started working and more than half on average developed to an advanced level. In total, respondents mentioned 415 tasks learned in the top three jobs they learnt the most abroad. These were directly related to the sector in which they worked, such as welding, growing rice, paving roads, ploughing and seeding. Several were related to cleaning, such as sweeping floors, cleaning toilets, washing clothes, and cleaning shops. Most respondents had not completed any relevant vocational training before migrating, so they had to rely on instructions from senior workers and on their ability to learn on the job. Findings also indicate that friends and relatives who invited respondents also gave them informal training and helped them to understand local culture and work practices.

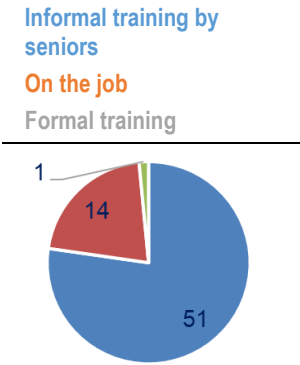
The Director of the BEAM Education Foundation agrees with the finding that informal training is most common among migrants. With limited ability to attend formal training, migrants must learn on the job and rely on work colleagues. According to BEAM, once migrants have more senior jobs, they are more likely to attend training courses, yet the proportion promoted to higher levels of responsibility, as seen in our survey, is very low.

A representative of the Migrants Resource Centre (MRC) said in an interview for this study that the MRC connects migrant workers with CSOs and NGOs (mainly with the Mon Women Federation and Swiss Contact) to receive skills development training. The MRC has a list of companies in different sectors in CODs where migrant workers can apply for work. Respondents of this survey, however, did not benefit from MRC help due to a lack of awareness of the support provided.

There were clear gender differences according to the tasks performed and the skills acquired or enhanced. Cleaning, done by 16 respondents (13 women and 3 men), bricklaying, done by 14 respondents (11 men and 3 women), preparation of food for cooking (10 women and 2 men) and ironing clothes (12 women). Other significant differences were found in tasks related to washing clothes, done only by women (seven in total) and babysitting (four women in total). While most respondents in construction were men, three out of four respondents who mentioned carrying bricks were women. In addition, men have more opportunities to reach senior roles, with four out of five respondents who worked supervising labourers being men.

Table 4 lists migrants' experience of on-the-job learning in various jobs. It notes the number of times migrants ranked a job type in their top three learning experiences, how long they spent on average in that type of job, and how much they considered their skills to have improved. For example, it can be seen that agriculture, forestry and fishery labour jobs were mentioned 15 times by 14 respondents (one respondent mentioned the job type twice in their top three). These respondents reported the largest improvement in skill level, with an average skill increase of 2.65 points. This is closely followed by vehicle, window, laundry, and other hand cleaning workers, with an average improvement of 2.60; market gardeners and crop growers with 2.43 average improvement; garment and related trades workers (2.42 average improvement); and food preparation assistants (2.40 average improvement). Other jobs have a higher improvement, but the number of mentions and respondents is too low to draw conclusive findings. For the full list of the jobs in which they learnt the most while abroad mentioned by respondents, see Annex.

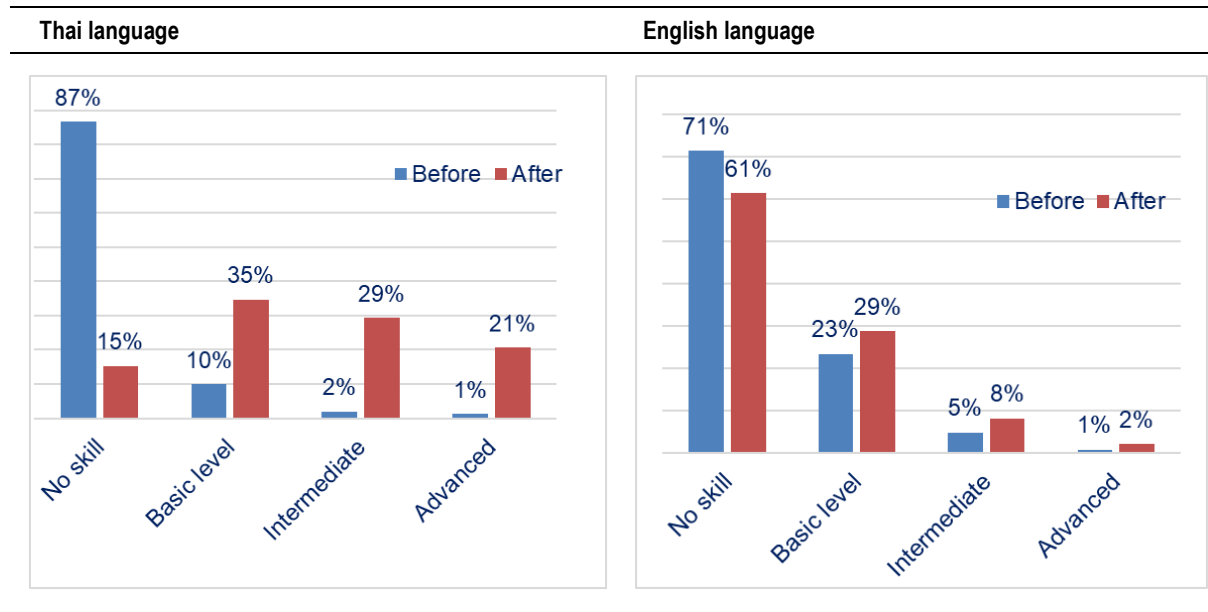
Table 4: Jobs with top three learning experiences

Job category	Mentions	Average time in job	Average job improvement	Training	Number of respondents
Manufacturing workers	66	3 years and 5 months	2.09	 <p>Informal training by seniors On the job Formal training</p>	44
Street and related services workers	26	4 years	1.98		22
Mining and construction workers	25	4 years and 11 months	1.78		24

The acquisition of non-task-based skills such as language, soft skills, and cross-sector skills, is another important experience for migrants living abroad. The most common of these was learning the Thai language. Chart 5 below compares self-assessed levels of English and Thai before and after migration, showing that nearly all migrants learnt at least the basics of Thai, and over one-fifth became advanced speakers, with no significant gender differences. Similar to other skills, respondents had no formal

training, and they learnt Thai or English by using the language in their living and working experience or practising with more proficient speakers.

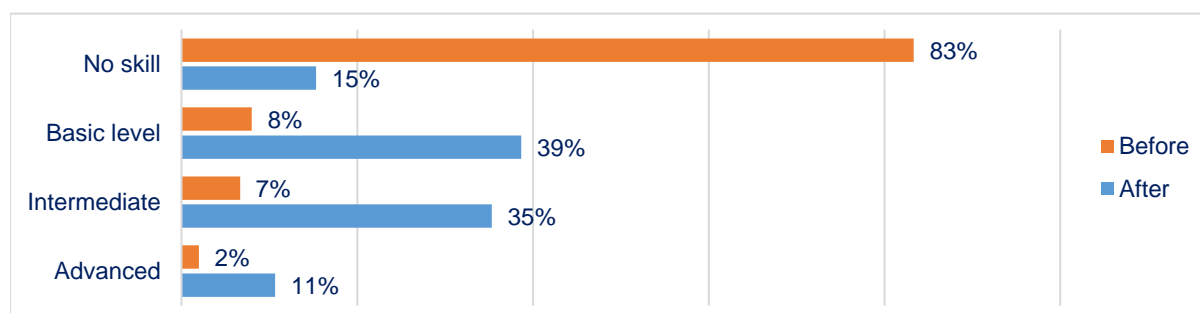
Chart 5: Language levels before and after migrating (n=150)



IT skills were also commonly acquired¹⁶ (Chart 6), but less than 2 per cent of respondents with IT skills have a certificate. It is of interest that IT was learnt by workers from all sectors except agriculture. The highest advances in learning were found in manufacturing, as only 10 per cent of those in the sector had some skills before migrating, but 82 per cent achieved at least a basic skill level after migration. In construction, IT skills went from 27 to 82 per cent; basic skills, and services and sales rose from 22 to 89 per cent. The gender difference was not statistically significant, although a slightly higher proportion of women self-assessed as having no skill before or after migration. In total, 86 per cent of women and 80 per cent of men self-assessed as having no IT skills before migration. The number dropped to 18 per cent and 13 per cent respectively after migration.

¹⁶ When respondents were asked about their IT skills, the questionnaire defined IT in a broad sense, referring to “IT skills (such as using computer, phone, internet, email, etc.)”

Chart 6: IT skills before and after migrating (n=150)



In a few cases migrant workers gained skills through formal training, but in most cases they were acquired through practical experience. The improvement in all seven key skills was considerable, particularly in view of the proportion of respondents saying they had no skills in these areas before migration (Table 5). There was also an important increase in the number of migrants saying they started with intermediate skills and moved to advanced levels, indicating that respondents did not simply learn new skills, but developed them considerably. A total of 67 per cent of respondents said that they had no self-confidence skills prior to migration, but after their experience abroad all had grown some self-confidence.

Table 5: Soft skills before and after migration (n=150)

Skills	Before / After Migrating				How was the skill acquired?
	No Skill	Basic level	Intermediate	Advanced	
Time management skill	49% / 14%	14% / 13%	25% / 41%	11% / 32%	Experience: 100%
Communication with others	32% / 12%	22% / 12%	34% / 36%	12% / 35%	Experience: 92% Other*: 8%
Teamwork	55% / 29%	13% / 13%	23% / 37%	9% / 21%	Experience: 100%
Problem solving	53% / 20%	17% / 20%	26% / 42%	4% / 18%	Experience: 90% Other**: 10%
Adapting to new environments	24% / 5%	21% / 15%	34% / 41%	21% / 39%	Experience: 94% Other: 6%
Management skill (of others)	56% / 21%	17% / 21%	19% / 31%	8% / 27%	Experience: 96% Working hard: 4%
Self-confidence	67% / 0%	22% / 22%	11% / 44%	0% / 34%	Experience: 89% Training: 11%

* Divided equally into becoming more mature, becoming more knowledgeable and interacting with people.

** Becoming more mature (4%), becoming more knowledgeable (2%) and interacting with people (2%).

Formal training abroad

Learning was primarily achieved through practical experience and on-the-job training, with only 15 per cent of respondents receiving formal training while working abroad. In total 22 respondents received formal training on 16 different topics; of these, 20 respondents received one course, while two attended

two separate courses. On average each course lasted six weeks, and the topics varied from complex (language or computer lessons) to basic, including packaging and juice making (Table 6).

Table 6: Topics of training abroad (n=22)

Formal training courses taken abroad and number of respondents					
Fire protection	4	Bag measurement and reducing fabric waste	1	Making fancy accessories	1
Computer course	3	Chinese language	1	Machinery usage	1
Packaging vegetables	2	Embossing	1	Occupational safety & health	1
Motor sewing machine	2	Juice making	1	Road safety	1
Hairdressing	2	Leadership	1	Thai language	1

Respondents working in manufacturing or in sales and services were more likely to receive training (22 per cent and 17 per cent respectively) than those in construction (5 per cent) or agriculture and aquaculture (4 per cent).

At first, we were interns and we could work by ourselves after working one week. When we arrived, we didn't know anything about our jobs. In our job abroad, there was one coach to teach and guide us. After one or two weeks, we knew everything we needed to know.

– Male participant from manufacturing FGD

Training providers were mostly senior colleagues (45 per cent) who arranged formal sessions to improve employees' skills, as opposed to more informal training that can be provided through on-the-job instruction by senior colleagues (Table 7).

Table 7: Formal training providers abroad

Training providers	First training (n=22)	%	Second training (n=2)	%
Seniors and colleagues	10	45%	0	0%
Government recognized course	6	27%	1	50%
Employer	4	18%	1	50%
Private teacher	1	5%	0	0%
Private language course	1	5%	0	0%

According to the director of BEAM, there are opportunities for migrant workers to attend training in Thailand, but only a small proportion are able to. The main obstacles are lack of time – since migrants usually have to work overtime, the cost of transportation to get to training centres, and issues surrounding irregular documentation.

Some jobs gave workers training classes of about two hours during the eight-hour working day. Some workers did exercise during those two hours. This amount of training depends on how big the company is – the companies follow the national laws. Most cotton factories did some training classes before the working day started. For example, supervisors counted how many people had arrived and if there were 15 people, they take those 15 people as one group and [they] practise for work they have to do on that day. The supervisor gave 15 minutes to practise, and after finishing all were doing their own work.

– Male participant from manufacturing FGD

Documentation of skill development and experience

According to my experience, [returned migrant workers] don't have any certificate or evidence or recommendation to prove where they worked or what skills they have. That's why it is difficult for them to work here when they come back. In Myanmar, we need to prove educational background or training or working experience. They don't have enough educational background and they only get on the job training.

– Migrant Resource Centre representative

As most of the skills and experience previously discussed were gained through on-the-job and informal training, few respondents had proof of what they had learned. For example, only one person received a time management certificate; 2 per cent had photo records of their teamwork experience; and another 2 per cent kept a work contract. Just 1 per cent had any proof of having developed problem-solving skills (an award). No one had references that mentioned soft skills, arguably the most important indication of such skill sets. Similarly, of the work tasks respondents said they learned to perform while abroad, only a limited number of respondents had any documentation. A few had photos of their work: one respondent was trained to sell machines and kept a photo record of the training, while others had certificates, awards or letters of recommendation. For most, however, there is no documentation of the tasks completed or their ability.

FGD participants explained that when changing jobs abroad workers received a reference letter with comments on their skills and experience from their previous employer. Other FGD participants said that letters are commonly issued but sent direct to the new employer and not given in hand to the employees on termination of their job. This means for many returning migrants no letters of recommendation are provided to future Myanmar employers.

Another view shared by FGD participants was that they can get a letter if they work well, but the employee must insist on receiving one. This opinion was shared by the Director General and the Deputy Director of the Education and Training Department of the Ministry of Border Affairs.

5.4 Returning to Myanmar

This section focuses on the training, skills and experience gained by migrants abroad and the extent to which these have been used after their return to Myanmar.

The problem is that our skilled workers have been working abroad in different sectors, but there are no job opportunities here when they come back. Moreover, the salary gap is too big for them. When they are working abroad, they can meet their basic needs and support their families.

– Mon Labour Youth Organization representative

Reasons for returning

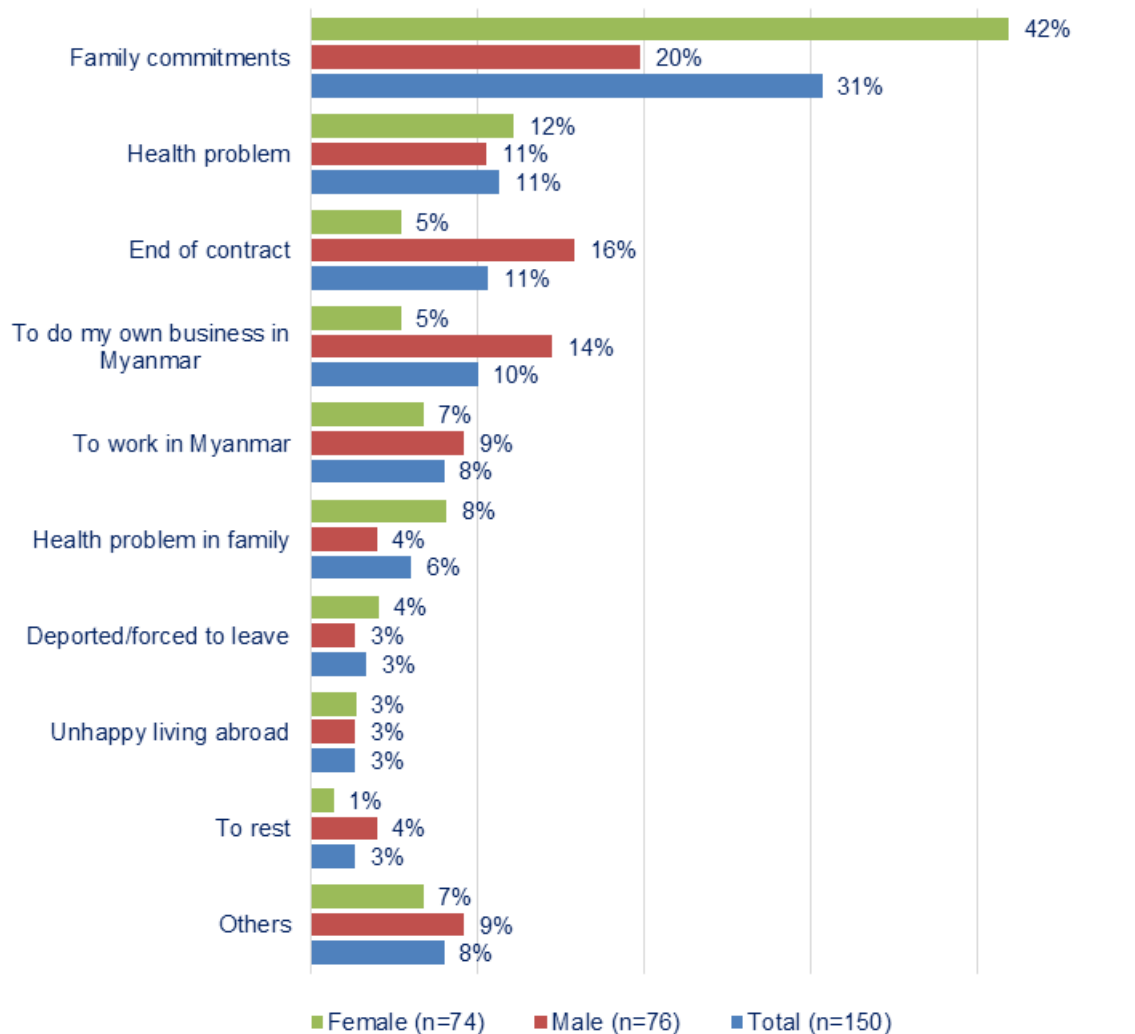
Family commitments were the main reason for returning to Myanmar, with 42 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men returning for that reason (Chart 7). Some returned to work or to set up their own businesses, with men (14 per cent) more likely than women to return to start their own businesses (5 per cent). Other reasons for returning included health problems (11 per cent) and end of contract (11 per cent). A few respondents reported problems at work in the CODs, such as problems with colleagues, low income, heavy workload or being unhappy abroad. All such responses were filed under "Others".

While some respondents found it challenging to adapt to a new country, language, work environment and living conditions, others with irregular status were in fear of the police and immigration. Having enough money to renew or obtain the correct documents was also a factor in deciding to return.

I started a business in Mae Sot. When I started, I got 70 THB per day [~USD 23]. I didn't have passport at that time, and it cost 3,000 THB [~USD 100] or 4,000 THB to do necessary documents.

- Male respondent from manufacturing FGD

Chart 7: Reasons for returning to Myanmar



Current employment status

While I was working abroad I had a stable job and I got paid regularly. But here, I don't have any regular income, resulting in hardship.

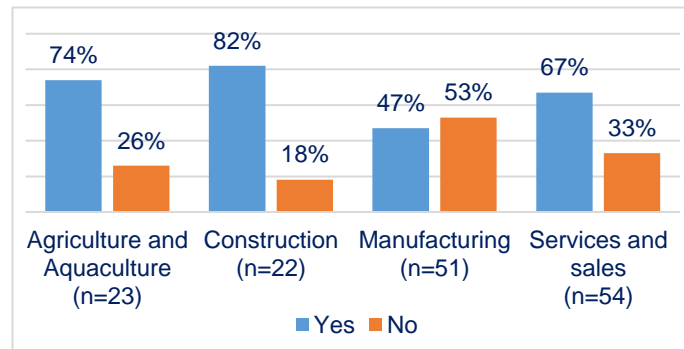
- Female participant from manufacturing FGD

A total of 63 per cent of returned migrants interviewed are currently working. Of these, only 20 per cent are working in the same sector as they did while abroad, although the majority would like to work in the same sector. Among those not working, reasons include lack of job opportunities (31 per cent), need

to look after children (29 per cent) and wanting to spend more time with family (15 per cent). A poor health condition prevented 11 per cent of those not working from looking for a job.

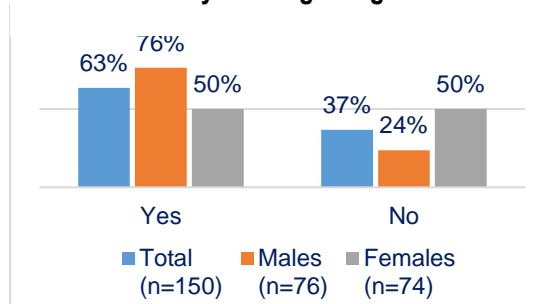
Chart 8 illustrates the proportion of respondents who have been working since they returned to Myanmar, based on the main sector of work while abroad. Respondents who worked in construction, agriculture and aquaculture were most likely to find work on their return. Construction workers were able to find temporary jobs or work for themselves. Agricultural workers found work as casual labourers or, in some cases, on their own land. The ability of people who had worked abroad in manufacturing, sales and services to find work in the same sectors on return was dependent on infrastructure and market conditions. Qualitative findings show that the gap between salaries abroad and in Myanmar demotivates returned migrants to work in the same sector, especially because they return with new skills and experience that are often not recognized.

Chart 8: Respondents who have worked since returning by main sector of work abroad



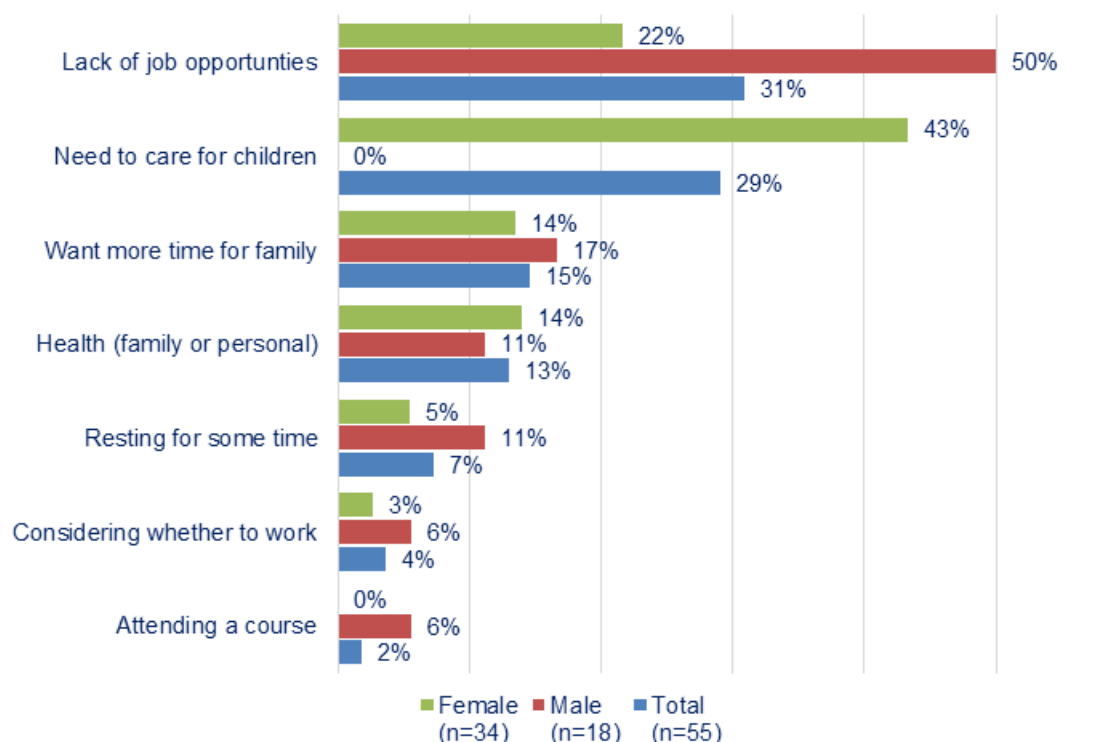
I have experience and new skills in some areas [which I gained abroad]. I could do what I have done abroad, but there are no similar jobs in Myanmar.
 – Male participant from services and sales FGD

Chart 9: Currently working and gender



Gender differences in ability to find work on return were significant: 50 per cent of women were working at the time of interview, compared to 76 per cent of men (Chart 9). Among the women not working, 43 per cent were unable to search for a job because of child care responsibilities, while none of the men interviewed faced the same responsibility. For 50 % of men the main reason for unemployment was a lack of job opportunities; for women, 22 per cent.

Chart 10: Reasons for not working and gender



Those currently working found employment across a range of sectors in Myanmar. Table 8 details the types of work by job groups according to the ILO International Standard Classification of Occupations.¹⁷

Table 8: Job groups of respondents since returning to Myanmar (n=95)	%
Sales workers (street and market salespersons)	28%
Street and related sales and services workers (street and related services workers)	9%
Personal services workers (other personal services workers)	6%
Labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport (mining and construction labourers)	6%
Sales workers (shop salesperson)	5%
Market-oriented skilled agricultural workers (market gardeners and crop growers)	4%
Building and related trades workers, excluding electricians (building frame and related trades workers)	4%
Metal, machinery and related trades workers (sheet and structural metal workers, moulders and welders, and related workers)	4%
Drivers and mobile plant operators (car, van and motorcycle drivers)	4%
Building and related trades workers, excluding electricians (building finishers and related trades workers)	3%
Food preparation assistants	3%
Street and related sales and services workers (street vendors (excluding food))	3%

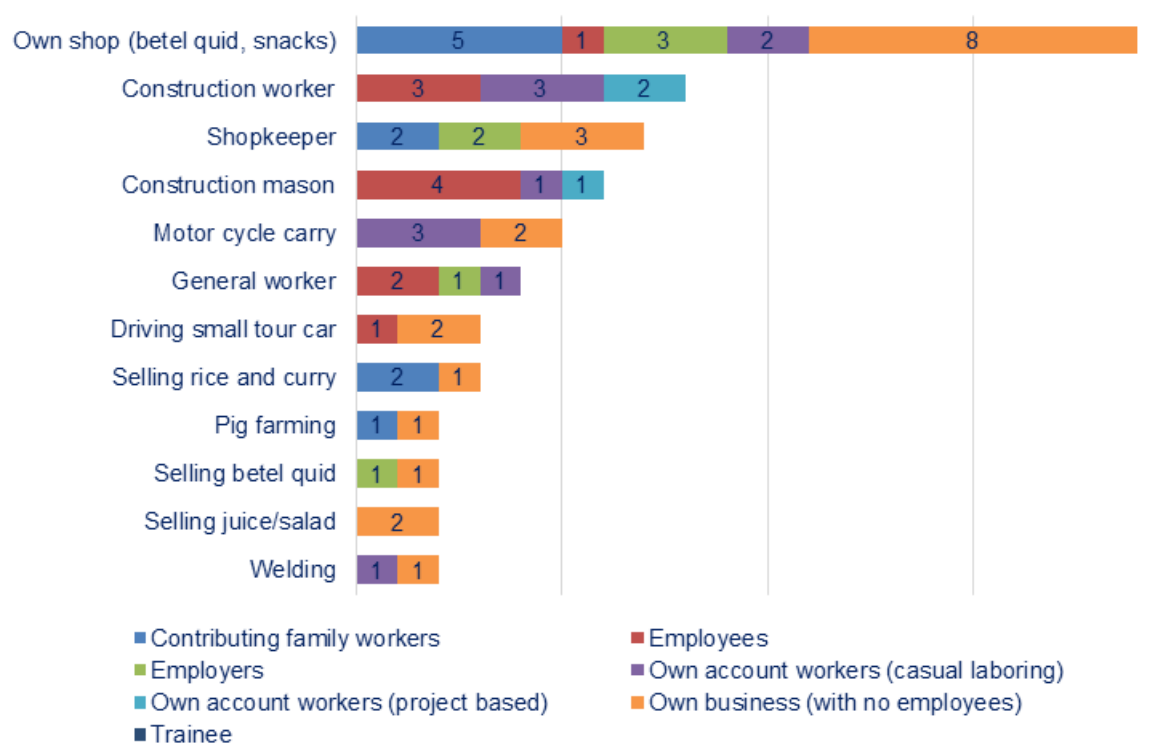
¹⁷ Based on ILO's International Standard Classification of Occupations - ISCO-08
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_172572.pdf

Table 8: Job groups of respondents since returning to Myanmar (n=95)	%
Sales workers (other sales workers)	2%
Market-oriented skilled agricultural workers (animal producers)	2%
Building and related trades workers (painters, building structure cleaners), excluding electricians	2%
Cleaners and helpers (domestic, hotel and office cleaners and helpers)	2%
Refuse workers and other elementary workers (other elementary workers)	2%
Personal services workers (hairdressers, beauticians and related workers)	1%
Personal services workers (building and housekeeping supervisors)	1%
Market-oriented skilled forestry, fishery and hunting workers (fishery workers, hunters and trappers)	1%
Metal, machinery and related trades workers (machinery mechanics and repairers)	1%
Handicraft and printing workers (printing trades workers)	1%
Assemblers	1%
Cleaners and helpers (vehicle, window, laundry and other hand cleaning workers)	1%

Note: Rounding means right column may not total 100.

Within the job types, respondents had a range of employment statuses (Chart 11). A significant number of respondents had their own business. Among respondents working, 36 per cent owned a business with no employees and 13 per cent had a business with employees. The difference between working women and men in business ownership was wide: 43 per cent of women and 31 per cent of men had a business with no employees; and 19 per cent of working women had a business with employees, compared to 9 per cent of working men. Other types of employment included being an employee (20 per cent), own account workers (casual labourers, 16 per cent), own account workers (project basis, 4 per cent) and contributing family members (11 per cent).

Chart 11: Status in employment and job (n=95)

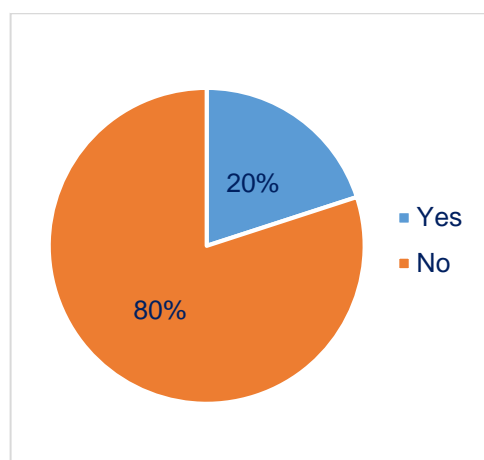


NB: Two jobs are not included in this chart as each had only one respondent for the full list of jobs.

On return, 60 per cent of respondents reported receiving daily wages. Others were paid every two days (1 per cent), every three days (1 per cent), weekly (3 per cent), or per project (6 per cent). A significant proportion, 16 per cent, did not receive a salary, as they were working for a family business or starting their own business. Overall, 13 per cent of the returnees currently working were receiving payment in kind: 12 per cent received accommodation, 11 per cent received meals, and 10 per cent received both. Accommodation was provided most often to construction workers and services and sales (meals were provided most often in the services and sales sector compared to other sectors).

Use of skills obtained abroad

Chart 12: Returned migrants with jobs in the same sector as abroad (n=95)



At the time of the survey, just 63 per cent of returned migrants had found employment in Myanmar. Among those who found a job, only 20 per cent were working in the same sector as abroad (Chart 12). The sector with the highest retention was construction, with 50 per cent (n=9), while respondents from other sectors were considerably more likely to find a job in a different sector than abroad. This was followed by agriculture: 20 per cent of those who had worked in agriculture abroad found jobs in the same sector on return; the figure for services and sales was 19 per cent. Last came manufacturing, with no cross-over. This inability to transfer suggests issues relating to skills drainage, lack of skills transferability and challenges in labour market information systems, with migrants unable to find jobs that matched their skills.

A particular challenge to staying in the same sector was the different way that work is conducted in Myanmar. For example, agricultural workers in Thailand usually work in agribusiness, which is very different and may require skills not applicable to farming practices in Myanmar. A UMFCCI representative interviewed commented that migrants who worked in the livestock breeding sector in other countries would have difficulty finding jobs here unless they started their own businesses, since in Myanmar there were only a few private businesses engaged on a large scale in that sector. This was also the case in construction, with different methods and equipment used in Thailand and Myanmar.

The majority of returned migrants who were unable to find a job in the same sector in Myanmar wanted to continue in the same sector (70 per cent), particularly those who had been working in services and sales (76 per cent) and construction (67 per cent). Fewer respondents with experience in agriculture (48 per cent) and manufacturing (58 per cent) aimed to continue in the same sector.

Qualitative results showed 10 per cent of interviewees wanted to start their own businesses on return to Myanmar, but faced many challenges. The main challenge entrepreneurs faced was lack of capital, a common obstacle across all the sectors surveyed. Another challenge was again the difference between the skills learned abroad and the ones needed in Myanmar. As one respondent noted, there is no point producing pig feed in Myanmar because there are limited intensive breeding businesses, and pigs are just given left over food.

A lack of materials and infrastructure could also limit the returned workers' ability to start their own businesses, as they might need specific raw materials unavailable in Myanmar. The infrastructure also varied significantly. As mentioned in FGDs, this sometimes made it difficult to use the skills learned abroad in a Myanmar context.

Another point mentioned in an interview with a representative of the Migration Division in the Department of Labour, and by some FGD participants, was that migrants might have worked in only one area of the production chain and not known the whole process, which limited their ability to start their own business.

I don't have [transferrable skills from working abroad] because I was just working in a prawn factory. My position was only removing the cover, so I have no skills.

- Female participant from manufacturing FGD

Nevertheless, the skills developed abroad can give some individuals a greater opportunity to start their own businesses, according to a representative of UMFCCI. Through exposure to different techniques, designs and methods, people can start businesses that are popular locally. The representative gave the example of welders who have worked in Malaysia.

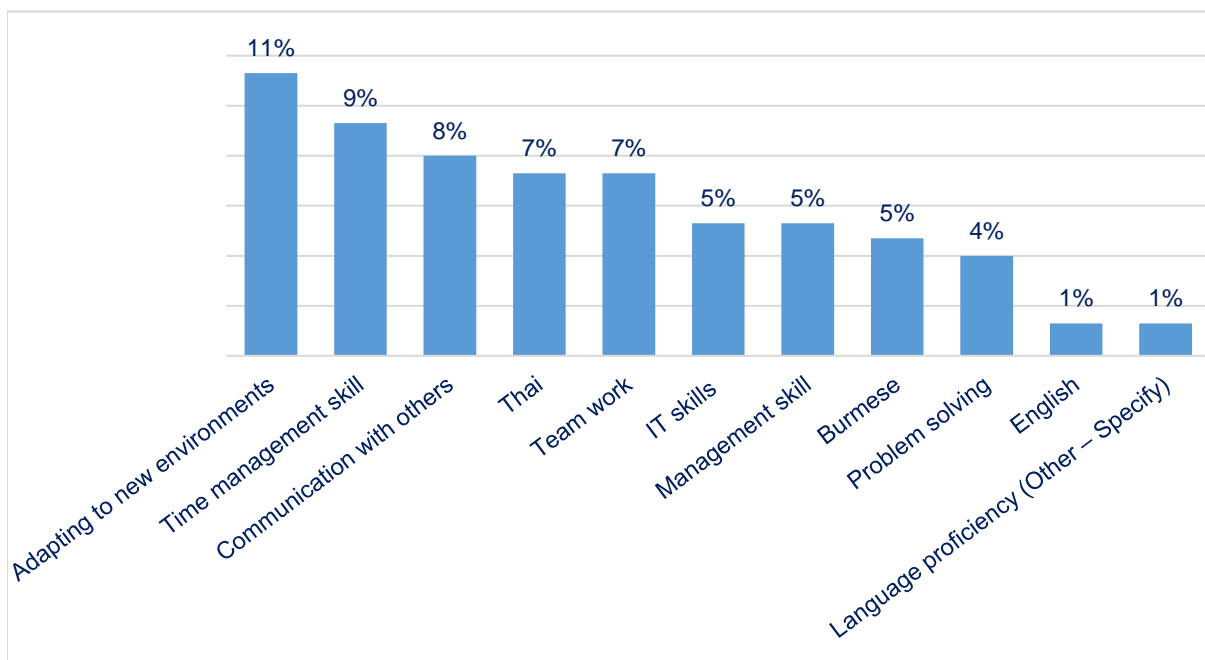
The skills gained from working overseas have benefits when they start their own business here. For example, migrants who were welders making metal walls and doors in Malaysia: the designs in Malaysia are very beautiful and creative and are not yet available in Myanmar. So, the designs of the returned migrants become the most beautiful and modern in their towns. Everyone likes and orders from them as they find the designs beautiful.

- UMFCCI representative

Some 34 per cent of respondents, however, found that their skills were useful in finding a job when they returned. This included 12 per cent of respondents who found the skills helpful to secure employment, 11 per cent who thought they helped to get a better job than they had previously had in Myanmar, and 13 per cent who thought they helped them gain promotion faster than other colleagues.

Only 11 per cent of respondents mentioned having their skills acknowledged upon their return (n=17). Skills were recognized by employers (n=6), the working environment (n=5), managers (n=3), colleagues (n=2) and customers (n=1). Of those respondents who had their skills or training recognized, four had to make a presentation or demonstration as part of the process of gaining recognition. According to the interview with the UMFCCI, more employers are asking jobseekers to demonstrate their skills through probationary periods, which is a positive development, reducing the emphasis on letters, certificates and formal education.

Chart 13: Additional skills most useful in Myanmar according to respondents



In addition, to the skills described above, 122 task-based skills were also deemed useful by respondents. These include bricklaying, cooking preparation, sales, domestic cleaning, ironing, laying tiles, driving, welding, washing clothes, cement mixing, babysitting, iron rod bending, car cleaning, grass cutting, and growing vegetables. Respondents ranked the skills they found most useful in Myanmar (Chart 13).

In the past, the employers just asked for documents to check the skill level of workers such as education background, certificates from training and courses. But nowadays priorities have changed. Employers focus on the capacities of workers to do a job. So they recruit someone and watch their skills during a probation period. If they like the skills of that worker, they hire that person. But still in the job adverts, there is a sentence about the documents to show. But the worker should mention their skills and experience to the employer when they are called for the interview.

- UMFCCI representative

The in-depth interviews showed that differences in the type of jobs men and women did might have deeper implications. As a representative of the MRC mentioned, even qualified women were not accepted in certain roles in sectors like construction. Female and male FGD participants said that most senior positions, like supervisors and managers, were given to men. This, combined with the disproportionate responsibility women have for unpaid care work, was a major obstacle for female returned migrants.

Despite the low levels of recognition and limited opportunities to use the skills learned abroad, most respondents believed they were progressing, some in more than one area. This is a view also shared by those who were not working at the time of the interview. Reflecting on their work history, 69 per cent of respondents said they were developing skills, a view shared by 74 per cent of men compared to 65 per cent of women.

Among the returned workers, 13 per cent plan to migrate again, with no significant difference between men and women. The main reasons for wanting to migrate again include the lack of jobs (n=8), low salaries (n=7) and gender discrimination (n=2). Respondents returned mainly due to family matters (more so women) or health, which would make it more difficult for them to migrate again.

Stakeholders interviewed agreed that one of the main obstacles to increasing the recognition and utilization of skills learned by migrant workers was the lack of a centralized, easily accessible information source for returned migrants. Nor is there a central database of skills and experience developed or (when available) evidence of them. Representatives of the Education and Training Department of the Ministry of Border Affairs stated that there was no systematic data collection for returned migrants. When they received any data, this was usually through other departments such as the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

In the interview with the Department of National Employment and Skills Development, it was stated that they planned to introduce an online labour registration card. The Migration and Labour Department is planning to give returned regular-status migrants certificates to use as proof of the number of years of work and the country and sector of work. The same department has plans, with funding from ILO and IOM, to improve the collection of data on returned migrants in order to enhance job matching, provide training based on skills and needs, and allow employers to find experienced workers. The data will also be used for policy making, but at the time of writing this was not in place.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

1. Conclusions

Migration has many benefits for migrants, their families and communities in countries of origin and destination. Migrant workers contribute to economic development in countries of origin, with typically

higher labour force participation than local populations, they are net contributors to fiscal revenue.¹⁸ They widen the pool of available skills in labour markets, both on arrival and on return, and expand the available labour force in countries of destination, increasing productivity, incomes and employment for nationals.¹⁹ Official remittances to Myanmar reached US\$2.8 billion in 2018 (World Bank) providing needed support to families at home for food, education, housing and health care, as well as potentially providing capital for business start-ups.

Investing in education and training and linking migration policy to skills policies will increase the likelihood that migrants, their families and communities are able to benefit from the positive developmental impacts of migration. This study analysed qualitative and quantitative data from returned migrant workers and qualitative data from key stakeholders to better understand the skills returned migrants developed while abroad and the extent to which these skills are recognized on their return.

The study found that migrants were able to acquire a range of skills including technical and non-technical, language skills, leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, time management, and social/cultural skills, while abroad as well as skills related to the tasks they performed at their workplace. It also identified a number of challenges faced by migrants in using their existing skills while abroad, further developing those skills and applying them on return home.

Migrants' skills were frequently under-utilized in countries of destination: many worked in low-skilled jobs, irrespective of their previous knowledge, and jobs were not necessarily linked to previous employment. The learning and use of skills were hindered by the inability to communicate in the local language. This means that in some instances, migrants deskilled compared to previous areas of work. Promotion to better jobs was slow and not without obstacles also related to language and local culture. This may also be linked to the labour demands in countries of destination. Skilled labour is more likely to be performed by nationals of the country and the labour shortages are clustered around non-skilled work which locals prefer not to perform.

Access to formal training outside the workplace was limited by factors, including lack of time and resources: many worked overtime to save money, women migrants additionally had greater responsibility for family care with its associated time costs, while irregular migration status reduced the accessibility of courses, as well as causing migrants to fear exposure. Finally, there was a lack of awareness of available training and rights to attend.

Women and men were impacted differently in their chance to learn and acquire skills while abroad. Sectors and roles within sectors were heavily divided by sex, with women often in positions of lower responsibility and earning lower pay for work of equal value. One male participant said that male carpenters earn 400 THB per day (~USD 13) in Thailand while female carpenters earn 250 THB (~USD 8) per day. Female dominated sectors are widely considered of lower value to society. Male and female FGD participants said that women were less likely to have senior roles in any sector, irrespective of their skills, especially if the role would involve managing men. Similar views were found in the quantitative data, showing men being more likely to work as supervisors. Traditional gender expectations strongly affect willingness to support the development of peers. A male FGD participant

¹⁸ ILO. 2018. *Skills for migration and employment*. Policy brief (Geneva). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_651238.pdf [25 Nov 2020]

¹⁹ Foged, M., Peri. G. (2016). Immigrants' effect on native workers: New analysis on longitudinal data. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. Vol. 8, No. 2, April 2016. Available at: <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20150114> [25 Nov 2020]

said that women “can only do basic work in construction because they are weak and not interested enough to learn skills necessary for more senior roles.

2. Key recommendations

Migration should be a gateway to workers increasing their skills and experience and having access to a wider choice of jobs on return. Information from respondents suggests that migrant workers are stagnating, without recognition of either their skills or education when they migrate or of their newly acquired skills and experience when they return.

In order for the skills of returning migrants to be recognized and for returning migrants to be able to secure decent work and have a choice of employment, this study concludes with the following recommendations, based on the ILO Human Resources Development Recommendation 2004 (No. 195).

To the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP)

- Recognize workplace learning, including formal and non-formal learning and work experience (ILO Human Resource Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195), paragraph 9(e).
- Encourage countries of destination to request employers to provide reference letters for returning migrants, including the type and level of skills performed in the job. Noting the good example of the “Happy Return Programme” launched by the Korean government to facilitate business and employment prospects of migrants under the Employment Permit System wherein migrants are provided training prior to returning to their country of origin.
- Promote awareness of the services offered by Labour Exchange Offices (LEO) and Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) among potential and returned migrant workers by distributing information leaflets through township GADs and CSOs working with migrants. In addition, design a campaign to run at border gates informing returning migrants about LEOs and MRCs.
- Build the capacity of LEO staff, including those with MRCs, to provide job matching services (locally and overseas) for returned migrants. Provide training on skills recognition, National Skills Standards, and career counselling to LEO staff.
- Connect migrants with LEOs and MRCs through expanded use of technology, or mobile apps, to provide returned migrants with targeted information and up-to-date job notice boards and job matching services.
- Consider making use of the ILO’s *General practical guidance on promoting coherence among employment, education/training and labour migration policies*²⁰ in order to maximize the developmental benefits of both migration and skills related policies.
- Develop a labour market information system to collect data on skills availability and current and future needs in the local labour market in line with the National Plan of Action on Labour Migration (2018 -2022).

²⁰ N. Popova and F. Panizica ILO, 2017. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_614314/lang--en/index.htm

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- Develop integrated labour market skills needs assessments (Myanmar and destination labour markets) and tailoring the development of vocational training courses to respond to current and forecast needs.
 - Promote decent work for all in the Myanmar labour market and progressively expand legal and social protection to the informal economy. Of particular importance for returning migrant workers will be domestic and care work, agriculture, fishing, and construction.²¹

To the Ministry of Education

- Measures should be adopted in collaboration with MOLIP and the social partners and using a national qualification framework, to promote the development, implementation and financing of a transparent mechanism for the assessment, certification and recognition of skills, including prior learning and previous experience, irrespective of the countries where they were acquired and whether acquired formally or informally. Special provisions should be designed to ensure recognition and certification of skills and qualifications of migrant workers (ILO Recommendation No. 195, paragraph 11).
- In collaboration with MOLIP, develop agreements with countries of destination on mutual recognition of skills certification.
- Build on initiatives such as the National Skills Standards Authority (NSSA) and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) “to facilitate lifelong learning, assist enterprises and employment agencies to match skills demand with supply, guide individuals on their choice of training and career and facilitate the recognition of prior learning and previously acquired skills, competencies and experience.”²²

To financial institutions and development partners

- Provide guidance on access to credit and financial institutions to returning migrants who want to start their own businesses.
- Support the provision of credit for micro and small entrepreneurs, which could build on existing programmes by the International Finance Corporation (IFC, the financial arm of the World Bank), ILO and Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC, a development organization based in Bangladesh with offices in Myanmar).
- Improve data collection mechanisms on the skills and experience of migrant workers. This would require the establishment of a centralized data system and/or data systems in Myanmar states and regions that would help workers to find a job, provide employers with a database of skills, help the design of training and inform policies.

To all stakeholders

The last set of recommendations seeks to mitigate the gender disparity in the workforce of Myanmar.

²¹ ILO Human Resources Development Recommendation 2004 (No. 195) para. 3(d): “[...] policies and programmes should be developed with the aim of creating decent jobs and opportunities for education and training, as well as validating prior learning and skills gained to assist workers and employers to move into the formal economy.”

²² Ibid., para. 5(e).

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- Considering the amount of unpaid work women perform in the home, which limits their time available to develop paid career opportunities, solutions are needed to ensure equal opportunities. These may involve public campaigns for greater recognition of the value of unpaid and paid work traditionally done by women, for greater participation of men in unpaid household work, as well as recognition of the skills needed to successfully manage a household. It could also include the extension of social assistance benefits targeting families and young children, or the development of carers' benefits for those taking time out of the paid workforce to take care of sick or elderly family members, to compensate for loss of income to the household, and to recognize the social and economic value of these hitherto unrecognized forms of work.
 - Promote equal opportunities for women and men in education, skills training and lifelong learning (ILO Recommendation No. 195, 5(g)).
 - Promote workplace equality for women in terms of opportunity, salary and seniority, including through legal recognition of all sectors, such as domestic work, heavily dominated by women, as well as increased inspection and penalties for discrimination in the workplace.

Appendix: ²³ Full list of top three job categories for learning abroad

Job category	Mentions	Average time in job (years / months)	Average job improvement	Number of respondents
Manufacturing labourers	66	3 / 5	2.09	44
Street and related services workers	26	4	1.98	22
Mining and construction labourers	25	4 / 11	1.78	24
Domestic, hotel and office cleaners and helpers	19	5 / 5	1.38	19
Agricultural, forestry and fishery labourers	15	4 / 5	2.65	14
Food preparation assistants	14	3 / 11	2.4	12
Animal producers	7	7 / 1	2.06	6
Garment and related trades workers	6	4 / 10	2.42	5
Market gardeners and crop growers	6	7 / 10	2.43	6
Cooks	6	5 / 3	2.22	6
Other personal services workers	6	2 / 3	2.03	5
Vehicle, window, laundry and other hand cleaning workers	5	1 / 10	2.60	5
Other elementary workers	5	6 / 2	1.75	5
Assemblers	4	4 / 10	2.65	2
Street and market salespersons	4	1 / 2	0.70	3
Other sales workers	3	2 / 2	2.9707	3
Textile, fur and leather products machine operators	3	22 / 7	3.00	3
Tellers, money collectors and related clerks	2	4 / 1	1.33	2

²³ The quantitative questionnaire, topic guide for the focus group discussions, and topic guide for in-depth interviews mentioned in the text are available on request.

Job category	Mentions	Average time in job (years / months)	Average job improvement	Number of respondents
Food processing and related trades workers	2	5 / 6	3.00	2
Transport and storage labourers	2	9 / 9	0	2
Personal care workers in health services	2	3 / 0	2.50	2
Shop salesperson	2	7 / 6	2.50	2
Street vendors (excluding food)	2	1 / 9	2.33	2
Building frame and related trades workers	1	20 / 0	3.00	1
Car, van and motorcycle drivers	1	5 / 0	2.00	1
Mobile plant operators	1	2 / 0	2.00	1
Other craft and related workers	1	3 / 0	2.00	1
Handicraft workers	1	4 / 0	2.00	1
Fishery workers, hunters and trappers	1	7 / 0	3.00	1
Machinery mechanics and repairers	1	6 / 0	3.00	1
Childcare workers and teachers' aides	1	1 / 0	3.00	1
Hairdressers, beauticians and related workers	1	8 / 0	1.50	1
Waiters and bartenders	1	7 / 0	3.00	1
Production and specialized services managers	1	8 / 0	2.33	1
Cashiers and ticket clerks	1	1 / 0	3.00	1
Metal processing and finishing plant operators	1	2 / 0	3.00	1
