

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON RETURNING MIGRANTS SHAN STATE ANALYSIS



Distributing items to returning migrants at a quarantine facility in Taunggyi, Shan State. © IOM 2020

OVERVIEW

This rapid assessment was conducted by Parami Development Network (PDN), with the technical support of IOM and in close coordination with the Department of Labour. The assessment covered 10 townships, namely, Hopong, Lawksawk, Nansang, Taunggyi, Nyaungshwe, Loilen, Mawkmai, Pinlaung, Hsihseng and Laihka.¹ The objectives of the assessment were to:

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

RETURN MIGRATION

Of the 2,311 returned migrants surveyed, 362 (men 183; women 179) have returned to Shan State. 95

per cent of Shan State migrants surveyed had returned from abroad (5% internal returnees).² Out of a total 345 international migrants surveyed in Shan State, 313 (91%) returned from Thailand and 32 (9%) from China.

33 per cent of returned migrants to Shan State said they returned because they got scared of COVID-19 (men 35%; women 32%). 17 per cent said that they returned because they lost their job as a result of the pandemic, 15 per cent said they returned for other reasons (but still related to the pandemic), and 11 per cent said their families asked them to return after the COVID-19 outbreak. A further 22 per cent gave other reasons, including returning for the Thingyan holidays (10%), increased hardships at destination (2%), to escape COVID-19 lockdown (1%), and reasons unrelated to the pandemic (9%).

Before returning to Shan State, 18 per cent of migrants said they had experienced increased psychological stress (men 18%; women 17%) and 15

¹For detailed methodology and full findings see main report.

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

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Livelihoods and Food Security Fund



managed by UNOPS

per cent had experienced discrimination/stigma (Figure 1). Slightly more men (17%) than women (14%) said they had experienced discrimination/stigma. 60 per cent of returnees said none of the listed experiences were applicable to them.

Over half (54%) of respondents (internal and international migrants) said they had lost their job prior to returning home and a further 38 per cent said they had experienced being cheated, exploited, or not paid their wages. 6 per cent said they had encountered violence/threats or discrimination. Only 2 per cent of Shan State respondents said none of the options listed were applicable to them.

Returnees to Shan State noted that their experiences have worsened since returning home. 27 per cent said they experienced discrimination or stigma (29% women; 25% men), and 22 per cent reported increased psychological stress (23% women; 20% men). Around half (46%) said none of the options were applicable to them. The remainder (5%) said they had experienced threats, psychological abuse or “other” challenges since their return home.

Returnees from within Myanmar and abroad have been required to quarantine in either community facilities or at home. In Shan State, 96 per cent of returnees said they had been requested to carry out some form of quarantine. 94 per cent said they subsequently quarantined in one of the aforementioned ways (only around 5% said they did not quarantine). Returnees to Shan State expressed a number of challenges during quarantine. 33 per cent, for instance, said there were not enough protective and hygiene items, and 19 per cent reported insufficient WASH facilities. 11 per cent said that they did not have enough food.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

Myanmar households have struggled with a loss of income since migrants returned home and Shan State has been no exception to the resultant economic and social challenges. 47 per cent of surveyed Shan State returnees said their households were no longer receiving the remittances that had been their main/only source of income (Figure 2), including 42 per cent of men and 51 per cent of women. 34 per cent said that remittances were not their only/main source of income, and 10 per cent said that remittances were their main/only source of income and they were continuing to receive the same amount.

The loss of remittances has impacted on migrants, their families and communities in different ways. The ability to withstand sustained economic shocks differs from region to region and household to household. 71 per cent of surveyed returnees in Shan State said that their households do not have any savings (men 73%; women 68%), and 18 per cent said they have savings but are using them at an increased rate. A further 11 per cent said that their household has savings, but do not need to use them.

As remittances have dried up, households without an economic buffer have looked to outside sources for economic relief. Borrowing money in an effort to fill an income gap has created and, in some cases, compounded existing levels of household debt. In Shan State, however, reported levels of debt were the lowest in the survey. Only 8 per cent of Shan State returnees surveyed said that their household is in debt and that the debt has worsened since the pandemic (men 10%; 7% women). 21 per cent said they are in debt, but the debt has not been affected

Figure 1: Experiences before return

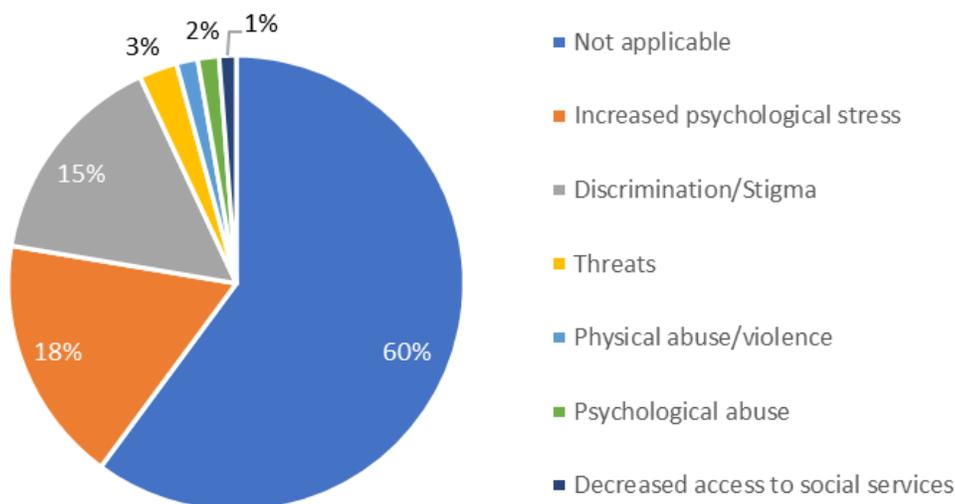
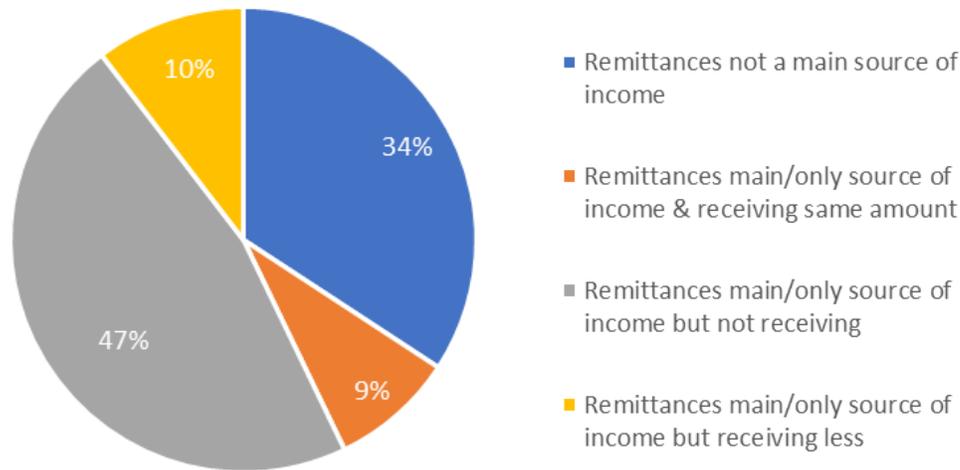


Figure 2: Remittances



by the pandemic, and 71 per cent of returnees said that their households are not in debt.

INTENTIONS

As the pandemic has continued, returnees have been compelled to consider what they will do next. 55 per cent of all surveyed returnees said that they plan to remigrate. In comparison, 45 per cent or 161 Shan State respondents said that they plan to remigrate, 10 per cent lower than the survey total (the remainder either do not plan to remigrate or do not know what they will do). 46 per cent of those who said they plan to remigrate said they intend to go as soon as possible, 23 per cent said they do not know when they will remigrate, 18 per cent did not specify when they would remigrate, 7 per cent said they will do so in the next year, and 7 per cent plan to go in the next 1-3 months.

Men (49%) were slightly more likely to want to leave as soon as possible than women (42%), while women (26%) were more likely to not know what they would do than men (19%). 48 per cent of returnees from Thailand said they planned to remigrate as soon as possible (compared to 0% or none from China).

82 per cent of Shan state returnees said that they intend to go back to the same place they were previously working (men 79%; women 86%), the remainder planned to go somewhere different. 77 per cent said they intend to work the same job they worked before the pandemic (men 72%; women 84%), the remainder plan to work a different job. Among Shan State returnees not intending to remigrate, 91 per cent said they plan to work in the agriculture sector, 5 per cent plan to do "other" work, and 4 per cent plan to do casual work.

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As returned migrants and their families wait to see what happens with regard to a lifting or loosening of COVID-19 related travel restrictions, they have immediate needs resulting from living without a source of income. 28 per cent of Shan State returnees surveyed said that food support is of greatest importance (men 26%; women 29%), 25 per cent said livelihood support (men 27%; women 23%) and 15 per cent said hygiene items, such as soap and toothpaste (men 13%; women 16%). A further 12 per cent said civil documentation is needed immediately, 5 per cent said shelter and the remainder (15%) cited either clothing, legal assistance, medical care, "other," or psychological care as required. Expressions of immediate needs were similar between men and women returnees.

If the situation improves, there are a number of economic, social and psychosocial support

interventions that will be required for returned migrants and their families, beyond satisfying immediate needs. 23 per cent of Shan State returnees surveyed said they would benefit from support in re-migration and/or finding employment abroad, 20 per cent said that they would benefit from business start-up support, 18 per cent said skills training would be most beneficial, and 11 per cent said support finding work in their hometown would be most useful. A further 9 per cent said psychological/psychosocial support would be of most help, and 8 per cent said they did not know. Men and women reported similar requirements.

CONCLUSION

Findings on the experiences of returned migrant workers to Shan State indicates that the pandemic has had a wide and deep economic and social impact on returnees and their families in this state.

Over half of Shan state migrants reported job loss prior their return and a little under a third reported discrimination/stigma upon returning home. Around half of returnees' households in Shan State are no longer receiving the remittances that were their main/only source of income, an economic shock that will impact hard on 90 per cent of households who either do not have savings or have savings but are using them at an increased rate. Just under 50 per cent of men and women said they plan to remigrate as soon as possible, with most planning on remigrating to where they previously worked. Of those who do not plan to remigrate, the majority intend to work in agriculture. In the meantime, almost a third have said they need food support and a further 25 per cent requested livelihood assistance.



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