



IMPACTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON RETURNING MIGRANTS AYEYARWADY REGION ANALYSIS



Interviewing returning migrant on the Impacts of COVID19 at Kat Kho Village, Mawlamyinegyun Township. © IOM 2020

OVERVIEW

This rapid assessment was conducted by three civil society organizations, namely Nay Wun Ni, Kyal Sin May and Swan Saung Shin, with the technical support of IOM and in close coordination with the General Administration Department. The assessment covered three townships of Ayeyarwady Region, namely Mawlamyinegyun, Labutta and Bogale.¹ The objectives of the assessment were to:

1. Understand the experiences, challenges and future intentions of returnees and communities of return
2. Support an evidence-based response to the challenges faced by returning migrants as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

RETURN MIGRATION

Of the 2,311 returned migrants surveyed, 384 (220 men; 164 women) returned to Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Region.² 356 (93%) of surveyed

returnees to this region were internal migrants and 28 (7%) were international migrants. 65 per cent of returnees to Ayeyarwady Region said they had lost their job before coming home, while a further 21 per cent said they had not been paid their wages. 3 per cent said they were subject to exploitation/discrimination and 12 per cent did not report any applicable challenges.

Almost half (45%) of returned migrants reported their reason for returning home was because they lost their job due to COVID-19, with the figure being significantly higher amongst men than women (50% vs 37%). 19 per cent said that they returned because they got scared and ran away (men 16%; women 23%), and 15 per cent said their family wanted them to return due to COVID-19 (men 10%; women 22%). A further 9 per cent said that they returned for reasons unrelated to the pandemic; and 12 per cent said that they returned for other reasons (but still related to the pandemic), Thingyan holidays, or increased hardships at destination.

¹For detailed methodology and full findings see main report.

²For presentation purposes this brief presents percentage figures rounded to the nearest whole percentage. For this reason and due to the rounding of decimal points, not all totals add up to exactly 100 per cent.

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Livelihoods and Food Security Fund



managed by UNOPS

Amongst respondents in Bogale, Mawlamyinegyun and Labutta townships, 56 per cent of returnees to Bogale, 50 per cent to Mawlamyinegyun, and 30 per cent to Labutta, said they returned because they lost their job due to COVID-19. A further 23 per cent of returnees to Bogale, 21 per cent to Mawlamyinegyun and 14 per cent to Labutta, returned because they got scared and ran away.

Prior to returning home, 42 per cent of migrants from Ayeyarwady said they had experienced increased psychological stress, with the figure being higher amongst women (46%) than men (39%); and 15 per cent said they had experienced discrimination/stigma. 38 per cent said that none of the options were applicable to them; 2 per cent said they had experienced psychological abuse; and a further 2 per cent said they had experienced decreased access to social services (prior to returning home). Returnees to Mawlamyinegyun reported particularly high levels of discrimination/stigma (56%) prior to returning home (vs 5% in Bogale and 3% in Labutta).

Since returning to Ayeyarwady, migrants reported high levels of physical and psychological stressors (Figure 1). A similar proportion of men and women cited experiences of increased psychological stress (32% vs 33%) and 23 per cent said they had experienced discrimination/stigma (men 22%; women 24%). 43 per cent said none of the aforementioned stressors applied to them, while only 1 per cent said they had experienced increased psychological abuse.

There were also some variations in experiences of social and psychosocial challenges upon return across townships. 42 per cent of returnees to Bogale, 35 per cent to Mawlamyinegyun and 24 per cent to Labutta, said they had experienced



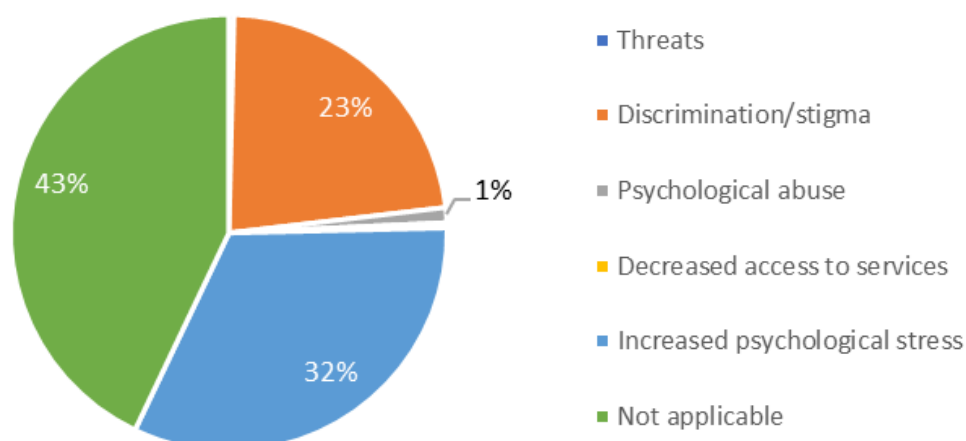
Donating health kits to a Village Health Centre near Mawlamyinegyun, Ayeyarwaddy Region. © IOM 2020

increased psychological stress; while 52 per cent of returnees to Mawlamyinegyun, 21 per cent to Labutta and 19 per cent to Bogale said they had experienced discrimination/stigma.

Upon arriving home, 99 per cent of migrants from Ayeyarwady said they were asked to quarantine in either in a community facility or at home. The same high proportion of respondents said that they subsequently quarantined in one of the aforementioned ways.

Of those who quarantined in a community facility, 31 per cent said there were not enough protective items and hygiene items, 22 per cent said there was not enough food, while 10 per cent reported that there were not enough non-food supplies, such as clothes and blankets. A further 9 per cent reported a lack of staff/volunteers in the quarantine facilities.

Figure 1: Experiences since return



11 per cent said the facilities were unsafe/inappropriate for proper quarantine and 6 per cent said the WASH facilities were insufficient. Men and women reported similar challenges while in quarantine.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

The pandemic has forced a growing number of migrant workers to return home to Myanmar. As a consequence, migrants and their families have had to contend with losing an important income source. 74 per cent of Ayeyarwady returnees said their households were no longer receiving the remittances that had been their main/only source of income (Figure 2). Only 13 per cent said that remittances were not their households' main source of income, 10 per cent said that remittances were the main/only source of income but their household is receiving less, and 3 per cent said remittances are the main/only source of income and their household continued to receive the same amount. Returned men and women reported similar experiences of remittance loss.

There were some differences across township, with returnees to Mawlamyinegyun (89%) most likely to report that their households were no longer receiving the remittances that had been their main/only source of income, compared to 71 per cent in Bogale and 61 per cent in Labutta.

The loss of remittances has impacted on migrants, their families and communities in different ways. In Ayeyarwady Region, for example, 89 per cent of surveyed returnees said that their households did not have any savings (men 91%; women 86%), and 9 per cent said they have savings but are using them at an increased rate (men 7%; women 12%). Only 2

per cent reported that they had savings but did not need to use them. 97 per cent of returnees to Labutta, 90 per cent to Mawlamyinegyun and 78 per cent to Bogale said they do not have any savings.

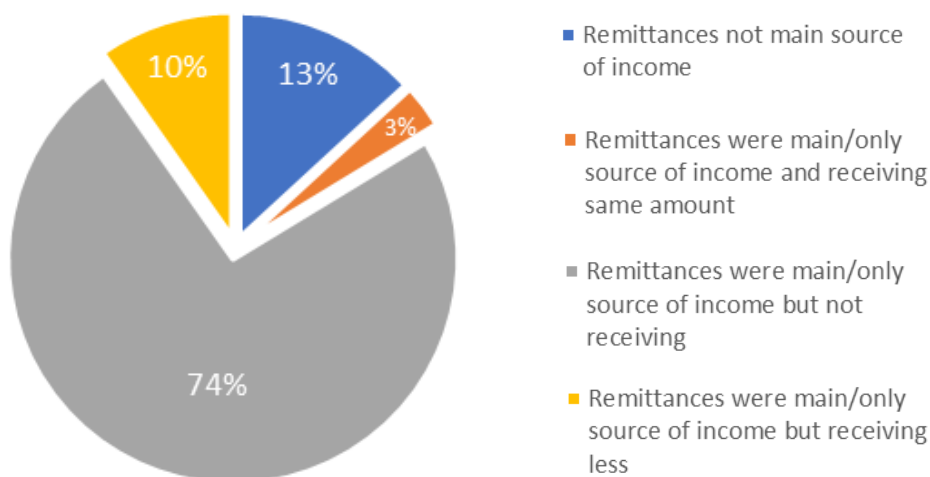
Households without savings to draw on and facing the reality of a loss of remittances have had to look for alternative sources of income. This can sometimes mean going into debt. In Ayeyarwady, 48 per cent of returnees said that their households were in debt and that the debt has worsened since the pandemic (men 51%; women 44%). 30 per cent said they are in debt, but the debt has not been affected by the pandemic (men 29%; women 31%), and only 22 per cent said their household is not in debt (men 20%; women 25%).

INTENTIONS

Although the pandemic appears far from over in Myanmar and around the world, returned migrant workers considering what they will do next. Of returnees surveyed across all states and regions, 55 per cent said that they plan to remigrate. For many in Ayeyarwady Region too, remigration remains the best option. A total of 242 (63%) respondents from this region said that they plan to remigrate. 66 per cent of men and 59 per cent of women planned to remigrate. The same proportion of men and women (34%) returned to Ayeyarwady and planning to remigrate, said they plan to go as soon as possible. A further 44 per cent said they plan to remigrate within the next 1-3 months, 14 per cent said they plan to remigrate within the next year, 7 per cent said they did not know when they would remigrate, and 1 per cent cited "other" plans.

Similar to returned migrants surveyed in other parts of the country, a high proportion (89%) of

Figure 2: Remittances



Ayeyarwady returnees who plan to remigrate said that they intend to go back to the same place they were previously working (the remainder planned to go somewhere else). 75 per cent said they intend to work the same job they worked before the pandemic (men 78%; women 71%), while the remainder planned to work a different job. These figures are similar across the three townships surveyed.

Among Ayeyarwady returnees not intending to remigrate, 69 per cent said they plan to find casual work (men 70%; women 67%), 17 per cent plan to work in the agricultural sector (men 21%; women 11%), 5 per cent said they plan to support their family business (men 2%; women 9%), and 4 per cent said they would do something other than what was listed in the survey. The remainder planned to do either fishing, domestic work or construction. 81 per cent of returnees to Labutta, 64 per cent to Mawlamyinegyun and 58 per cent to Bogale said they plan to do casual work, while 29 per cent of returnees to Mawlamyinegyun plan to work in agriculture (vs 14% in Bogale and 12% in Labutta).

Returned migrants to Ayeyarwady Region have immediate needs resulting from living without a source of income. Around a third (33%) said that livelihood support is of greatest importance, another third (32%) said food support is needed immediately and 18 per cent said civil documentation was a priority. A further 16 per cent cited an immediate need for hygiene items/shelter, and 1 per cent said psychological care. These needs were consistent across the three townships surveyed as well as between men and women.

If the situation improves, there are a number of economic, social and psychosocial support interventions that will be required for returned migrants and their families, beyond satisfying immediate needs. 32 per cent of Ayeyarwady men and women surveyed said that they would benefit from business start-up support; 23 per cent of men and 26 per cent of women said that skills training would be of greatest help; 14 per cent said support finding work in their hometown (men 15%; women 14%) would be helpful; 13 per cent said they would

benefit from help with remigration/support finding employment overseas (men 12%; women 14%); and around 9 per cent of men and women said they would benefit from assistance finding work elsewhere in Myanmar. A further 5 per cent said they would benefit from economic recovery/development support in their community, and 2 per cent cited a need for psychological/psychosocial assistance.

Findings on the experiences of returned migrant workers to Ayeyarwady Region indicates that a high proportion of returnees arrived home after losing their jobs, and that both men and women have experienced high levels of psychological and physical stress both before and after arriving home. Adding to these stressors, around three quarters of Ayeyarwady returnees' households are no longer receiving the remittances that had been their main/only source of income, and almost all returnees surveyed said they did not have any savings to draw on. A high proportion of Ayeyarwady returnees plan to remigrate, and of those who do not, most plan to find casual work.



Sharing COVID19 information in Bogale Township, Ayeyarwady Region. © IOM 2020

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