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著者	Fujita Koichi, Endo Tamaki, Okamoto Ikuko, Nakanishi Yoshihiro, Yamada Miwa
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journal or publication title	IDE Discussion Paper
volume	257
year	2010
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2344/919

IDE Discussion Papers are preliminary materials circulated
to stimulate discussions and critical comments

IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 257

**Myanmar Migrant Laborers in
Ranong, Thailand**

Koichi Fujita, ^{a)} Tamaki Endo, ^{b)} Ikuko
Okamoto, ^{c)} Yoshihiro Nakanishi, ^{c)} Miwa
Yamada^{c)}

Abstract

Thailand is the major destination for migrants in mainland Southeast Asia, and Myanmar (Burmese) migrants account for the dominant share. This paper sheds light on the actual working conditions and the life of Myanmar migrants in Thailand, based on our intensive survey in Ranong in southern Thailand in 2009. We found a wide range of serious problems that Myanmar migrants face in everyday life: very harsh working conditions, low income, heavy indebtedness, risk of being human-trafficking victims, harassment by the police and military (especially of sex workers), high risk of illness including malaria and HIV/AIDS and limited access to affordable medical facilities, and a poor educational environment for their children.

Keywords: Migration, Household, Myanmar, Thailand

JEL classification: E26, E22, J61, R23

a) Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

b) Faculty of Economics, Saitama University

c) Institute of Developing Economies-JETRO

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INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO
3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI
CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN

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Introduction

As the globalization of the world economy has accelerated in recent years, more and more people have been moving across borders. This has been particularly noticeable in mainland Southeast Asia. Thailand has been the major destination for the movement of people from neighboring countries. This has been caused partly by the transitional process to market economies in these neighboring countries which began at the end of the 1980s, and partly induced by the increasing economic disparity between Thailand and these countries.¹ Myanmar (Burmese) migrants account for the dominant share in the total flow of people from the three countries bordering Thailand, namely Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. According to the Thai Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour in 2009, the number of foreign laborers in Thailand was estimated to be about two million, out of which 1.3 million were from these three countries, and Myanmar migrants accounted for 82% of them.

The Burmese socialist regime, set up by General Ne Win in 1962, collapsed in 1988. The major reason for the collapse lay in the failure of economic management under the ‘Burmese Way to Socialism’, which left the people destitute, leading to their discontent which peaked in 1988. However, the military regime rejected any abdication of power even after it lost the general election in 1990, and for the past 20 years it has continued to hold onto power despite harsh international criticism.

To some extent the military regime has achieved economic recovery and development through promoting market liberalization. Nevertheless, the economy is far from sound and has never gotten back on track for further development. Murky and authoritarian economic policies and regulations are still in place in various economic spheres. The halt of international economic assistance has also made economic management of the country more difficult. As a result, the peoples’ living standards have not improved greatly in the past twenty years (See, for example, Fujita et al eds. [2009]). Furthermore, the people are deprived of any political freedom under the military regime and continued to be repressed, which is particularly evident in the case of the ethnic minorities. The reason for the large scale migration from Myanmar to Thailand lies not only in the increasing economic disparity, but also in these kinds of political push factors within Myanmar.

In order to find out in detail the actual living and working conditions of Myanmar migrants in Thailand, we conducted a survey in Ranong Province in southern Thailand in 2009. According to the Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, ‘documented’ Myanmar workers numbered

¹ Another major flow of people is from China (especially Yunnan Province) to Myanmar and Laos. However, this paper will not deal with this issue.

about 1.1 million at the end of 2009. The top-ranking provinces in the order of the number of 'documented' Myanmar migrant laborers are: Bangkok (195,244), Samut Sakhon (152,707),² Chiang Mai (65,988), Surat Thani (60,787), Phuket (56,705), Samut Prakan (49,290). Ranong ranks seventh, with a population of 48,992. Eighth is Tak (45,316). Since Ranong borders Myanmar, migrants from that country account for 99.9% of the migrants from the three countries bordering Thailand. This trend is the same in northern Thailand where Myanmar migrants account for 99.8% in Chiang Mai and 100% in Tak. These figures are only for the 'documented' migrant laborers; as will be described later, much larger numbers of Myanmar migrants are living in these provinces when 'undocumented' workers are included.

The main purpose of this survey was to grasp the real working and living conditions of Myanmar migrants who are working in Ranong in a variety of occupations. As will be described later in more detail, their occupations are diverse. They work in agriculture, forestry, fishing, construction, seafood processing, general work in the public fish market, domestic work, waste-material collection, as sex workers, and more. We did not aim to capture an 'average' picture of Myanmar migrant households in Ranong, thus we did not conduct a random sampling. Even if we wanted to do such a sampling, information on the mother population, which is indispensable for random sampling, was not available from any source. Nor did we have the time to conduct a large-scale survey which could justify for not conducting a random sampling. Therefore, we had to give up doing a quantitative analysis, and decided to focus on obtaining very reliable, detailed, high-quality information. We were able to interview a total of 57 households in our survey.

The survey was done by a Japanese research team during the period of 2008-09.³ The most important component of the survey was the interviews with Myanmar migrants, which was done by the researchers themselves in the Myanmar language. World Vision, an NGO which has been operating in Ranong over the years while maintaining cooperative relations with the Thai authorities, kindly assisted us in conducting the survey, including the selection of sample migrant households for the interviews.

The paper is organized into five sections. Section 1 provides an overview of Ranong, the survey area. Section 2 to Section 4 explain the results of the survey of the 57 households (including 16 households of single people) in a precinct manner. Section 2 describes the timing of migration and its background; Section 3 takes up the working conditions and environment of Myanmar migrant workers, while Section 4 takes up the actual living conditions of their lives. The last section summarizes the survey findings and mentions some remaining issues to be explored in the future.

² Samut Sakhon is also called Mahachai. It is the most important base for the marketing and processing of fishery products in Thailand. Large numbers of Myanmar workers are working in the fishery-related industries in this city.

³ The team consisted of five researchers who specialize in the following fields: two in agricultural economics, one in economics, one in politics and one in law.

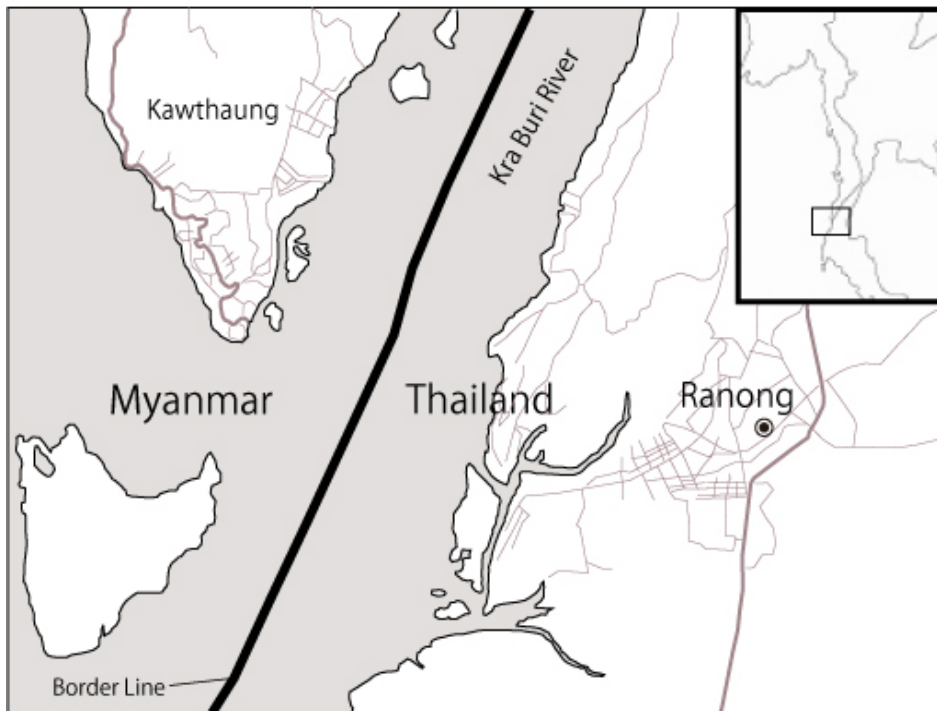
1. Overview of the Survey Area

Ranong is a small fishing port town located in the southern part of Thailand. The Kra Buri River runs down from the north past Ranong town towards the Andaman Sea. This river forms the border between Thailand and Myanmar. Kawthaung, a town at the southern-most point of Myanmar, is located on the opposite side of the river (Figure 1). Ranong has been developed as a center for the fishing and seafood processing industries, where Thai fishing boats land their catches taken from Myanmar waters as well as from Thai waters.⁴ However, during our research period (2008-09), we found that Myanmar migrant workers were deeply embedded in the local economic structure of Ranong, not only in the fishery and seafood processing industries, but also in agriculture, forestry, construction, commerce, domestic service, and in the sex industry. Myanmar migrants were the dominant class of people who were at the bottom of the local economy.

The population of Ranong is about 300 thousand with Thais accounting for about 170 thousand while Myanmar migrants are estimated to be 130 thousand (Clarke [2007], p.44). Thus the Thai and Myanmar populations are relatively similar in size. On the other hand, according to the estimate of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) in 2002 (World Vision [2004], p.9), the Thai population was 133 thousand (2001) and foreign migrants (mostly Myanmar migrants in this case) were 60 thousand. The former figure for the Myanmar population is more than double that to the latter. This large gap does not necessarily come from the difference in the survey years, but rather it suggests the difficulty in estimating the exact number of migrant workers.

⁴ The industrial structure of Ranong is concentrated in primary industries. If we look at the Gross Regional Product (GRP), primary industries made up 60% of the town's industrial sector in 1995 and about 50% in 2000 (during the same period, manufacturing made up 7% and 11%). Among primary industries, the share for the fishery industry is on top at more than 70%. Among all industries, the fishery industry also has the highest ratio, 46% in 1995 and 36% in 2000 (NESDB [2000]).

Figure 1. Ranong and Kawthaung



Source: Prepared by the authors.

According to the report of World Vision, referred to above, the number of ‘documented’ migrant workers in Ranong in 2002 was 22,406 based on an announcement that year by the Ministry of Labour. Among these workers, males numbered 13,887 and females 8,529. If we take a closer look at their occupational categories, 10,617 worked in the fishery and related industries, 3,697 in agriculture, 3,638 in general labor, 1,806 in domestic service, and 931 in the livestock industry. ‘Documented’ workers supposedly means workers having work permits, and if the estimation of the Ministry of Public Health was close to the real figure, we could infer that the total number of migrants was triple compared with the number of ‘documented’ workers. Dependent family members such as housewives, children and the elderly probably make up the majority of ‘undocumented’ workers, but at the same time, the number of illegal migrants is probably not negligible.

As indicated above, it is difficult to grasp the real figures for the number of migrant workers in Ranong. Nevertheless, it is very clear that the local economy of Ranong can no longer be sustained without these Myanmar workers.

2. Migration Period, Place of Origin, Migrating Reasons and Patterns

We conducted a household survey in Ranong in September 2009. The total number of households was 57. We will discuss some characteristics of the migrants, focusing on the period of migration, place of origin, the reasons for migrating and patterns of migration.

Table 1 illustrates the year of migration when household heads and their spouses arrived in Ranong. The latest arrival year was 2009 when one fisherman and two commercial sex workers came to Ranong. The earliest arrival year, on the other hand, was 1978 when the household head of No.30 arrived in Ranong,⁵ followed in 1979 by the arrival of the household head of No.26, who has been working in a rubber plantation since then.⁶

The distribution of the period of migration among 92 of the migrants is set forth in Table 1, i.e., 2 in the late 1970s, 2 in the early 1980s, 10 in the late 1980s, 14 in the early 1990s, 13 in the late 1990s, 20 in the 2000s, and 31 in the late 2000s. Considering that eight out of the ten migrants in the late 1980s came to Ranong in either 1988 or 1989 indicates that the overwhelming majority of the migrants arrived in Ranong after 1988, when the Myanmar economy started to liberalize. The table also shows that more than half of the migrants arrived in Ranong after 2000. Although migrant workers tend to be short-term migrants, the economic stagnation and relatively high inflation in Myanmar in recent years has motivated Myanmar people to emigrate to Thailand.

The patterns of migration among 37 married couples was generally either of the following: wife followed her husband to Ranong where he was already working (17 couples) or both came together (15 couples). There were only four couples where the husband later joined his wife who was already employed in Ranong.

⁵ He left Mawlamyaing, the town of his birth, in 1978 and worked in Myeik in Thanintharyi Division for three months, then in Kawthaung one month. He then migrated to Ranong and worked as a charcoal maker.

⁶ While he was helping on his parents' farm in Dawei, one of his friends asked him to go and work on a rubber plantation in Ranong. He was 17 years old then. However, after he worked three years in Ranong, he returned to Dawei to do farming for five years before returning again to Ranong (No.26).

Table 1 : Years of Migration

Household No	Type of Occupation	The first year he /she arrived in Ranong		Household No	Type of Occupation	The first year he/ she arrived in Ranong	
		Husband	Wife			Husband	Wife
1	Fishery	1999	1995	25	Rubber Plantation	1994	1994
3	Fishery	1994	2004	26	Rubber Plantation	1979	1990
4	Fishery/Seafood Processing	2008	1994	27	Rubber Plantation	1999	2005
6	Fishery	2001	2001	29	Rubber Plantation/Construction	2009	2004
8	Fishery	2001	2001	32	Rubber Plantation	1984	1984
10	Fishery/ Ice Making	1994	2005	28	Wood cutter/ Construction	2001	2001
14	Fisery/NGO	2000	2000	31	Wood cutter/ Sales clerk	2004	2003
19	Fishery	1999	2008	5	Construction	1994	2007(S)
22	Fishery	1989	2005	9	Construction/ Peddling	1990	1992
45	Fishery	1988	1997	30	Construction	1978	1989
53	Fishery	1994	1995	33	Construction/ (Seafood Processing)	2000	2006
54	Fishery	2009	2009	34	Construction/ Cashew nuts	1989	1994
56	Fishery	2007	2003	36	Construction/ (Seafood Processing)	1989	1999
57	Fishery	2002	2002	37	Construction	2006	2006
2	Fishery	2005		38	Farm/Cashew nuts	1994	1994
7	Fishery	2007		49	Navigation of a Carrying Vessel/ Construction/ Weeding	1987	1987
18	Fishery	2006		52	Porter	dead	2007
21	Fishery	2007		55	Collection of Waste Materials/ Fishery	1997	1999
23	Fishery	2005		35	No job (World Vision Volunteer)	1989	Born in Ranong
50	Crab Catching	1997	1997	13	Immigration Broker	1988	1992
51	Crab Catching	2008	2008	11	Sex worker		2008
39	Fish Market/ Construction/ Cashew Nuts	1988	2000	12	Sex worker		2007
40	Fish Market/ (Fishery)	1996	1996	15	Sex worker		2009
43	Fish Market	1999		16	Sex worker		2008
44	Fish Market	2001		17	Sex worker		2008
48	Fish Market/ (Seafood Processing)	2003	2003	20	Sex worker		2008
				24	Sex worker		2008
				41	Sex worker		2007
				42	Sex worker		2009
				46	Sex worker		2007
				47	Sex worker		2005

Source: Authors' Survey.

Table 2 indicates the migrants' places of origin in Myanmar. Thirty five migrants hailed from Dawei, which is the capital of Tanintharyi Division, followed by 23 from Yangon. Those who were from Yangon consisted of 7 men and 16 women including 9 sex workers. The rest of the female sex workers were from Mawlamyaing, the capital of Mon State. In other words, in our samples no woman from Tanintharyi Division was engaged in the sex industry. The third major place of origin was Mawlamyaing (13 people). Other places of origin included Bago (the capital of Bago Division), Patheingyi (the capital of Ayeyarwaddy Division), Pa-an (the capital of Karen State), Sittwe (the capital of Rakhine State), and Mandalay (the capital of Mandalay Division).

Table 2. Hometown

Hometown	Men	Women	Total
Dawei	16	19	35
Yangon	7	16	23
Mawlamyaing	5	8	13
Bago	2	2	4
Patheingyi	3	0	3
Pa-an	1	1	2
Hinthada	2	0	2
Kawthaung	1	1	2
Ye	1	1	2
Mandalay	2	0	2
Wakema	1	0	1
Sittwe	1	0	1
Myawaddy	1	0	1
Kyaukse	1	0	1
Myeik	1	0	1
Taungtha	0	1	1
Total	45	49	94

Source: Authors' Survey.

The reasons for migrating were mainly economic, or accompanying a spouse who was seeking work. In many cases, migrants came to Ranong through personal networks such as relatives or friends. Due to differentials in wage rates between Myanmar and Thailand, Ranong seems to be one of the major destinations for Myanmar migrant workers, especially those from Tanintharyi Division.

Ranong, in comparison with other provinces in Thailand, is not necessarily the best workplace for migrant workers. Very few people in our samples came to Ranong from other places in Thailand; only three people came to Ranong after staying in other provinces in Thailand. The household head of No. 27 initially went to Surat Thani Province and worked on a rubber plantation before coming to Ranong. The household head of No. 29 left Dawei to avoid having to do forced labor for the military government in Myanmar; he lived in Phang Nga Province in Thailand before going to Trang Province, then to Ranong after he found a job on a rubber plantation. The last case was exceptional. The household head of No. 35 had been a soldier with anti-government insurgents in Myanmar. He had hid himself in Ranong during his participation in the resistance movement. He was captured and imprisoned in Myanmar; he escaped and lived in a refugee camp in Thailand. He finally came back to Ranong and got married to a local woman.

The other pattern of migration via another place was that of 15 people who had lived for a while in Kawthaung, the southern-most point of Myanmar, before crossing to Ranong. In many cases, while they were working or looking for a job in Kawthaung, they obtained information about better jobs on the Thai side and crossed the border.

It is worth mentioning that female sex workers migrated through an exceptional recruitment process (as will be described in detail later), even though they migrated for economic reasons. It was found that 10 out of 11 sex workers were deceived by brokers or other people, even friends, who had told them that they would work in a market, restaurants or bars. There was only one migrant woman who knew that she would be a sex worker in Ranong.

3. Working Environment and Conditions of Myanmar Migrant Workers

1) Fishery industry

(1) Fishery workers (19 households)

Thai fishing boats can land their catches at the port of Ranong after operating in Myanmar waters, while Myanmar-owned fishing boats need to land theirs at Kawthaung where they are reloaded onto carrier boats that bring the fish to Ranong after paying duties to the Thai customs on the way.

The majority of Thai fishing boats engage in trawl fishing in Myanmar waters by paying very expensive fishing license fees.⁷ They accept this cost because fishery resources are still abundant in Myanmar waters compared to those in Thai waters. Normally these boats have a crew of 17-18 workers, including a pilot, an engineer, and a cook. Generally, a worker leader is appointed by the owner; this leader plays a very important role as will be described later. The pilot and engineer are normally Thais, while the rest of the crew are Myanmar, including the worker leader and cook. A boat goes out fishing for about 30-40 days and comes back to Ranong to rest for 3-5 days. Then it goes out to sea again.⁸ The duration of time at sea is longer if the operating fishing ground is far from Ranong. For example, a boat operating in Rakhine waters in Myanmar may stay at sea for up to 40 days, while the duration would be only about 30 days if the fishing ground is in Dawei, Myeik or Yangon waters.⁹ Though the number is far less than those operating in Myanmar waters, there are fishing boats operating in the Indian Ocean for six months (catches from these boats are

⁷ The license fee was set according to the gross registered tonnage (GRT) of a fishing vessel and the fishing ground where it operated. For example, the license fee for a boat of GRT 80 operating in the waters of Rakhine would be 11,600 US dollars per time, while it would be 8,700 US dollars if the fishing ground of operation was off Yangon. The fishing boat owner needed to pay 50,000 baht as a commission fee per time to an intermediary company named Siam Jonathan (this was lowered to 35,000 baht in 2009). The total number of licenses issued per year ranged between 100 and 200. Siam Jonathan had two fishing vessels (GRT 100) of its own. This information was obtained from a 21 September 2009 interview at the headquarters of Siam Jonathan in Ranong.

⁸ The timing for fishing operations is decided by the worker leader. In one very extreme case, a boat returned to sea after resting just for a night. By contrast, if a boat needed some major repairs, the fishing workers could spend anywhere from 10 to 30 days resting on land.

⁹ The duration of fishing operations per time was prescribed by agreement with the Myanmar government, together with the license fees.

reloaded to a carrier boat once a month), or those operating in Thai waters,¹⁰ and even in the Gulf of Thailand after passing through the Straits of Malacca and up the east coast of the Malay Peninsula.

The incomes of fishing workers on trawling boats fluctuate according to the catch. If there are more high-value fish in the catch, the workers are eligible to receive a higher reward; if not, their pay will decrease.¹¹ The actual distribution of pay is decided by the worker leader who has been monitoring how each worker worked during the whole fishing period. Therefore, there can be discrepancies in wages among workers on the same boat. Nevertheless, the average wage per worker was 100-200 baht per day, or 3,000-6,000 baht per month. Income for a pilot could be much higher, as much as 12,000 baht monthly. We were unable to interview an engineer, but their pay was supposedly also high considering the required skills. Worker leaders were also paid higher wages than the general workers.¹²

Besides trawl fishing, there are some boats that specialize in long-line fishing.¹³ In this type of fishing, the catch is marked off for each individual worker and payment is made according to the respective catch. However, the average income for general workers doing this type of fishing did not differ much from that of trawl fishing workers, ranging between 3,000 and 6,000 baht per month.

In both types of fishing the cost of meals was borne by the boat owner. Meals consisting of rice, fish and vegetables were provided three to four times a day, although vegetables would be consumed after 15 days or so, thus the rest of the time meals were rice and fish only. The approximate cost of meals per day was about 50-100 baht. Thus, the real daily wage per worker was 150-300 baht if the cost of meals is taken into account.

It is customary for workers to receive some advance payment of wages before going out to sea. For example, a worker told us that when his expected wage was 4,500 baht, 3,000 baht was paid in advance.¹⁴ According to a Myanmar intermediary wholesaler who worked at the public wholesale

¹⁰ Fishing boats operating in Thai waters are smaller in size and have seven workers on board on average. The duration of fishing is about ten days.

¹¹ Therefore, when a boat is fortunate to have a bumper catch, the reward to workers is expected to be high. However, there was a case where a boat had a large catch, and the boat owner got greedy and hesitated to pay a fair share to his workers. He ended up killing the worker leader. However, the Thai owner did not face any criminal charges against for this murder.

¹² Some boats have a rule to pay the leader 10% of the total sales of the catch.

¹³ Long-line fishing does not require a rod. The workers wear leather gloves and handhold a fishing line with several hooks attached. In interviews workers said they could handle 20-30 kg of fish at a time. Bait is small dead fish which is provided by the boat owner. The duration of one fishing trip is ten days. It takes two days to travel to and from the fishing ground. Thus they actually engage in fishing for eight days.

¹⁴ Another example was an advanced payment of 4,000 baht on an expected wage of 6,500 baht for 38 days of fishing. The advance payment can be regarded as a minimum guaranteed wage, and the rest can fluctuate according to the catch and the performance of the worker.

fish market (Mr. N), as will be described again later, he provided interest-free loans as working capital to Myanmar fishing boat owners who operated about ten days per fishing operation in Myeik waters. Part of this loan may have been used to provide advance wages to their fishing workers. A similar custom was also seen for Thai fishing boats.

The workers on fishing boats are only males, who are generally young. The way they work on the fishing boat is as follows.¹⁵ The boat searches for fish using sonar devices, and the workers spread nets once they hit a school of fish. The boat trawls the nets for about two hours. After this operation the workers take a rest for five hours during which the boat searches for more schools of fish, then the trawling starts again. This is repeated for 24 hours. When the workers take a rest, they have meals, bathe (with seawater and rinse with freshwater) and sleep. If it is raining they sleep inside the cabin; in fine weather they lie on the deck. When they get sick or are injured, they use medicine kept on the boat. In a case where the boat has no medicine, the workers use what they have brought with them.

These fishing workers do not necessarily stay with the same fishing boat. Rather, they tend to change boats quite frequently. It seemed that it is not difficult for a worker to find a new fishing boat that is willing to hire him.

Since these workers spend a good deal of time on their boats under very harsh working and living conditions, they tend to spend their few days on land in a great way. Some spent 500 to 1000 baht per night drinking beer and whisky, singing Karaoke, or going to brothels, although there were others who did not drink any alcohol and stayed at home enjoying eating snacks.

(2) Crab catching workers (2 households)

Two households engaged in crab catching. These workers caught crabs in a rocky stretch where many crabs could be found. There was only a single boat, owned by a Thai, for crab catching around that area. The boat normally carried three Myanmar workers. They would leave a small port (different from the one where the public wholesale market is located) and arrive at the rocky stretch in about an hour. As the tide rises, the crabs climb up the rocks. The workers catch the crabs by hand (wearing gloves) while in water up to their chests. They wear water-proof shoes which allow them to walk easily in the water. They wear long-sleeved shirt as well, in order to prevent any scratches from the rocks. They catch crabs of every size. When they have caught all the crabs in a specific spot, they move to another place. After repeating this, they come back to the port by 3-4 o'clock in the morning. The Thai boat owner is at the port awaiting their return to receive the catch of that day. Wages are paid according to the weight of the catch, and it was 15 baht per kilogram at

¹⁵ Interviews suggest that there are variations. For instance, in squid fishing the workers put down nets and pull them up three or four hours later, repeating this operation three times in the morning and twice in the afternoon.

the time of survey. On average, the workers earned about 200 baht per person (the minimum was 30 baht and maximum 300 baht). They told us that it was very tiresome work and they felt very exhausted before getting accustomed to it. We asked whether there was a danger of depleting the crab resources, but they told us that crabs could be found again in the same rocky stretches after four to five days. In the dry season they went out for crab catching about 15 days per month, but this decreased to ten days in the rainy season. They did not work everyday, but they did this job only as they believed the Thai owner (*thaokae* in Thai) they worked for did not like them working for others.¹⁶

(3) Crab farming workers (2 households)

There was no one working on any of the crab farms at the time of the survey. However, two couples used to work on them, so based on their interviews we will describe the working conditions on these farms. This farming is for soft-shell crabs which are marketed before the shells get too hard. These farms are generally located on sandy beaches. The Thai owners of these farms intentionally chose a couple for this work, and paid 6,000 baht per month per couple (the wage was same in 2004 and 2006). Their main tasks were to feed the crabs once a week and to look into the holes where the crabs hid and catch them when they were ready to be marketed.

(4) Crocodile farm worker (1 household)

This may not be within the fishery category in rigorous terms, but we would like to share the case of a Myanmar man (65 years old) who had been working for eight years on a crocodile farm. The man commuted to the farm by bicycle which took him about ten minutes. He worked from 7:00 to 17:00. There was no day off, except when he got sick. He earned 4,000 baht per month at the time of the survey (it had been 2,400 baht in 2001). There were about 100 crocodiles on the farm, and their skins were exported to Malaysia. The worker's main responsibility was to change the water and to feed chickens to the crocodiles every ten days. He had been bitten once by a crocodile. The farm purchased baby crocodiles and sold them when they got 1.5-2 meters long after three to four years. There were two crocodile farms in the area, including this one.

2) General workers at the public wholesale fish market (4 households and 1 person)

We interviewed four Myanmar workers working in the public wholesale fish market at the Ranong port. Three were unskilled laborers and one was a middleman.

¹⁶ Another household gave us slightly different information. He caught crabs using nets and the tides did not matter. During low tide he caught crabs in the trees, and during high tide he caught them on the beach. The working hours were from 18:00 till 4:00 the next morning. His wage was paid on a piece-rate basis. The price for small crabs was 15 baht per kg and that for big crabs 25 baht per kilogram. He went out crab catching 3-4 times per week, thus the monthly income was around 5,000 baht.

One of the unskilled workers normally worked from 6:00 until 17:00. He worked overtime until 21:00 or 22:00 for 10-15 days per month. His *thaokae* provided him a supper around 18:00 when he worked overtime. He was responsible for sorting fish, packing ice and cleaning floors. He received 5,500 baht per month as his basic wage, and his overtime pay was added onto this at the rate of 50 baht per period of overtime. His wage was paid every 15 days and he could get one day paid leave. Any other leave he took was deducted from his wage at a rate of 200 baht per day. He had to buy his own boots to wear at the market, which cost 600 baht per pair and which lasted about six months.

The second worker was employed by an intermediate wholesaler. He worked from 5:00 to 17:00 when the volume of fish was large. When the volume was small, his working hours were from 8:00 until 13:00. He received a fixed wage of 4,000 baht per month. His job was quite similar to that of the worker described above.

The last worker worked only for short hours, from 8:00 to 12:00. His salary was 3,700 baht. His Thai *thaokae* was managing a hotel in Bangkok, for which he bought fish. The worker's task was to collect fish purchased by Thai workers, pack them with ice and load them onto trucks.

The Myanmar middleman we interviewed had a Thai partner. They bought fish in the public wholesale fish market and resold them to buyers coming from Phuket, Surat Thani and Krabi. Their emphasis was on low-margin and high turn over. He worked from 5:00 to 14:00 and received a fixed salary of 5,000 baht per month.¹⁷

Lastly, we would like to add some information about Mr. N, who was an intermediate wholesaler in the public wholesale fish market. He also worked for a Thai *thaokae*. This *thaokae* had an office in the wholesale fish market and he owned a processing factory which employed about 300 workers.

Mr. N owned four fishing boats with his family. He moved to Ranong in 1996, but his brothers and other relatives were still in Myeik and Kawthaung in Myanmar and they all were working together. He managed his own fishing boats while providing working capital (50 thousand baht per fishing operation) to 20 Myanmar fishing boats that operated for ten days in Myeik waters on condition that the catch be sold to Mr. N. However, since Myanmar fishing boats could not land their catches at Ranong port, they had to land them at Kawthaung and reload them onto carrier boats for transport to the Ranong port (which entailed custom clearing and duty payment on the way to Ranong).¹⁸ His turnover was 10 to 50 tons per day and 3% of the value of total sales went to his Thai *thaokae*. Mr. N took 20% of the remaining 97%. The rest went to the fishing boat owners. Mr. N had to pay taxes to the Myanmar and Thai governments, the cost of carrier boats and other expenses such as the labor cost for landing fish at Ranong (350 baht per 70 kg). After deducting all these costs, his monthly income from his intermediate wholesale work was estimated to be around

¹⁷ The salary of his Thai partner was not known.

¹⁸ Low-valued fish that could not fetch a high price was sent to Myeik.

20 thousand baht.

Mr. N had to monitor not only the wholesale price movement in Ranong, but also those in Kawthaung and Myeik in Myanmar, as well as in Bangkok, China and Malaysia in order to capture business chances. The price movement he paid most attention to was that in Malaysia.

3) Agricultural workers (5 households)

Many Myanmar workers are working in the agricultural sector, notably on rubber, oil palm, cashew nut, and orchard plantations. These plantations are located in hilly sparsely populated areas far from the center of Ranong. Because of their remote locations, the majority of these households do not live in tenement houses, but live in old wooden houses located within the plantations. Since agriculture tends to provide only a seasonal income, many of the plantation workers need to find other daily employment, such as construction work, during slack periods.

On a rubber plantation we visited, all the family members who were able to work did so everyday from November to February, except when it rained. The owner allocated plots for collecting rubber latex depending on the available number of laborers in a family. From around 1:00 in the morning workers started to collect rubber latex into cups by chipping the bark, and they continued this until around 6:00 in the morning. After resting and having breakfast, they started mixing the coagulant with the rubber latex and waited for it to coagulate during the period between 7:00 and 10:00. Then from 13:00 they spread the mixture into rubber sheets and washed them. At 18:00 in the evening, they started hanging the sheets to dry. Thin sheets could dry within ten days, while thick ones took about one month. If they were to get wet because of rain, the workers dried the sheets by grilling them on fires. The finished products were handed over to the plantation owner who came to the plantation once every 3-4 days. They were paid on a piece-rate basis which was 15 baht per kilogram at the time of the survey. The average monthly income per worker was 5,000-6,000 baht. Income for a couple could amount to 30-40 thousand baht during the 3-4 month period of the dry season. The wage was not paid every month, but at the end of the season as a lump sum.

Rubber latex could be collected during the rainy season as well, if not everyday. If there was a day when there was a lull in the rain, workers would go out for collecting, in which case a couple's income could reach about 10,000 baht per season (As in the case of the dry season, the wage was only paid as a lump sum at the end of the rainy season).

In the rainy season, besides collecting rubber latex, workers needed to do the weeding of the plantation (in some cases they needed to apply fertilizer) every three to four months. They worked 15 days per time for 2-3 times during 8-9 months (excluding the dry season), and received 100-130 baht per day per person. This weeding and application of fertilizer provided income of 1,500 to

2,000 baht per month.¹⁹

The rubber plantations are often attached to oil palm plantations in which case the workers were required to do weeding for the oil palm plantations as well. However, they did not engage in the harvesting and processing of oil palm, since other workers were employed for these operations.

Regarding the cashew nuts plantation, we were able to interviewed only three female workers who husked the harvested cashew nuts. This job was available only in the rainy season, thus the workers rested during the months of November, December and January. The workers started working from 3-4 o'clock in the morning and continued until noon or the evening. Their wage was on a piece-rate basis which was 15 baht per kilogram. Once accustomed to this work, a worker could finish 10 kg per day and earn 150 baht. But until then, she earned only 100 baht a day.

From the above observations it is quite clear that agricultural work has strong seasonality and there is virtually no work in the slack season. This problem is quite serious for male workers who are the main income earners. They need to seek daily employment opportunities such as construction work. Female workers also try to find opportunities to earn whatever income, by baby sitting, peddling, or even going out to do construction work with their husbands.

4) Wood cutters (2 households and 1 person)

These workers were transported daily by truck from where they lived to the places for cutting wood. These places were located within ten km from their residential quarters. Their working hours were from 7:30 to 17:00. They had a one-hour lunch break for which they brought their own lunches. Normally they formed a team of 6 workers; 4 cut the trees with chain saws while the remaining 2 workers carried the timber. Those who cut the trees got 220 baht per day, while the latter received 150 baht. They could cut 20-30 big trees or 100 smaller ones per day. This work was available 25 days per month on average.

5) Construction workers (8 households)

Construction workers were transported by big trucks everyday in the early morning from where they lived to construction sites and came home in the evening. When they completed the construction work in one place, they were transferred to another. The average working hours were from 7:30 to 17:30, and they had a one-hour lunch break. Male workers got 180-200 baht per day, while females got 150 baht. If a worker took part in a job on a temporary basis, the wage tended to be lower than these figures. They needed to bring their own lunch. Male workers could work 25 days per month, while it was only 20 days for female workers. Thus, the average monthly income

¹⁹ Some owners paid a daily wage only to one person, even though several family members engaged in weeding.

was around 4,500-5,000 baht for males, and 3,000 baht for females.

6) Navigation worker of a carrying vessel (1 household)

One male worker (21 years old) engaged in the navigation of a carrying vessel. This vessel transported iron, stones and cement to Phayam Island. His workday began around 3:00 in the morning, and he came home at around 15:00. He had started this job two months ago. His daily wage was 200 baht. This work was available for 4-6 days per week.

7) Porter (1 household)

In the carrying vessel described above, there were 3 to 4 Myanmar workers on board. One of them was a 20-year old male worker. He worked from 9:00 to 15:00 and earned 280 baht; he brought his own lunch. His working days per month varied from month to month, anywhere from 10 to 30 days, and the average was 20 days. Thus his monthly income was less than 6,000 baht.

8) Waste-materials collector (1 household)

This work was collecting waste materials (e.g. scrap iron, glass and plastic bottles, electric wire) to sell to a Thai employer (*thaokae*). He left home around 5:00 in the morning to start collecting and came home around 13:00 in the afternoon. The *thaokae* came to pick up the collected materials once a month. His monthly income varied, but was between 4,000 and 5,000 baht on average. It was 6,000 baht in July 2009, but in August the same year he earned nothing at all as it was Ramadan. He had been doing this job for 11 years. At one time there had been 10 workers collecting waste materials who had been living in his residential quarters, but this had dropped to 2-3 workers at the time of the survey. The main reason for this drop was the decrease in prices. Those who quit this work left the residential quarters to be fishing workers.

9) NGO worker (1 temporary staff and 2 volunteers)

We interviewed one temporary staff worker who was hired only when World Vision held training. The working time was from 8:00 till 17:00 with a lunch break of one hour, the lunch being provided when a training session was held. The daily wage was 150 baht. Since the work was available only 15-20 days per month, it would not be sufficient to support a family. However, this worker's household could do well enough because he had three sons who were working as fishing workers. There were two other volunteer workers (one male and one female) who worked occasionally, but they were not paid other than transportation cost.

10) Immigration brokers

Immigration brokers assist Myanmar people in crossing the border from Kawthaung, and take commission fees for this service. There were two female brokers in one household, but we could not obtain detailed information on how they did their business.

11) Seafood processing factory workers (12 cases)

A large number of seafood processing factories, especially for prawn (peeling, removing heads and guts) and fish (cutting off the heads), hire many Myanmar workers. The factories range from big ones, such as the Siamchai International Food Co. LTD (SIFCO) and Andaman Sea Food, to middle and marginal ones. Myanmar female workers make up a dominant share of the workforce in these factories. Based on our interviews, including with those who used to work in these factories, we were able to get a detailed description of their working environment and conditions.

The working conditions at SIFCO, which is the biggest company in Ranong, are as follows: The basic working hours were from 8:00 to 21:00. Workers had to work throughout these hours, except for the lunch time break (12:00-13:00) and one 30-minute break. After 17:00 was overtime work, and 25 additional baht per hour was paid. Toilet breaks were allowed but only five minutes per time, and one of the Thai staff would follow to monitor the worker. The workers could only take 4-5 days off per month. The wage was paid on a piece-rate basis, and if a worker had sufficient skills, she could earn 130-140 baht per day, or 4,000-5,000 baht per month. The wage was settled every 15 days but was paid in cash only 5 days later.²⁰ What especially drew our attention was that the workers needed a fair amount of money to start working in the factory. They had to purchase 4 sets of jackets (50 baht per set), 2 sets of pants (100 baht per set), 2 sets of long rubber boots (200 baht per set) and they had to pay 1,000 baht as an entrance fee to the company (this could have, in fact, been a bribe).²¹ One female worker needed to sell her TV (1,000 baht) and took out a loan at an interest rate of 20% per month in order to meet all these costs. The company put up 4,500 baht for her, which was necessary to obtain a work permit (it was valid for one year), and 300 baht was deducted from the wage settled every 15 days. It took about six months for her to repay her debt.

Despite these harsh working conditions, many Myanmar female workers want to work at SIFCO. One 25-year old female worker transferred to a smaller Chinese seafood processing factory which employed about 80 workers, as she felt she could no longer endure working at SIFCO. However, she returned to the SIFCO five months later because she found the working conditions at the Chinese factory were not as favorable as she had expected, including the wage which was as low as 2,500 baht per month. The benefit of working at SIFCO was that workers would not be

²⁰ If they had perfect attendance, they got a reward of 15 kg of rice.

²¹ It was said that this entry fee system had been abolished two months before we did our survey.

arrested if they were employed by that company, and they could get free transportation to the factory they worked at.

The working conditions of another large company, the Andaman Sea Food, were as follows: This company dealt only with prawns and the workers were responsible for peeling the shells and removing the heads and guts. The working hours were 15 hours per day; from 6 to 11 in the morning, 12 to 17 in the afternoon, and 18 to 23 in the evening. Workers did not work in three shifts; they continued working for 15 hours. The wage was paid on a piece-rate basis, regardless of the time slots. It was eight baht per kilogram for small prawns, and eight baht per two kilograms for big ones. An average worker could complete 20 kg in five hours (50 kg for a very efficient worker). Their daily wage was only 160 baht, even though they work very long hours. Furthermore, the majority of workers in this factory tended to suffer very similar damage their health, and the cost of treatment was not negligible.²² They could take two unpaid days off a month, but if they took more than three days off, other than for health reasons, they would be fired instantly. This company did not provide a free transportation for workers unlike SIFCO, thus the workers felt very insecure when they went home very late at night.²³

Similar to that of SIFCO, the workers needed a fair amount of money when they entered the company. According to one 25-year-old female worker, she needed to purchase 2 sets of long-sleeved jackets (200 baht per set), 2 sets of short-sleeved jackets (120 baht per set), 2 sets of pants (120 baht per set), 2 hats (80 baht each), 2 masks (20 baht each), 2 pairs of gloves (35 baht per pair) and 1 pair of long rubber boots (90 baht). She also needed to pay an entrance fee of 2,500 baht (considered to be a bribe). The total cost was 3,740 baht. As she did not have sufficient money, she had to take out a loan at an interest rate of 40% per month.²⁴

The following is information from our interviews about other fishing-related factories.

- a) A factory with 1,000 workers: The working hours were from 8:00 to 17:00; workers had 2-3 days off per month; the monthly wage was about 3,000 baht with lunch provided by the factory.
- b) A factory with 200 workers: The working hours were from 5:00 to 18:00; there was a day off every week; the monthly wage was 3,000 baht. The workers had to commute on foot to the factory, and they brought their own lunches.
- c) A Chinese factory with 80 workers: The workers degutted the fish; the monthly wage was

²² One worker worked at the factory from 2003 to 2004 and suffered damaged to her health. She returned to Kawthaung and was hospitalized for one month. She then had to stay at a rented house for five months to recover fully.

²³ Payday was the most 'dangerous day' for workers. On that day they tried to go home in groups. There was a report of an incident in which 20-30 Myanmar female workers were attacked and killed on their way home on payday.

²⁴ A Thai money lender had given a loan at to a Myanmar migrant who had acted as an intermediary for the interviewee, and that money was relent out to the interviewee at an additional 10% per month.

2,500 baht.

- d) A shrimp processing factory with 30 workers: The working hours were 7:00 to 15:00; the work was available for ten days per month for six months; the daily wage was 50-70 baht.
- e) A squid processing factory with 6-7 workers: The working hours were 5:00 to 17:00; the daily wage was 100-130 baht.
- f) An ice factory: The working hours were 6:00 to 21:00; the wage for male workers was 3,300 baht per month.

12) Other employment opportunities for female workers

- a) Doing weeding on plantations for a daily wage of 100 baht.
- b) Packing tobacco leaves in a factory. Working hours were from 8:30 to 17:00; wages were paid on a piece-rate basis; the workers normally got 40 baht for three hours of work; a workers daily income was between 80-100 baht.
- c) Domestic worker (commuting): Monthly salary was 3,500 baht. A daily wage paid to a domestic worker who worked in the morning only (8:00 to 11:00) was 60 baht.
- d) Sales clerk at a grocery store (selling sugar, chillies, etc): Working hours were from 8:00 to 17:00 with a 30-minute break; she worked a half-day on Sundays; her monthly wage was 4,000 baht.
- e) A nurse: Patients came to see her at her house; she gave consultation and provided some medicine; she also worked as a birth attendant. Her income was 6,000-7,000 baht per month; she received 1,500 -2,000 baht when she assisted in a delivery.

13) Sex workers (11 cases)

There are two areas in Ranong where many karaoke bars and brothels are located. One area is regarded as 'high-grade' where the clientele is mainly Thais. The other is seen as 'low-grade' where the main clients are Myanmar workers (mostly fishery workers). The latter is located in a back street of a residential area where many fishing workers live.

We interviewed 11 Myanmar sex workers, out of which 7 were from the 'high-grade' area and 4 from the 'low-grade' area. We requested World Vision to arrange the interviews; they were in the daytime. The interviews for the former group were done in the Ranong Public Hospital; for the latter, was they were done in the World Vision clinic. Key points of their lives that we obtained from the interviews are described below. A to G were from the 'high-grade' area; H-K were from the 'lower-grade' area.

- A) Twenty-one years old. She was from Yangon. Her father (50 years old) was a masseur and mother (40 years old) was a street vender in Yangon. She completed only 1st standard in

primary school. She started to help her mother with her work when she was 15 years old. She got married at the age of 17 but divorced six months later. She came to Ranong in January 2008 and started to work as a sex worker. Four to five Myanmar girls were working in the same brothel. When she arrived in Ranong, she contacted a *thaokae*, who was introduced by a friend in Yangon (this *thaokae* was a Myanmar living in Ranong for ten years). She knew what she was supposed to do before she came to Ranong. She had more Thai clients. She did not like Myanmar clients as they tended to be rough. The payment was 300 baht for a 'short', from which she got 150 baht, and 900 baht for a 'stay', from which she got 450 baht.²⁵ She was paid in cash every 15 days from the *thaokae*.²⁶ Her monthly income was between 25-30 thousand baht.²⁷ She sent money to her parents, 100-200 thousand kyat (US \$100-200) every month. She borrowed 100 thousand kyat from a friend when she came to Ranong, and was able to repay it after six months. She had a work permit which the *thaokae* had arranged at the cost of 6,000 baht. With the work permit, she felt secured as she would not get arrested. She had taken out a loan (20,000 baht) without interest from the *thaokae* a month earlier (August 2009). She used that money to buy a house in Yangon. She could speak a little Thai. She always asked all her clients to use condoms. She learned about HIV/AIDS only when she came to Ranong. She took HIV/AIDS test every month at the public hospital (where the interview took place) and also had a blood test once every three months. She got a sexually transmitted disease once and got treatment which the *thaokae* had paid for. She wanted to go back to Myanmar in April 2010. She said she would tell her *thaokae* that she would go back only temporarily, but she would not come back to Ranong again.

B) Nineteen years old. She was a Mon from Mawlamyaing but lived with her grandmother in Yangon from the age of five. Her parents were farmers in Mawlamyaing. She had two elder brothers. She had completed up to 9th standard in school. She was single. She had had no job in Yangon. She met a broker there who told her that "there is a job selling things in a market." She believed the broker, and she came to Ranong with her friend in November 2008. When she arrived at Ranong, she was told that she owed 32,000 baht to the broker, thus she had no choice but to start working as a sex worker two days later. Her clients were mostly Thais who were in their 40s and 50s. They paid 300 baht for a 'short' and 1,000 for a 'stay.' Half of that price went

²⁵ A 'short' was a short-time stay with a client for a limited number of minutes or hours; under a 'stay' the worker spent the night with the client.

²⁶ Besides the payment from the *thaokae*, girls may have received tips from clients, as has also been suggested by Human Rights Watch (1993).

²⁷ This figure is obviously far higher compared to the incomes of other sex workers, thus she might have provided the 'gross amount', in which case, after deducting for various costs, she would have earned.

to her as her earnings. She earned 25-30 thousand baht per month.²⁸ She repaid all her debt to *thaokae* in March 2009. She sent 100 thousand kyat in April, 300 thousand kyat in June and 200 thousand kyat in August to her family from Kawthaung (100 thousand kyat is equivalent of 100 US dollars). She was arrested once by the police in the market, and the *thaokae* paid the fine for her. She obtained a work permit with the assistance of her *thaokae* at the cost of 7,000 baht. She made a phone call to her parents once a month, but she told them that she was working in a seafood processing factory. She felt the job was mentally demanding. She hated drunken clients. She tried to reject any clients who declined to use condoms. She learned about HIV/AIDS only when she came to Ranong. She was tested for HIV/AIDS once every three months. The *thaokae* had told her that she could go back to Myanmar after she worked for one year and she definitely would do so. If she ran away and got brought back, she knew she would get beaten badly. She did not have anyone to talk to whenever she felt very sad. The only thing she could do was to write down those feelings in a notebook.

C) Seventeen years old. She was from Yangon. Her parents died when she was very young. Her aunt raised her from the age of three. Her uncle was working in a timber factory and brother was a construction worker. She had no schooling. She worked as a factory worker for a year in Yangon. She met a female broker who told her that there was a job selling garments. She and another girl were accompanied by a woman from Yangon to Kawthaung by air and crossed the border in a small boat which could carry ten people or so. This happened on 12 June 2009. Another Myanmar man was waiting in Ranong and took them to a brothel. The other girl ran away, saying she would never do the job. However, the interviewee said she gave up as she did not have any money and was told she had a debt and that she could go back after working for four months. She was a virgin and had to take clients from the first day. Thais made up 80-90% of her clients. She was told that the price was 1,200 baht per client and half of that would be her earnings. But she had not received any earnings up to the time of the survey, though she received 50-100 baht for daily expenses. She was also told that she had a debt of 9,000 baht, which included the cost of obtaining a work permit (which was 4,000 baht), but she had never seen her work permit. She did not know how to record figures, so she had no idea how much she had earned. There were ten Myanmar girls working in the same brothel. She suspected that three or four of them had been deceived into working in the brothel. A room was allotted to each girl, which was also where they took their clients. She felt that there was no way out, so she would go back to Myanmar after she earned enough money to cover the cost of an eye operation for her brother and to build a house. All her clients used condoms. She came

²⁸ Same as footnote 27.

to the clinic to have an examination on the orders of her owner. It was her first time and she did not know the purpose of examination. She had no contact with her family as she could not afford to pay for a phone call which she had been told would cost 200 baht per call.

D) Twenty-two years old. She was from Yangon. She had parents, one elder brother and one younger sister. Her father and brother were in the army. She completed her schooling up to 4th standard. She worked in a garment factory for a year and earned 20 thousand kyat (20 US dollars) per month. A woman in her neighborhood approached her saying “there is work in a beer hall in Ranong.” The woman accompanied her and another girl to Ranong where she found out that the ‘job’ was being a ‘sex worker’ (she worked in the same brothel as C). She was told that she had a debt of 10,000 baht for the cost of bringing her to Ranong. She was a virgin, so her first client paid 5,000 baht. After that the price was 350 baht half of which was paid to her. Her clients were 80-90% Thais. She had been arrested three times when she was out walking in the street. She was told by the owner that the fine, 20,000 baht, became her debt. The owner took all the money that clients paid, and she was given 50-100 baht for daily expenses. However, she managed to record how much she earned. She got married in Ranong, but continued her job. She was now divorced and had a two-year old son. She contacted her mother once a month. Her mother was the only person who knew what she was doing in Ranong. Many clients were drunk and they sometimes refused to use condoms. She received a contraception injection once a month.

E) Nineteen years old. She was from Yangon. Her mother remarried to an artist who did not have a regular income: and thus her mother had a huge amount of debts. She had an elder brother who had completed 5th standard and worked in a processing factory. She had gone to school up to 8th standard. She wanted to be a cosmetics sales clerk, therefore she travelled from Yangon to Dawei by car and then took a boat to Kawthaung. From Kawthaung she crossed the border by small boat to Ranong after paying 1,000 baht. She spent all her money (60 thousand kyat or 60 US dollars) on the trip. It was just a year ago (2008). She found a friend in Ranong who used to be her class mate. The friend advised her to ‘sell beer’ and she ended up in the present job; she had been deceived. She was a virgin, but had no idea how much the client paid for it. She was arrested by the police three times, and had to pay a 2,000-baht fine each time. She was also arrested by the military and was taken into custody for ten days. No meal was provided while she was being held by the military, and she had to survive on food given by someone outside. She was freed after paying a fine of 10,000 baht. Her priority was to send 3,000 baht to her mother. Many clients were drunk and refused to use condoms. In the worse

cases, she was beaten by the clients. She was checked for pregnancy at the clinic every week. She also had a HIV/AIDS examination once a month. She still had a 16,000-baht debt to the owner, which was a bit less than the peak amount which had been 20,000 baht. She believed that she would be able to repay the debt in full within two months, and she wished to go back to Myanmar.

F) Twenty-three years old. She was from Yangon. She had two other sisters. Her parents divorced when she was very young, and she was raised in a village (the exact place was not known) by her uncle and aunt who were farmers. She went to a kindergarten for a month. She regained contact with her parents in 2000. She started to live with her father's family in Yangon in 2002; she was 16 years old then. But she did not get along with the stepchildren of her father, so she started to live with her mother's family in 2004. Her mother had also remarried and had a daughter. She worked in a restaurant earning 10-12 thousand kyat per month (equivalent of 10-20 US dollars) until 2007 when she moved to Myeik. During that period, she got married but divorced soon after. Her elder sister also divorced around 2007, but as she was pregnant her situation was worse. Her family needed money, therefore she moved to Myeik, and a friend who was a domestic worker for an affluent family in Myeik introduced her to the family to do the same job. She started working for the family as a domestic worker earning 15 thousand kyat (15 US dollars) per month. However, the friend working in the same house quit the job, and had to work alone in the huge house she decided to go back to her mother's home in Yangon. A few days after she came home, the cyclone (Nargis) hit the city causing great hardship. A Myanmar woman whose husband was a Thai and whom she had come to know in Myeik told her that "there is a job which pays 35 thousand kyat (35 dollars) per month in Kawthaung." She believed these words and went with her. Eventually she was taken to Ranong and started work at a massage parlor for five days. At that time, the woman demanded that she repay her debt of 10,000 baht. She asked the massage shop owner to lend her money, but she was refused. Instead she was introduced to a brothel where she was working at the time of the survey. All these events happened in September 2008. When she came to the brothel, she discovered her debt had increased to 15,000 baht. However, she was able to repay the debt within four months. Her clients were charged a price of 350 baht for a 'short', 800-1200 baht for a 'stay', and half of the amount was her income. She was arrested twice by the police and had to pay fines of 2,000 baht and 3,000 baht. Her *thaokae* paid the fines, and she already repaid him. Her monthly income ranged between 5,000 and 6,000 baht and she sent 100 thousand kyat (3,000-3,500 baht) to her mother in Yangon. Most of her clients were willing to use condoms, but some were not. She had a contraception injection every three months. She wanted to go back to Myanmar, but she felt she could do so only after she saved enough money.

G) Twenty-one years old. She was from Yangon. Her parents divorced when she was two years old and she grew up with her mother. She had an elder sister. Her mother was a vegetable seller. She had completed up to 7th standard. She got married in Mawlamyaing in September 2008. She worked with her husband at a beer hall (monthly income was 10,000 kyat or 10 US dollar). They had to return to Yangon four months later, and from around that time she suffered from her husband's domestic violence. She decided to divorce. Shortly thereafter she was approached by a woman originally from Rakhine State who was living in her neighbourhood. She was taken to Ranong via Dawei, Myeik and Kawthaung. She was charged with the travel cost which became her debt, then told she had to work in a brothel if she did not have the money to repay the debt. Around the same time, she learned she was three-months pregnant by her ex-husband.

Despite being pregnant, she had to continue to work in the brothel. The price was 300 baht for a 'short' and 1000 baht for a 'stay'. Half of that amount was supposed to be her income, but 100 baht per day was deducted by the owner as the cost for meals and water. When she was six-months pregnant, she was arrested by the police and kept in custody for two months. After she was freed, she was allowed to live in the owner's house and washed dishes for them. She gave birth to her son in the Ranong Hospital. The hospital did not charge her as they had sympathy to her. She restarted work as a sex worker only a month after giving birth. She raised her son until he was seven months old. However, given her low income, which ranged between 2,000 and 3,000 baht per month after making payment on her debt, she felt she would not be able to raise her son. Thus she begrudgingly decided to place him in the care of a Myanmar couple who was originally from Dawei. We could see during the interview that she deeply regretted this. She said she might have been able to raise her son if she had earned 5,000 baht per month. She had a work permit which she obtained by borrowing 3,500 baht. Half of the clients used condoms. She had contraception injections once a month. She also had taken a blood test twice, but she did not know the results. She wanted to go back to Myanmar in October 2010. She thought she needed 150-200 thousand kyat (150-200 US dollars) for travel costs.

H) Twenty-two years old. She was from Mawlamyaing. Her father was a farmer and mother managed a tea shop. She completed schooling up to 5th standard. She ran off together with her boyfriend and got married against her parents' will. The two of them moved to Kawthaung. She worked as a waitress in tea shops and restaurants, but her husband did not work at all. This caused quarrels all the time. They divorced one and a half years later, and she moved to Mahachai where her mother (she was already divorced) was working on an orange plantation. She stayed with her mother for about one and half years. Then her father and grandmother (she

was blind at that time) contacted her to come back to Kawthaung as they were facing some difficulties. She was in Kawthaung for a few days when she met a broker who assisted her and her friend to cross the border at a cost of 3,500 baht. This was in 2008. The broker told them “there is work in a restaurant,” but where he took them was a brothel. The price was 500 baht for a ‘short’ and 1,500 baht for a ‘stay’. Half of that money was her income, but 1,000 baht per month was deducted by the owner for the cost of meals, water and cleaning. Furthermore, 1,000-2,000 baht was deducted as repayment for the cost of a work permit. Thus, her net income was in the range of 4,000 to 10,000 baht. She was able to earn 10,000 baht the very first month, so she repaid her debt with the money. Her younger brother (in 8th standard) and sister (in 7th standard) were still in school staying with her father. She sent money every two months to pay for their school fees. She was able to send 150-180 thousand kyat (5,000-6,000 baht) per time to her family, but one time she was able to send 900 thousand kyat (30,000 baht). In 2009 she sent money four times. In her brothel there were five Myanmar girls. The clients were all Myanmar. She went back to Kawthaung at the Burmese New Year and spent ten days there. She planned to go back to Myanmar in the coming November (of 2009) and would never return to Ranong. If possible, she wanted to go with her brother and sister to her mother’s place in Mahachai.

I) Seventeen years old. She was from Yangon. Her father was a masseur and fortune teller. Her mother lived in Kawthaung. Her younger brother (five years old) and younger sisters (13 and seven years old) were also in Kawthaung. She had three older sisters, and two of them were married and living in Bangkok (Their husbands were fishing workers and the sisters were working in seafood processing factories). She went to school up to 2nd standard. She was single; she had a boyfriend and was not a virgin. She was approached by a broker in February 2009 who induced her to work in a noodle shop in Ranong. She worked at the noodle shop for the first month (her wage was 1,500 baht per month). However, she ran short of money, so she moved to the brothel which the owner of the noodle shop ran as well. She repaid her debt to the broker, which was 1,500 baht, from the money she earned at the noodle shop. There were seven Myanmar girls in the same brothel. The clients were all Myanmar. She received 175 baht out of the 400 for a ‘short’ and 450 baht out of the 1000 for a ‘stay’. Payment was settled every 15 days. Her monthly income ranged between 10,000 and 12,000 baht. However, since the 200-baht per day that she received for daily expenses was deducted, the actual amount of cash she received was 5,000-6,000 baht. She sent almost all the money to her family in Kawthaung. She contacted her family once a week. She had returned to Kawthaung three times when she had fallen sick. Her parents believed she was working in a noodle shop. She did not have a work permit. She was arrested twice by the police. Her *thaokae* had paid for the fines for her,

but she did know how much the fines were. She still owed 2,000 baht to her *thaokae*. Most of her clients used condoms, but she sometimes had to struggle to make them do so. She had contraception injections at the clinic, but never had a blood test. She wanted to quit her job, but could not because she did not have money. If she had the money, she would go to Bangkok rather than going back to Kawthaung.

J) Thirty years old. She was from Mawlamyaing. Her father was a bus driver and mother a housewife. She had one elder brother, one elder sister and four younger brothers. Two of them were already married. She had completed school up to 5th standard. She had married a navy sailor in Mawlamyaing, but divorced because he cheated on her. She had no children. She had lived in destitution in Mawlamyaing while earning money to pay for her younger brother's school fees. Around that time she met a broker (a Myanmar woman) and taken to Kawthaung to 'work in a market as a seller.' She worked in a restaurant (earning 7,000-8,000 kyat with three meals) for 1-2 months. She decided to go to Ranong when she heard from a friend working there that wages were higher in Ranong. This was in 2005. There were six Myanmar girls in the same brothel run by a Thai owner. She assumed that nobody in the brothel had been deceived to be there. The clientele was 80-90% Myanmar. The price was 300 baht for a 'short' and 1,000 baht for a 'stay'. Half the amount was her earnings. Payment was settled every 15 days. She was able to send 50 thousand kyat (50 US dollars) back home after one year. Thereafter she sent 100,000 kyat every two months. She was arrested by the military in 2007 and kept in custody for 45 days. Fifty to sixty people were in the same prison and they were ordered to wash the dishes used by the criminals. Her 9,000-baht fine was paid for by her *thaokae*, which she repaid in 500-1,000-baht instalments when she received her earnings every 15 days. She got a work permit in July 2009 which cost 4,500 baht. She borrowed the money from her *thaokae* and repaid 500 baht every 15 days. Her clients used condoms. She came to clinic every week and had contraception injections every three months. She had had blood tests two to three times and the results were good. She could speak Thai (she understood general conversation). Her parents did not know her job. She wanted to go home, but had no savings.

K) Twenty-five years old. She was from Yangon. Her father was a construction worker and mother a housewife. She had two elder sisters and one brother, and all of them were married. She was fortunate to have gone to school up to 10th standard. She got married at the age of 18 but divorced two years later because she did not get along with her parents-in-law. Her son, who was five years old at the time of survey, was cared for by her parents and went to kindergarten. She had worked as an apparel seller for 4-5 months and earned 20 thousand kyat (20 US dollars) per month. In November 2007 she met a broker (a Myanmar woman) and

started to work in a tea shop in Kawthaung. Her salary was 20 thousand kyat with three meals. The work was very tiring as she had to work very long hours (from 5:00 to 24:00), and she had to sleep in a big room with others. She worked for one month. Around that time she was approached by a Myanmar female broker (her husband was a Thai) who induced her to work in a noodle shop in Ranong. She decided to do so and came to Ranong. The travel cost was 2,000 baht, and she was initially told that the cost would be borne by the owner of the noodle shop. However, it was not the case. She had to pay the cost which became her debt. She worked at the noodle shop for a month, but was arrested by the military and kept in custody for five days (there were 200 people who were arrested at that time). She was sent back to Kawthaung and spent five days there. She returned to Ranong through the arrangements of the noodle shop owner. Her debt had risen to 5,000 baht by then. She thought she would not be able to pay it back, thus started to work as a sex worker. Her *thaokae* was a Myanmar woman who was 35 years old. The price was 300 baht for a '25-minutes short' (she earned 125 baht), 450 baht for a '1 hour short' (she earned 200 baht) and 1,000-1,200 baht for a 'stay' (she earned 400-550 baht). Meals and utility costs were deducted from her total earnings, thus she earned in the range of 2,000-5,000 baht per 15 days. She still had a debt of 2,500 baht. She hoped she could go back to Myanmar in April 2010 after saving some money. But she did not want to go back to her home in Yangon, since she did not get along with her brothers and sisters. Her parents did not know what she was doing in Ranong. She wanted to have her own house. She did not think that she would not have another chance to have a happy marriage. She always asked clients to use condoms. She travelled to Dawei to get a blood test every three months; the cost was borne by the Global Fund.

When we gleaned from the information above the figures for income per capita by occupation, we found that migrant workers without any special skills (excluding sex workers) could earn 4,000-6,000 baht per month in the case of males, and 3,000 baht in the case of females with the exception of those who worked long hours at the large seafood processing factories where the women earned 4,000-4,500 baht monthly.

Table 3 shows the number of household members, members able to work, income and household expenditure for the 57 households surveyed. It is clear that household income is close to the multiple numbers of the workers in the household.

Household expenditure is shown according to purpose, i.e., house rent, water, electricity and gas, meals, education, transportation, telecommunication, leisure, the cost for acquiring a working permit (which often takes the form of debt repayment to the *thaokae*), other debt repayment, and 'other'. 'Other' includes the cost for clothes, medication, funerals and weddings, and religious affairs.

Table 3 Family Structure, Income and Expenditure of Surveyed Households

Household No	Type of Occupation	Number of Family Members		Number of Family Members Able to Work		Monthly Income (Baht)	Number of Spongers	Monthly Household Expenditures										Surplus (Income-Expenditure) (Baht)	Remittances to Myanmar (Baht)
		Male	Female	Male	Female			Rent	Water/Electricity/Gas	Food	Education	Transportation	Telecommunication	Leisure	Debt Repayment including Work Deposit	Others	Total		
1	Fishery	1	1	1	0	5,750	3	1,200	900	3,000		2,000	450	1,500		150	9,200	-3,450	2,800
3	Fishery	2	2	1	0	4,500	1	2,000	1,700	3,000		0	0	0		450	7,150	-2,650	0
4	Fishery/ Seafood Processing	2	2	2	2	27,000	10	2,500	850	4,000		550	800	1,000		1,200	10,900	16,100	0
6	Fishery	2	1	2	0	10,000	1	1,200	400	6,000		600	600	5,000		500	14,300	-4,300	5,750
8	Fishery	2	2	1	0	12,000	2	1,800	700	2,400	120	0	0	1,000		50	6,070	5,930	500
10	Fishery/Ice Making	2	2	1	1	15,300	10	1,200	800	3,000		2,300	1,000		0	150	8,450	6,850	750
14	Fishery/NGO	4	1	4	0	18,500	0	1,200	1,500	3,500	0	170	500	600	700	2,400	10,570	7,930	420
19	Fishery	1	1	1	1	8,000	10	2,000	0	3,000	0	200	0	2,500		100	8,320	-320	0
22	Fishery	2	1	1	0	3,000	0	1,000	500	1,860	0	2,000	0	160	1,575	300	7,395	-4,395	260
45	Fishery	2	1	1	0	7,000	2	0	1,560	?	0	?	?	3,000		420	?	7,000	0
54	Fishery	1	1	1	0	3,000	0	1,000	200	2,000	0	10	200	0	530	200	4,140	-1,140	0
53	Fishery	2	3	2	1	11,000	0	1,500	750	3,000	0	60	400	0	375	900	6,985	4,015	660
56	Fishery	3	1	3	0	14,100	0	1,000	750	5,000	380	60	150	2,000	300	1,000	10,640	3,460	0
57	Fishery	1	3	1	0	3,500	0	1,200	400	5,000	200	0	15	30	800	500	8,145	-4,645	0
2	Fishery	1	0	1	0	3,400	Sponger							1,000			1,000	2,400	1,000
7	Fishery	1	0	1	0	7,000	Sponger			300		500		300			1,100	5,900	3,250
18	Fishery	1	0	1	0	5,000	Rent with 7 people							4,000	100		4,100	900	0
21	Fishery	1	0	1	0	5,000	Sponger			750				800	0		1,550	3,450	700
23	Fishery	1	0	1	0	6,500	Sponger							6,500	0		6,500	0	0
50	Crab Catching	1	0	0	0	5,000	5	350	550	4,000	0	200	0	0	380	1,000	6,480	-1,480	250
51	Crab Catching	3	2	1	0	2,500	0	700	700	6,000	0	?	150	900	375	300	9,125	-6,625	0
39	Fish Market/Construction/Cashew Nuts	3	1	2	(1)	10,000	0	0	810	6,000	0	1,500	800	0	1,350	430	10,890	-890	0
40	Fish Market/ (Fishery)	3	2	1	1	5,000	2	800	750	6,000	500	180	?	2,000	930	250	11,410	-6,410	1,350
43	Fish Market	1	0	1	0	3,700	0	1,000	300	1,500	0	0	0	2,000	530	80	5,410	-1,710	0
44	Fish Market	1	0	1	0	5,500	0	1,000	400	1,200	0	300	0	3,000	0	450	6,350	-850	0
48	Fish Market/ (Seafood Processing)	1	1	1	(1)	6,000	0	1,000	600	6,000	0	130	300	400	460	280	9,170	-3,170	0
25	Rubber Plantation	1	2	1	1	3,300	0	0	0	3,300	0	0	300	370	?	160	4,130	-830	550
26	Rubber Plantation	1	1	1	1	4,500	0	0	0	4,000	0	320	250	1,000	520	0	6,090	-1,590	350
27	Rubber Plantation	1	1	1	1	3,300	0	0	0	3,500	0	10	150	0	670	170	4,500	-1,200	550
29	Rubber Plantation/Construction	5	3	3	2	15,000	0	0	0	?	?	?	?	?	6,175	?	?	?	?
32	Rubber Plantation	3	1	3	(1)	5,000	0	700	0	3,000	0	150	0	0	1,000	300	5,150	-150	0
28	Wood Cutter/Construction	2	2	2	1	12,750	0	0	350	5,000	0	200	2,000	0	1,630	1,000	10,180	2,570	0
31	Wood cutter/Sales clerk	2	4	2	2	15,000	0	0	700	6,000	0	250	300	200	2,600	900	10,950	4,050	1,200
5	Construction	2	0	2	0	14,000	0	0	450	2,400		150	250	0	50	3,300	10,700	6,800	
9	Construction/Peddling	1	1	1	1	8,200	0	0	600	?	?	?	?	?	670	?	?	?	4,500
30	Construction	3	1	1	0	4,500	0	0	0	3,000	0	100	60	210	320	25	3,715	785	0
33	Processing)	1	1	1	(1)	4,000	0	700	0	2,000	0	0	200	200	420	50	3,570	430	0
34	Construction/Cashew nuts	1	3	1	1	8,000	0	0	250	6,000	1,200	600	300	500	2,325	1,000	12,175	-4,175	0
36	Processing)	1	3	1	(1)	4,800	0	1,000	650	3,000	600	100	0	600	1,575	210	7,735	-2,935	830
37	Construction	2	1	1	0	4,500	0	400	300	3,000	600	200	0	300	830	500	6,130	-1,630	2,150
38	Construction/Crocodile Farm/Cashew nuts	2	2	2	1	7,830	0	500	300	6,000	0	15	300	750	1,500	1,430	10,795	-2,965	440

Household No	Type of Occupation	Number of Family Members		Number of Family Members Able to Work		Monthly Income (Baht)	Number of Spongers	Monthly Household Expenditures										Surplus (Income-Expenditure) (Baht)	Remittances to Myanmar (Baht)
		Male	Female	Male	Female			Rent	Water/Electricity/Gas	Food	Education	Transportation	Telecommunication	Leisure	Debt Repayment including Work Permit	Others	Total		
49	Navigation of a Carrying Vessel/Construction/Weeding	2	4	1	1	7,000	0	700	400	6,000	0	0	500	0	500	1,000	9,100	-2,100	0
52	Porter	1	1	1	0	5,600	0	700	320	4,500	0	0	200	600	2,170	80	8,570	-2,970	0
55	Materials/Fishery	3	3	1	0	4,500	1	1,500	400	3,500	200	0	0	0	630	200	6,430	-1,930	1,650
35	No job (World Vision Volunteer)	1	2	(1)	0	0	0	0	0	2,000	1,350	0	180	0	375	1,050	4,955	-4,955	0
13	Immigration Broker	2	2	0	2	3,650	6	2,000	1,200	3,000	0	2,000	4,000	150	83	5,700	18,133	-14,483	0
11	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	27,500	-		115				100		580	450	1,245	26,255	3,300
12	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	27,500	-								500		500	27,000	5,000
15	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	?	-								333		333	?	?
16	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	?	-										0	?	3,300
17	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	?	-										0	?	3,000
20	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	5,500	-								0		0	5,500	3,300
24	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	3,000	-								290		290	2,710	?
41	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	7,500	-								420		420	7,080	3,000
42	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	10,000	-								0		0	10,000	6,000
46	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	?	-								375		375	?	1,650
47	Sex worker	0	1	0	1	7,000	-		300	3,000							3,300	3,700	?

Source: Authors' Survey.

If we look at household ‘surplus’, calculated by deducting expenditure from income, the majority were experiencing a deficit, except for several single-person households who sponged accommodations in other people’s houses, five workers who rented a house in a group of seven, and 11 sex workers (marked in grey in the table). This suggests that there was a underestimation of income, overestimation of expenditure, or both. At the same time, it also suggests that many migrant workers are compelled to live with little surplus. This is also reinforced by the fact that 21 households out of 40 (excluding 16 single-person households and one household whose information on remittance was unavailable) did not sent any money to Myanmar.

Why were some households not remitting money? One possible reason is that the households had moved to Ranong (directly or via other cities in Thailand) a long ago and no longer had anyone to send money to in Myanmar. However, it is more likely because their income was so low, and they had expenditures in addition to daily expenses. This was partly due to their very poor working conditions, typically those of the female workers at the seafood processing factories. At the same time, it was also due to the economic burden on them, particularly that reflected in their debt; it could be the debt for the cost of moving from Myanmar to Ranong, the cost for acquiring a work permit, or the fines paid to the police or military when they were arrested. As shown clearly in Table 5, many households were suffering from a large amount of debt. The debt to the *thaokae* could be interest-free, but for the loans from other Myanmar or Thai persons, interest rates could be as high as 10-20% per month if it were without any collateral.

4. Living Environment in Myanmar Migrant Households

This section will describe the living environment of Myanmar migrant households, bringing in some of the issues already touched upon.

1) Housing

The majority of Myanmar migrants and their families live in a room in a tenement or an independent house rented from a Thai owners.

Fishery workers who have their families in Ranong usually rent a room in one of the concrete tenements located along the small paths near the Ranong port. These tenements are mostly single story. Some households have a relatively big room partitioned with plywood panels. Some households only have common toilets available, but most have their own toilet; however, bathrooms are communal. At the time of the survey the monthly rent was 1,000-2,000 baht which

was paid to the Thai house owner. Often the electricity and water costs were included in the rent.²⁹ Contracts were all verbal and not documented.

A goodly share of the fishery workers were single persons. Since they spent the majority of their time at sea, it was not economical for them to rent a room on their own in Ranong. Thus, some rented a room together with their fellow workers. In more cases, they stayed their few days on land in a room rented by a worker who had his family in Ranong. In the latter case, meals were also provided. These workers would pay 70 baht per day on average, which could vary according to the length of stay and the strength of the friendship with the person who was the real tenant of the room.

The rent could be a bit lower, 700-1,000 baht, if a tenement was not located in the center of Ranong. If a household lived in a very old wooden tenement, or independent but shabby wooden house located on a plantation owned by the *thaokae*, the rent was often waived (although, if the house had electricity and water, 300-400 baht per month was charged for these). If a household's residence was located far from the center of Ranong, life could be a bit inconvenient, but there was also the merit of less risk of arrest by the police.

Sex workers lived in the karaoke bars or brothels ran by their *thaokae*. In some cases each girl was allotted a room (in which case it was also the place where they took their clients), or 2-3 girls, 3-4 girls or even 10 girls lived in a single room. Some *thaokae* bore the costs of electricity and water, but the majority deducted these costs, including those for meals, from the girls' wages. These girls were advised not to go out often (especially if a girl did not have a work permit), and thus many would not go out except to go to the clinic to have periodic checks and treatment.

3) Possession of consumer durable goods

Table 4 shows what consumer durable goods households possessed and the year of purchase. The goods showing a high rate of possession were: TVs and DVDs (these were purchased as a unit in most cases), mobile phones, electric fans, bicycles, and rice cookers. There were only a few households that possessed expensive goods such as refrigerator and motorbikes. Agricultural workers were more likely to have fewer consumer durable goods compared to other types of workers.

We need to be careful, however, regarding the possession of motorbikes. Ranong Province passed an ordinance which prohibits Myanmar people possessing motorbikes, and this likely influenced the rate of motorbike possession to a great extent. After the ordinance was issued, some migrants sold their motorbikes. A similar ordinance was passed regarding the possession of mobile

²⁹ However, in most of the cases the households bought drinking water.

phones by Myanmar migrants, but in this case, they continued to use them in secret as clearly shown in Table 4.

Table 4 indicates that these consumer durable goods were purchased only five to ten years ago, even though our survey included migrants who had lived in Ranong for longer than ten years (see Table 1).

Table 4 Possession of Consumer Durable Goods and Year Purchased

Household No	Type of Occupation	Possession of Consumer Durable Goods (if known, year purchased is shown; otherwise simply indicated as Yes)								
		TV	Electric Fan	Radio-Cassette	DVD	Rice Cooker	Refrigerator	Motorbike	Bicycle	Mobile Phone
1	Fishery	2008	2006		2008					2009
3	Fishery	2004	2004		2008					
4	Fishery/ Seafood Processing	2009	2009		2009		2009		Yes	2008
6	Fishery	2007	2004	2007	2007			2007	2009	2007
8	Fishery	2007	Yes		2007		2008			
10	Fishery/ Ice Making	2009	2009		2009				2007	2009
14	Fishery/NGO	2003	2002	2003	2003	2003	2003		Yes	2002
19	Fishery		2009			2007				
22	Fishery	2006	2006		2006	Yes			2007	2009
45	Fishery	2006	2005		2009	2005			2007	2007
54	Fishery	2009	2009		2009	2009				2009
53	Fishery	2004	2005		2004	2006			2005	2008
56	Fishery	2008			2008	2006			2008	2008
57	Fishery	2007	Yes		2007	2006			2008	2007
2	Fishery									
7	Fishery									
18	Fishery	Yes	Yes		Yes					
21	Fishery									
23	Fishery									
50	Crab Catching	2008	Yes		Yes	Yes				
51	Crab Catching					2009				2009
	Fish									
39	Market/Construction/Cashew Nuts	1999	1998		2008		2006	2005	2006	1999
40	Fish Market/ (Fishery)	2007	2008		2009	2005			Yes	2005
43	Fish Market		2002							
44	Fish Market		2003			2006				
48	Fish Market/ (Seafood Processing)		2009			2007				Yes
25	Rubber Plantation	Yes							Yes	2006
26	Rubber Plantation	2005							2007	2005
27	Rubber Plantation									2009
29	Construction									2009
32	Rubber Plantation									
28	Wood Cutter/Construction	2008	2006		2008					
31	Wood cutter/Sales clerk	2007	2006	2009	2009	2006			2006	2008
5	Construction	2001	2009		2006	2007	2009			2009
9	Construction/Peddling		2004			2004			2007	Yes
30	Construction	2000							2006	2008
33	Construction/ (Seafood Processing)	Yes				Yes				2007
34	Construction/Cashew nuts	2005	2005		Yes				2006	2007
36	Construction/Seafood Processing)		2002			2003				
37	Construction	2008	2008		2008	2006			2008	
38	Construction/Crocodile Farm/Cashew nuts	2007	2003	1999	2008	1999			1999	2009
49	Navigation of a Carrying Vessel/Construction/Weeding	2003	2003		2003	2008				Yes
52	Porter		2007			2007				2007
55	Collection of Waste Materials/Fishery	2004	2004		2004				Yes	
35	Volunteer)	2007	2007	2007	2007	Yes	2007	Yes		Yes
13	Immigration Broker	2006	2006	2004	2006	2009				2006
11	Sex worker									
12	Sex worker									
15	Sex worker									
16	Sex worker									
17	Sex worker									
20	Sex worker									
24	Sex worker									
41	Sex worker									
42	Sex worker									
46	Sex worker									2009
47	Sex worker									

Source: Authors' Survey.

3) Problems relating to life in Ranong including documentation

(1) Legal status of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand

Although in principle unskilled migrant workers are not allowed in Thailand under both immigration law and the Alien Working Act, migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos were semi-legalized by being registered and given work permits (WPs) in accordance with Cabinet resolutions issued sporadically. This was done on the premises that migrant worker employment was temporary, therefore the cabinet resolutions varied year by year. For example, WPs might be valid for one year or half a year, or new migrants might apply for registration or only existing workers might be eligible to do so. Overall, their legal statuses remained unstable.

(2) Thailand's migrant worker policy

Due to its complexity, high cost and the gap from reality, the system lost its effectiveness. The greatest number of migrant workers to be registered in one year was in 2004 when 1,284,924 workers were recorded.³⁰ Thereafter the number gradually decreased to only one-third in 2008.

The Thai government was concerned that the uncontrolled influx of illegal migrant workers would adversely affect Thai society in terms of national security, public health and social security. The government introduced a new policy to get rid of illegal workers and allow only legal ones. Under the 2008 Alien Employment Act, migrant workers from the three neighboring countries could be recruited and hired only through governmental channels. Under the new system, migrant workers were to have passports issued by their governments and visas issued by the Thai government after which they could legally migrate to Thailand to live and work.

In the startup of the new system, the greatest concern of the Thai government was to how to deal with the existing migrant workers who had entered and were living and working illegally. Under the government's previous system, it was enough for migrant workers to designate themselves Myanmar, Cambodian or Laotian. There was no need to produce any document issued by their governments. For example, it was possible for a Vietnamese to obtain a WP by identifying him/herself as Cambodian.

For national security reasons, Thai government introduced national verification (NV) procedures to clarify a migrant worker's country of origin. Under agreements with the three neighboring countries, the Thai government began requiring existing migrant workers in Thailand to have their country of origin verify their nationalities; then they had to obtain passports (valid only for Thailand) from their governments and visas from the Thai government. In another words, through this process the Thai government intended to fully legalize (under immigration law and the

³⁰ The number of 'documented' workers among them who obtained work permits was 814,247 for the same year.

Alien Working Act) the existing semi-legal migrant workers in the country. The government's deadline was February 28, 2010, two years after implementation of the 2008 Alien Employment Act. National verification and the existing system of semi-legal migrant workers were to end by that date.

Migrant workers with valid WPs were eligible to apply for national verification and had a chance to be legalized. In July 2009, by cabinet resolution, the Thai government offered a last opportunity for migrant workers to register and obtain WPs, not only for workers with valid WPs to renew but also for new workers without registration or valid WPs. In other words, the Thai government was requiring and encouraging all migrant workers to register and obtain WPs, which were prerequisites for proceeding with national verification by February 28, 2010. Regarding registration and WPs, we asked interviewees the following questions:

- Do you have valid registration or WP? Or have you ever had these before?
- How much did they cost and how did you pay for them?
- If you do not have, why?
- Are there any merits in having a WP?
- Did you know about the final registration in July 2009? How did you know about it?
- Did you proceed to final registration? If not, why?

The national verification procedures agreed to between Thailand and Myanmar are as follows: 1) The Ministry of Labour of Thailand sends the list of Myanmar workers to the Myanmar government through diplomatic channels. 2) The Myanmar government verifies the nationality of their nationals. 3) Upon notification, the verified worker returns to Myanmar to the border gates of Tachilek, Myawaddy or Kawthaung to receive passports issued by the Myanmar government. 4) The worker with passport comes back to Thailand and obtains a visa and work permit (valid for two years). NV procedures were already started for Cambodians and Laotians. For Myanmar migrants, the process only started in July 2009. Regarding national verification, we asked interviewees the following questions:

- Do you know about the new system which requires migrant workers to obtain passports? How did you know about it?
 - Do you want to return to Myanmar to obtain a passport? Why?

This survey was conducted about five months before the February 28, 2010 deadline for national verification. If the migrant workers did not register or apply for WPs (precondition for

national verification) before the deadline, they would have no means to be legalized or documented thereafter.

(3) Results of the survey regarding legal status

According to Table 5, of the 57 households surveyed (including those of single persons), 32 held WPs or were in the process of obtaining one. Among 19 fishery workers, only 3 held WPs (18%). The rest held border passes as legal documents. This border pass enabled the holder to cross the border between Ranong and Kawthaung by agreement of Myanmar and Thailand. This allowed migrants to stay in Ranong for only seven days and did not substitute for registration or a WP. Border passes were enough for the fishery workers who were at sea fishing for 30-40 days and came back to Ranong port in Thailand legally to rest for 3-5 days. In other words, the number of Myanmar migrant workers residing in Ranong far exceeded the number of registered WP holders. Among the wives of 14 married fishery workers, 7 held WPs, 1 held only a registration card, 3 used border passes, and the rest had nothing.

Among 38 households (including single-person ones) which had members who were workers in the public fish market, crab catching workers, construction workers, wood-cutting workers and rubber plantation workers, i.e., workers who continuously resided in Thailand unlike fishery workers, 29 held WPs or were in the process of obtaining one (76%). The rate of WP holders among workers who continuously resided in Thailand was far higher than for fishery workers. Among the rest, 7 held nothing and 2 used border passes. Among 22 couples (including one in which the wife was Thai), in 12 couples both husband and wife held WPs or were in the process of obtaining one; in 7 couples only the husband had a WPs, and 2 couples had nothing. One person held a Ranong Card which used to be issued by Ranong Province but which no longer was legal.

Regarding the new national verification system, half of the interviewees were aware of it but did not know the details of the new system or the necessary procedures. Most workers learned about the system from their comrades or communities. One rubber plantation worker said he had obtained information by listening to the BBC and VOA, but on the same rubber plantation there were workers who knew nothing about it. Most of the workers who were aware of the new system said if possible they wanted to obtain the passports in order to remain in Thailand and work. However, they could not afford the cost, nor did they hold a WP which was a prerequisite for national verification. None answered of being afraid of political risks or arrest or harassment by Myanmar authorities, and there were few who were afraid of being identified. (We were also told that migrant workers were able to buy their identification without being identified.) Among all interviewees, 1 worker in a rubber plantation and 2 wives of fishery workers held temporary

Table 5 Status and Problems of Myanmar Migrants

Household No	Type of Occupation	Holding a Work Permit as of September 2009 (bracketed figure shows amount of payment) (if not holding WP, other documentation shown)					Experiences of being Arrested (Bracketed figure shows amount of fine)		Amount of outstanding debt (% monthly interest rate)			Problems the Households Face
		Husband	Wife	Other family member	Other family member	Other family member	Police	Military	Debt 1	Debt 2	Debt 3	
1	Fishery	Tanmo	Tanmo	Student (D)	-	-	1 (4000)	None	4500/0%			Economic Recession
3	Fishery	Tanmo	No	-	-	-	1 (?)	None	18000/ 0%	1000/ 90%		Health Problem, Possible arrest by the police
4	Fishery/ Seafood Processing	Tanmo	Yes (4500)	Tanmo	?	-	None	None	0			None
6	Fishery	Tanmo	KS(5000)	No Job (D)	Student (D)	Student (D)	2 (7000/4000)	None	0			No Savings
8	Fishery	Tanmo	No	No	No	Student(S)	4 (2000 times 4)	None	0			None
10	Fishery/Ice Making	Tanmo	Tanmo	?	?	Student(S)	1 (?)	None	10000/?			Possible arrest by the police
	Fisery/NGO	Yes (3800)	Yes (4500)	Tanmo	Tanmo	Tanmo	None	None	0			None
19	Fishery	Tanmo	Yes (5000)	-	-	-	1 (3000)	None	0			None
22	Fishery	Tanmo	Yes (4500)	-	-	-	None	None	1000/20%			Husband was sick
45	Fishery	Tanmo	Yes (4500)	-	-	-	1 (2000)	None	0			None
53	Fishery	Tanmo	Yes (4500)	Yes (4500)	Tanmo	-	None	None	0			Possible arrest by the police
54	Fishery	Tanmo/H(2000)	No	Student(S)	Student(D)	-	None	None	50000/10%			Possible arrest by the police
56	Fishery	Tanmo	No	Tanmo	Tanmo	-	3 (None)	None	2800/0%	1200/20%		Lack of monoe and saving
57	Fishery	Tanmo	Yes (?)	Student(D)	Student(D)	-	2 (3000/4000)	None	8000/10%			sickness
2	Fishery	Tanmo	-	-	-	-	None	None	0			None
7	Fishery	Tanmo	-	-	-	-	None	None	0			None
18	Fishery	Tanmo(100)	-	-	-	-	None	None	1000/40%			None
21	Fishery	-	-	-	-	-	None	None	2000/20%			Possible arrest by the police, No savings
23	Fishery	Tanmo	-	-	-	-	3 (230/1000/700)	None	1000/90%			None
50	Crab Catching	-	No	-	-	-	None	None	3000/0%	13000/ 20%		Health problem
51	Crab Catching	Yes (4500)	KS(?)	-	-	-	None	None	6500/0%	3000/20%		problem
39	Market/Construction/Cashwe	WP(?)	No	Yes (3800)	-	-	1 (1500)	None	1000/0%	9000/20%		None
40	Fish Market/ (Fishery)	Yes (4000)	Yes (?)	Student(S)	Student(S)	-	None	None	3000/20%			None
43	Fish Market	Yes (?)	-	-	-	-	None	None	2000/0%			High living expenditure
44	Fish Market	Yes (?)	-	-	-	-	None	None	0			None
48	Fish Market/ (Seafood Processing)	Yes (5500)	Ranong Card	-	-	-	1 (6000)	None	1600/?			No Savings
25	Rubber Plantation	Yes (?)	Yes (?)	Student(S)	-	-	3 (5000/3000/3200)	None	30000/0%			No work, High living expenses
26	Rubber Plantation	none	Yes (3800)	Student(D)	Student(S)	Kindergarten(D)	None	None	10000/0%	10000/10%		Lack of money for remittance
27	Rubber Plantation	Yes (4000)	Yes (4000)	-	-	-	3 (1500/2500/2500)	None	10000/0%	10000/20%		Lack of Money
29	Rubber Plantation/Construction	5 person Yes (4200*5)	-	-	-	Student(S)	None	None	19500/15%	18500/10%	5000/0%	Lack of money, Large debt
32	Rubber Plantation	None	None	None	None	-	Yes (5000)	None	10000/0%	5000/20%		Lack of money, Health problem
28	Wood Cutter/Construction	Yes (3800)	Yes (3800)	Yes (4000)	Student(D)	-	1 (2000)	none	8000/?	5000/20%		Lack of money
31	Wood cutter/Sales clerk	Yes (3000)	Yes (3000)	Yes (3000)	Yes (3000)	No	None	none	16000/10%			Work permit

Household No	Type of Occupation	Holding a Work Permit as of September 2009 (bracketed figure shows amount of payment) (if not holding WP, other documentation shown)					Experiences of being Arrested (Bracketed figure shows amount of fine)		Amount of outstanding debt (% monthly interest rate)			Problems the Households Face
		Husband	Wife	Other family member	Other family member	Other family member	Police	Military	Debt 1	Debt 2	Debt 3	
5	Construction	Yes (3800)	Housewife	Yes (3800)	Student (D)	Kindergarten(D)	None	none	0			None
9	Construction/Peddling	Yes (4000)	Yes (4000)	No Job(D)	HIV(D)	Student(S)	2 (800*2)	none	5000/0%			Daughter is HIV positive
30	Construction	Yes (3800)	none	none	Student(S)		3 (800/1000/1500)	None	2500/0%			Health problem of their children
33	Construction/ (Seafood Processing)	Yes (5000)	none				Yes (0)	none	0			No work
34	Construction/Cashew nuts	Yes (5000)	Yes (4900)	Student(D)	Student(D)		2 (2500/1000)	none	10000/15%			Lack of Money
36	Construction/ (Seafood Processing)	Yes (4500)	?	Student(D)	-		None	none	6000/20%			Lack of Money
37	Construction	Yes (5000)	Y(5000)	Student(D)	Student(S)	Student(S)	None	none	0			Unavailability of Job
38	Construction/Crocodile Farm/Cashew nuts	Yes (3800)	?	Yes (4800)	Yes (3800)		1 (3000)	none	5000/10%			None
49	Navigation of a Carring Vessel/Construction/Weeding	none	none	none	-	-	none	none	4000/0%	3000/20%		Health problem, Lack of money
52	Porter	-	N	WP (4000)	-	-	none	none	20000/10%			Health problem
55	Collection of Waste Materials/Fishery	Yes (3800)	Yes (3800)	Tanmo	Student(S)	Student(D)	1 (1000)	none	3000/?			None
35	No job (World Vision Volunteer)	Yes (4500)	Thai	Kindergarten(D)			1 (3000)	none	0			Unavailability of Job
13	Immigration Broker	none	KS(1000)	none			3 (2000/5000/?)	none	5000/20%			Husband could not work
11	Sex worker	-	Yes (5000)				1 (?)	none	0			Mentally depressing
12	Sex worker	-	Yes (6000)				None	none	20000/?			
15	Sex worker	-	Yes (4000)				None	none	9000/?			
16	Sex worker	-	?				2 (5000*2)	1 (10000)	?			
17	Sex worker	-	?				3 (2000*3)	1 (10000)	16000/?			
20	Sex worker	-	Tanmo				2 (2000/3000)	none	0			
24	Sex worker	-	Yes (3500)				1 (?)	none	3500/?			Feel of depression
41	Sex worker	-	Yes (5000)				None	none	0			Wish to move to Mahachai
42	Sex worker	-	none				2 (?)	none	2000/0%			Wish to go home, but lacks money
46	Sex worker	-	Yes (4500)				None	1 (9000)	4500/0%			Wish to go home, but lacks money
47	Sex worker	-	KS (2500)				None	1 (5000)	2500/0%			Wish to go home, but lacks money

Note 1) Tanmo means a pass valid for 7 days.

Note2) (s) means son, (d) means daughter.

Source: Authors' Survey.

passports. Although the temporary passport issued by the Myanmar government costs 3,000 kyat (equivalent to 100 baht), we were told that the brokers charged 3,000 baht which included transportation and guide.

(4) Summary

During our research in December 2008, the representative of World Vision, Ranong commented that it was desirable in Ranong to have a flexible, not rigid, system which would accommodate the border crossing patterns and closeness between Thai and Myanmar residents in the area. At the time a permit known as the Ranong Card, unique to Ranong Province, was still being issued. The card is no longer issued, and during the survey we saw that central government policy and control had become pervasive in Ranong. We found that many migrant workers had registered and applied for WPs in July 2009, the last chance to do so. There were workers who had registered for the first time in July, after having stayed in Thailand for more than 10 years. Thus we could see that the policy of the Ministry of Labour had been implemented on the ground to some extent. However, most of the interviewees were not aware that they needed to have passports after the expiration of their then current WPs on February 28, 2010.

The incentive for migrant workers to hold WPs was not to be arrested or harassed by the police or military for staying illegally. Therefore, migrant workers would try to obtain WPs in anyway regardless of their employment, and there were brokers who took advantage of the situation.

The experience of being arrested was different for workers with WPs or in the process of obtaining them compared to workers without WPs. On average, the former were arrested 0.7 times and paid 2,591 baht for their release, while the latter were arrested 1.28 times and paid 3,091 baht for their release. We noted that workers without WPs were arrested repeatedly.

From the interviews we found that the system for managing migrant workers had been distorted and manipulated, and become a major source of business for brokers. Among the interviewees was a midwife (self-employment) who held a WP with employer who was her friend and ran a grocery shop. There was a housewife (without occupation) who held a WP with an employer who was just her landlord. Moreover, there were female migrant workers with WPs working in the sex industry where migrant workers (even Thai workers) are not allowed to work under Thai law. There were also migrants who obtained WPs by claiming to be older than they were (WPs are issued only to those over 15) and under the others' names. Numerous such cases exemplified how the then current WP system did not serve to protect the rights of migrants as labor. On the contrary, the system aggravated the exploitation of laborers.

4) Health issues

Registered migrant workers are eligible for the 30-baht health program of the Ministry of Public Health. Upon registration at a provincial office of the Ministry of Interior, a migrant worker receives a health check at a designated public hospital for a 600-baht fee, and a health insurance card for an annual fee of 1,300 baht. This card enables the migrant worker to receive treatment at a designated public hospital at a 30-baht fee for each visit. All the WP holders mentioned above had health cards and were entitled to use this program; however, this insurance covered only the card holder, not his/her family members. In the past, family members of a migrant worker had been eligible to register, and there were a few family members who still held a health card and could use the system. However, health insurance registration no longer allows family members to register. Therefore, as the health cards of family members have expired, there has likely been a significant rise in the number of migrants who are not covered by the health system.

Among the interviewees, health card holders used the system and encountered few problems. But health coverage under the system is limited. While a woman was able to deliver her baby at the cost of 30 baht under the system, a man was not able to cover the cost for treating the severe injury he incurred at his work. Especially for a household with a member who needs constant treatment at a hospital without the 30 baht coverage, the cost is a heavy burden on the household finances.

We interviewed sex workers at clinics where they came for HIV/AIDS checks and to receive contraceptive treatment. To avoid HIV/AIDS infection, sex workers were instructed to request that their customers use condoms during intercourse; however, there were some who refused to do so. The girls came to the clinic at the permission and instruction of their employers, and some were not aware of why their blood was being examined or what HIV/AIDS is. Although we were unable to have an interview, there was one sex worker who had contracted HIV/AIDS and needed constant treatment; and she was still working. Younger workers learned from her experience. The girls also had to avoid pregnancy, but the contraceptive injections were a severe burden on their physical condition.

Malaria was one of the contagious diseases among the migrant workers. Although we found no patients among the interviewees in the migrant residential areas, we were told that many Myanmar malaria sufferers crossed the border into Thailand to be treated at a clinic run by the Thai government.

5) Education issues

Since August 2005, all children, regardless of their legal statuses, who reside in Thailand, are entitled to attend public schools for basic education. However, in reality, most migrant workers were unaware of this opportunity for their children. Even among those that were aware, due to

economic, social and physical reasons, many parents were not able to send their children to school. Also, we were told that the entry of migrant children to a school is at the principal's discretion. Among the interviewees, no migrant parents sent their children to Thai public school. (One boy, whose father was Thai and mother a Myanmar migrant, attended a Thai public elementary school in his neighborhood.) There are a significant number of learning centers run by various NGOs and individuals in border provinces that include Ranong. Among the interviewees, two children attended a learning center run by a missionary NGO. A 14-year old boy told us that when he was in a learning center studying in the first grade, there were around 100 children in the same grade, but the number decreased as the grade went higher. This shows that migrant parents could not afford to send their children to school as their age increased. The 14-year old boy quitted school at the age of 10, and started to work with his fisherman father at 12. Completion of study at a learning center does not entitle children to pursue further education at Thai school.

Instead of education in Thailand, many Myanmar migrant parents send their children back to Myanmar when the children reach the age of five or six. The children are taken care of by their grandparents, or aunts and uncles or other relatives. In other cases, the mother takes the children back to Myanmar, and the father remains working in Thailand. The migrant parents send money regularly to those caring for their children. If there are family members who can take care of the children in Myanmar, sending them back to receive a Myanmar education is the preferable choice for migrant parents.

Summary and Remaining Issues

In order to get a detailed grasp of the actual working conditions and the life of Myanmar migrants in Thailand, we conducted a survey in Ranong Province in southern Thailand in 2009. We interviewed 57 Myanmar migrant households in the Myanmar language. The occupations of these households were diverse and included fishery workers, agricultural workers, forestry workers, construction workers, seafood processing workers, workers at the public fish market, domestic workers, waste-material collectors, and sex workers. In this working paper, which is a mid-term report, we tried to present as much detailed information as possible on various aspects of the migrants, including the process and reasons for migrating, their working conditions, the income, expenditure and remittance of their household economy, their living standard including the possession of consumer durable goods, legal status and related problems, health conditions and access to medical facilities, education of their children, and their future prospects.

Our survey showed that Myanmar migrants in Ranong by and large were working in the

so-called 3Ds, jobs that are dangerous, dirty and difficult, and the income level of those without special skills (excluding sex workers) was 4,000-6,000 baht per month for males, and 3,000 baht for females with the exception of those working long hours at the large seafood processing factories, who earned 4,000-4,500 baht. The household 'surplus', calculated by deducting expenditure from income, for the majority was negative; many were in debt, except for single-person households. In other words, the majority had no money for remitting back home mainly because their income was so low and working conditions very poor, especially in the case of female workers at the seafood processing factories. It was also because of the high expenditures beyond those of their daily expenses, which they had incurred because of their debts; these could be the debt for the cost of moving from Myanmar to Ranong, the cost for acquiring a working permit or paying fines to the police or military when they were arrested. The debt to the *thaokae* could be interest-free, but the loans from other Myanmar or Thai persons could carry interest rates as high as 10-20% per month if these were without any collateral.

Among the 57 households surveyed (including those of single persons), 32 held work permits (effective for one year) or were in the process of obtaining one. The cost for obtaining a work permit ranged from 3,800 to 5,000 baht. When comparing workers with work permits or in the process of obtaining them as a group to workers without work permits, we found a difference in the experience of being arrested by the police or the military. On average, workers in the former group were arrested 0.7 time and paid 2,591 baht for their release, while the latter were arrested 1.28 times and paid 3,091 baht for their release. Also workers without work permits were arrested repeatedly. Particular attention needs to be paid to sex workers, most of whom had been deceived and compelled to be sex workers. They were continually harassed by the police and military. We concluded from our survey that the work-permit system did not serve to protect the rights of migrants as labor. On the contrary, the system aggravated the exploitation of labor.

The majority of Myanmar migrants and their families lived in a room in one of the tenements or in an independent house which they rented from a Thai owner. Some had only common toilets, but most of them had their own toilet (however, bathrooms were communal). Monthly rent was 700-2,000 baht; electricity and water costs were often included in the rent. Migrants usually possessed TVs and DVDs (which were usually purchased as a unit), mobile phones, electric fans, bicycles and rice cookers, but they had few expensive goods such as refrigerators and motorbikes.

Migrants faced a high risk of illness including malaria and HIV/AIDS. Registered migrant workers were eligible for the 30-baht health program of the Ministry of Public Health. Upon registration at a provincial office of the Ministry of Interior, a migrant worker received a health check at a designated public hospital for a 600-baht fee, and a health insurance card for an annual

fee of 1,300 baht. This card enabled the migrant worker to receive treatment at a designated public hospital for a 30-baht fee each visit. All the work-permit holders had health cards and were entitled to use this program; however, this insurance covered only the card holder and not his/her family members.

Since August 2005, all children, regardless of their legal status, who reside in Thailand are entitled to enroll in public school for a basic education. However, most migrant workers were unaware of this opportunity for their children. Even if aware, due to economic, social and physical reasons, many parents were not able to send their children to school. Instead of educating them in Thailand, many Myanmar migrant parents sent their children back to Myanmar when they reached the age of five or six. In Myanmar they were cared for by their grandparents, or aunts and uncles or other relatives. In other cases, the mother took the children back to Myanmar, and the father remained working in Thailand. The migrant parents sent money regularly to those caring for their children. If there were family members to care for the children in Myanmar, sending them back for education in the home country was the preferable choice for migrant parents.

In sum, our survey showed that Myanmar migrants faced numerous and serious problems, i.e., very poor working conditions and low income, indebtedness due to low income and high and unexpected expenditures (including costs of obtaining work permits and other legal-status related problems), human trafficking and harassment by the police and military (especially in the case of sex workers), high risk of illness including malaria and HIV/AIDS and problems of access to cheap medical facilities, and a poor educational environment for their children.

We are going to do a supplementary survey in September 2010, which we believe will enable us to understand more comprehensively the structure of Ranong's economy (which is supported by Myanmar migrants from the bottom) and its heavy reliance on Myanmar migrant labor.

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<Acknowledgements>

This work was supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (KAKENHI 19101010) from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences (JSPS). We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to World Vision, Ranong, for their kind and valuable assistance to our research.