LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC FLOW MONITORING SURVEY REPORT 2022

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)
DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX (DTM)
DECEMBER 2022

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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Passengers waiting for their bus at Vientiane Central Bus Station 2022 © IOM 2022/Sarnai ENKHBAATAR

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Enumerators interviewing migrants in the bus. © IOM 2022/Phouvit PHANTHAVONG

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INTRODUCTION

Labour migration is a key characteristic of the Greater Mekong subregion and is often regarded as having the potential to reduce poverty and bring socio-economic development to rural and underdeveloped areas. (Sunam et al., 2021). Lao People's Democratic Republic serves as a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants across Southeast Asian region and beyond. Over the last two decades, the number of Lao people residing outside of the country has doubled from 650,000 to 1.3 million as of 2020 (IOM, 2021a).

Thailand is the most popular destination country for Lao labour migrants with 280,000 Lao migrants migrating regularly and many more irregularly. The estimation of formal and informal remittance flows from Thailand to Lao People's Democratic Republic amounts to a yearly sum of 316 million USD, equivalent to 2 per cent of the national GDP (IOM, 2021b). The remittance contributes to the growth and development of the national economy through increased consumption, savings, and investment, and provides vital cash flows for low-income families in the country.

While Lao People's Democratic Republic made noticeable efforts and progresses towards graduating from the least developed country (LDC) category, the economy and the livelihood of Lao people were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its containment measures (World Bank, 2022a). The share of Lao labour migrants in Thailand who had been out of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to have reached 49 per cent at its peak (IOM, 2021b). Consequently, tens of thousands of migrant workers returned to their families in Lao People's Democratic Republic at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cámbara, 2022) resulting in income loss among the most economically vulnerable population (World Bank, 2022a). However, with Lao People's Democratic Republic fully opening international borders since 9 May 2022, and Thailand since 1 October 2021, the outflow of labour migration is expected to resume to its pre-COVID-19 level. In addition to the impact of COVID-19 on the job market, new economic challenges including currency depreciation, increase in fuel price are expected to drive the rate of outward migration further (World Bank, 2022b).

While the Lao labour migration flow towards Thailand is expected to resume, the challenges and vulnerabilities experienced by the migrants are expected to persist. Socio-demographic status, migration status, employment status can affect the migrant's accessibility of public services, living and working conditions and financial status. However, currently there is a large gap in policies and interventions to address migrant specific needs and challenges.

Improvement of data collection and increase of available data on the migrant Lao population abroad is important for the development of evidence-based migration policies and projects that are comprehensive and inclusive. Therefore, this Flow Monitoring survey aims to collect data on the largest labour migration movement out of Lao People's Democratic Republic and compare it to reports from previous years (IOM, 2020; IOM 2021b) to better understand the nature of these movements in areas such as drivers of migration, arrangement of migration journey, vulnerabilities, and finances of migrants.

METHODOLOGY

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. It regularly and systematically gathers and analyzes data to disseminate critical multi layered information on the mobility, vulnerabilities, and needs of displaced and mobile populations that enables decision makers and responders to provide these populations with better context specific assistance. Flow Monitoring is one component of DTM and is conducted at locations that are identified, with assistance of key informants, as being key transit locations along a migration route.

The data collection for the Flow Monitoring report took place between 14 to 29 September 2022 at Vientiane Central Bus Station, First Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge and on various buses that run between the two locations. Locations were chosen as they have high numbers of labour migrants transiting through and are a good base for convenience sampling method the surveys have used. Eight enumerators (five women and three men), all Lao nationals, were recruited to conduct two types of Flow Monitoring surveys, namely (i) Inflow Survey targeting Lao labour migrants returning from Thailand after working there and (ii) Outflow Survey targeting Lao labour migrants departing to Thailand for work. The enumerators have used four and five screening questions to identify Inflow and Outflow of migrants and their willingness to participate in the survey.

Both surveys consisted of quantitative questions regarding the following topics: (i) Migrant Profile, (ii) Drivers of Migration, (iii) Pre-migration Arrangements and Migration Journey, (iv) Financial Status, (v) Migrant Vulnerabilities and (vi) Return.

The inflow survey had 174 valid responses and the Outflow survey had 350 valid responses. Survey responses were collected using KoboTool application on tablets. The data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Power BI software. The report draws comparisons between Outflow and Inflow surveys whenever there is a significant difference among the 2 populations. Similarly, it draws comparisons from previous reports and identifies key trends and changes over the years if present.

Limitations

Despite the large sample size (n=524), there are some limitations that must be considered.

First, a very noticeable limitation is the low number of Inflow survey respondents (n=174), compared to Outflow survey respondents (n=350). In consultations with the enumerators, key reasons to this limitation are identified as: (i) returning migrants are often picked up by private cars at the border, rather than commuting with public transport, which makes participation less likely; (ii) the peak border crossing days for returning migrants are weekends and data collection took place during weekdays.

Second, the data represents the labour migration flow at the specific border crossing point where data was collected - First Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge in Vientiane. There are several other international land border crossing points and airports that Lao migrants could use for their migration journey to and from Thailand and this report does not capture those flows.

Third, some migrants departing to Thailand accompanied by recruitment agents were told not to participate in the survey, which could have impacted the representativeness of the survey.

Year on Year Comparison

In addition to the Outflow and Inflow data comparisons, the report draws comparisons from previous reports in order to identify key trends and changes over the years if present.

Previous Flow Monitoring reports in the Lao People's Democratic Republic include: (i) Flow Monitoring Survey Report published in August 2020 with a data collection period from July to August 2019 (from here on referred to as 2019 Flow Monitoring report) and (ii) Flow Monitoring Survey Report published in February 2021 with a data collection period from August to November 2020 (from here on referred to as 2020 Flow Monitoring report). This report is the third Flow Monitoring Survey Report produced by IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic.

This year's report has utilized nearly identical data collection methodology as the previous reports in terms of survey location, sampling method and survey topics. The 2020 Flow Monitoring report did not conduct an Outflow survey and had 161 Inflow survey responses. The 2019 Flow Monitoring report had 249 Outflow and 152 Inflow survey responses.

IOM staff briefing enumerators at the First Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge. © IOM 2022/Lisa WEBER

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Area 1 - Migration Profile

Socio-demographic Profiles

All respondents are Lao nationals travelling to or returning from Thailand for labour migration. Respondents are aged 18 to 58 and the average age is 28.5. The respondents consist of 265 women (51%), and 258 men (49%), showing a balanced female-to-male ratio. One person identified themselves as non-binary. Figure 1 furthermore shows that the age groups are equally represented by sex.

Figure 1: Overall age - Gender breakdown

● Female ● Male

46 and older	2%	1%
41 - 45 yrs	3%	3%
36 - 40 yrs	5%	4%
31 - 35 yrs	8%	8%
26 - 30 yrs	12%	11%
21 - 25 yrs	13%	13%
18 -20 yrs	8%	8%
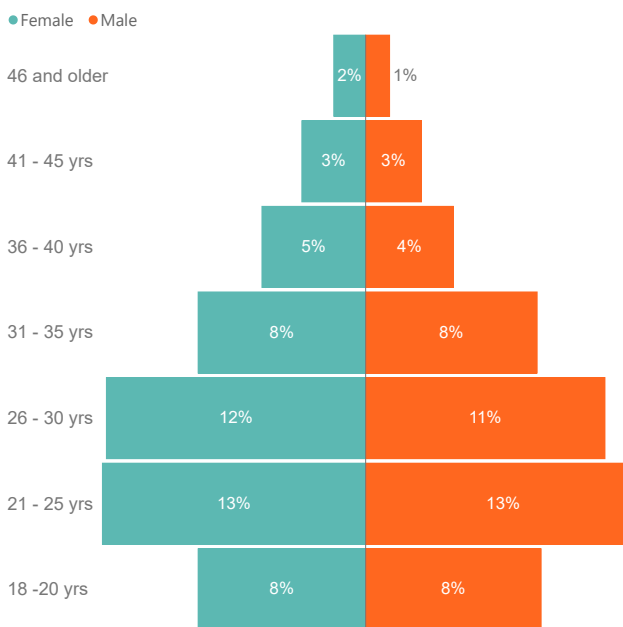
Note: n = 524

Figure 2: Overall Socio-Economic Profile

16% respondents belonging to an ethinic minority

47% respondents married

42% respondents having children ⟶ 11% of these respondents have their children reside with them in Thailand

1% respondents having health condition ⟶ 2x Thyroid, 1x Diabetes, 1x High blood pressure.

Note: n = 524

Year on Year Comparison

Age and gender wise, this report follows similar patterns in the population composition of the Flow Monitoring report of 2020. However, in comparison to the 2019 Flow Monitoring report, the female-to-male ratio (38% and 62%) of this report was more balanced out.

In line with the previous reports, the 21–25-year-old respondents' group embodied the largest group of the sample.

Nearly half of the respondents were married or in civil union (47%), the other half were single (48%), with 16 respondents responding that they were in a relationship (3%) and 14 respondents divorced or separated (2%). Marital status did not differ amongst women and men. Out of the 42 per cent of respondents who had children, only 11 per cent resided in Thailand with their children. Most parent respondents reported that their child/ children stayed with someone else in Laos (74%). Seven respondents said that their child/children would stay/stayed with someone else in Thailand.

Figure 3: Residence of Children during Stay in Thailand

- With someone else in Laos: 74%
- With me in Thailand: 11%
- Other: 11%
- With someone else in Thailand: 3%
- I do not know/ I do not want to answer: 1%
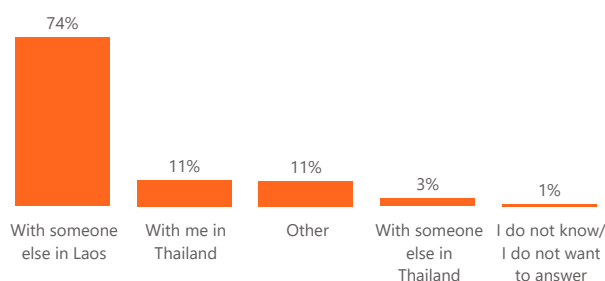
Note: n = 220

Outflow and Inflow Comparison

When comparing Outflow and Inflow survey results, it is noticeable that only 9 per cent of the respondents leaving Lao Peoples Democratic Republic planned to have their children reside with them in Thailand, yet 16 per cent of migrants returning to Lao Peoples Democratic Republic recorded having had their children with them in Thailand.

To identify health vulnerabilities of migrants, the study inquired whether the respondents had any disability or chronic condition. Only four respondents (1%) indicated such health concerns, namely thyroid (2 respondents), diabetes (1) and high blood pressure (1).

Year on Year Comparison

Compared to previous reports, married respondents represented a larger share in this year's report (47% in 2022, 34% married in 2020, 43% married in 2019). Furthermore, this year's respondents were more likely to have children (42% in 2022, 31% in 2020 39% in 2019). In addition, the share of migrants residing with their children in Thailand has doubled (11% in 2022, 5% in 2020, 6% in 2019).

Figure 4: Highest Level of Education

- Bachelor's degree and above: 3%
- Technical and Vocational Education: 3%
- Upper Secondary Education (grade 10-12): 24%
- Lower Secondary Education (grade 6-9): 33%
- Primary Education (grade 5 or less): 29%
- No Education: 7%
- I do not want to answer: 2%
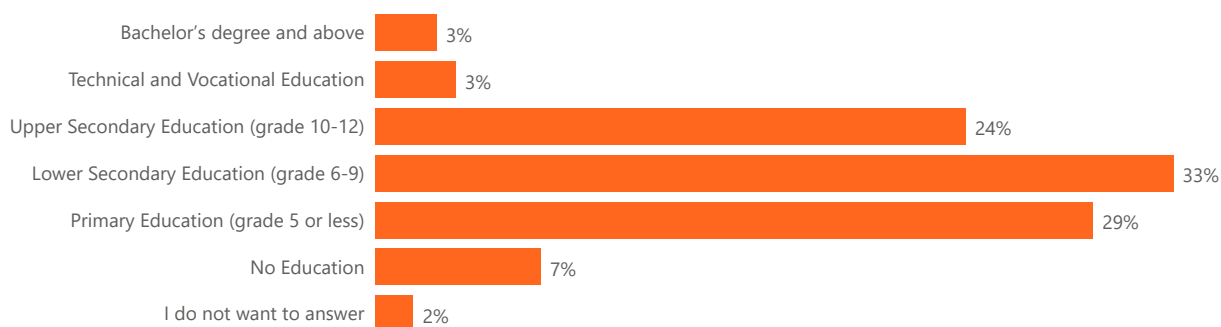
Note: n = 524

One-third of all respondents holds lower secondary education (grade 6-9) as their highest education level. The group indicating primary education (grade 5 or less) as their highest level of education was the second largest, with 29 per cent, followed by upper secondary education (grade 10-12) (24%). Thirty-five (7%) respondents have not received formal education. Of this group, half indicated that they can read and write.

Year on Year Comparison

The migrant profiles of this year's report are largely identical to the 2019 and 2020 report. However, the share of respondents with only primary or no education (36%) increased (34% in 2019, 19% in 2020).

As for previous international migration experience, almost all Outflow and Inflow migrants (99%) had never worked abroad in countries other than in Thailand. Five respondents (1%) who disclosed having worked in other countries besides Thailand, had worked in Cambodia, China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the United States of America. Of all Outflow respondents, 58 per cent had worked in Thailand before this departure.

Province of Origin

Respondents were asked about their last place of permanent residence in Lao People's Democratic Republic. As visualized in Figure 5, the most prominent provinces were Champasak (17%), Vientiane capital (16%), and Savannakhet (15%), followed by Luang Prabang (10%) and Vientiane province (9%).

Figure 5: Last Place of Permanent Residence in Lao People's Democratic Republic
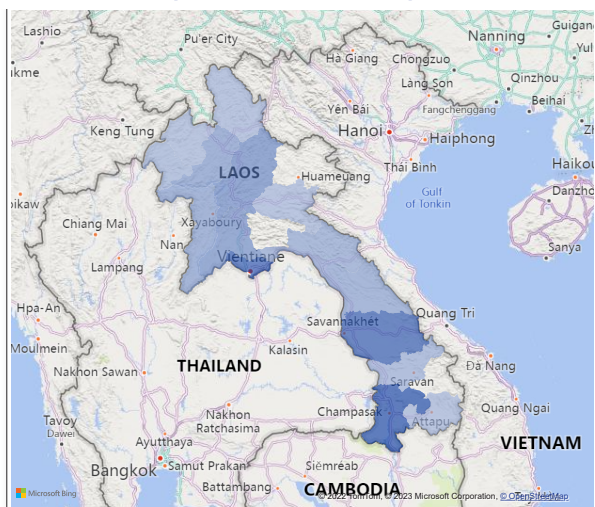
Note: n = 524

Outflow and Inflow Comparison

When comparing Outflow and Inflow data, the representativeness limitation due to the flow monitoring location (First Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge close to Vientiane capital) becomes apparent. While outgoing migrants were mostly from Southern provinces including Champasak (19%) and Savannakhet (15%), incoming migrants were mostly from Vientiane capital (24%) and Savannakhet (17%). It is most likely that migrants from Southern provinces return to Lao People's Democratic Republic through Southern border crossing points.

Figure 6: Destination Provinces in Thailand
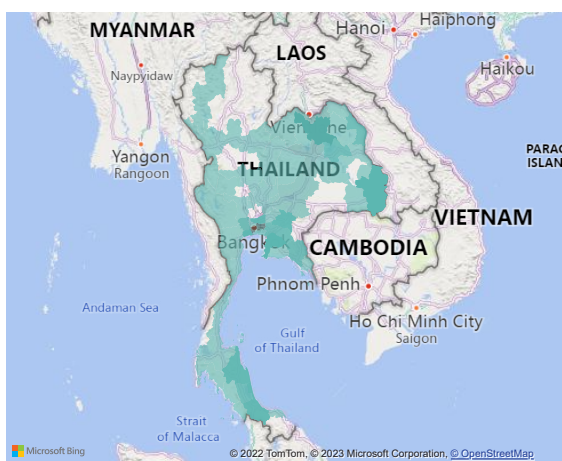
Note: n = 377

Year on Year Comparison

The top 3 provinces of residency in Lao People's Democratic Republic align with the previous Flow Monitoring reports data. The 2020 Flow Monitoring data for returning migrants, however, deviates from this year's and 2019's report, by showing highest numbers for respondents from Xayaboury province.

Province of Work in Thailand

In order to get a holistic overview of their migration journey, both, Outflow and Inflow migrants who have already worked in Thailand before were asked to identify their destination provinces in Thailand. Most popular Thai provinces were Bangkok (29%), to a lesser extent Khon Kaen (6%), and Nong Khai (6%).

Year on Year Comparison

In the 2019 Flow Monitoring report, Udon Thani, a province close to Vientiane capital, was found to be the second most popular destination province with 12 per cent share. In this year, however, Udon Thani accounted for only 6 per cent of the overall destination provinces for Lao migrants. The 2020 report did not include related data.

Figure 7 shows the detailed migration flow from Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand which visualizes the popularity of Bangkok as the most common destination for Lao labour migrants.

Figure 7: Migration Flow from Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand
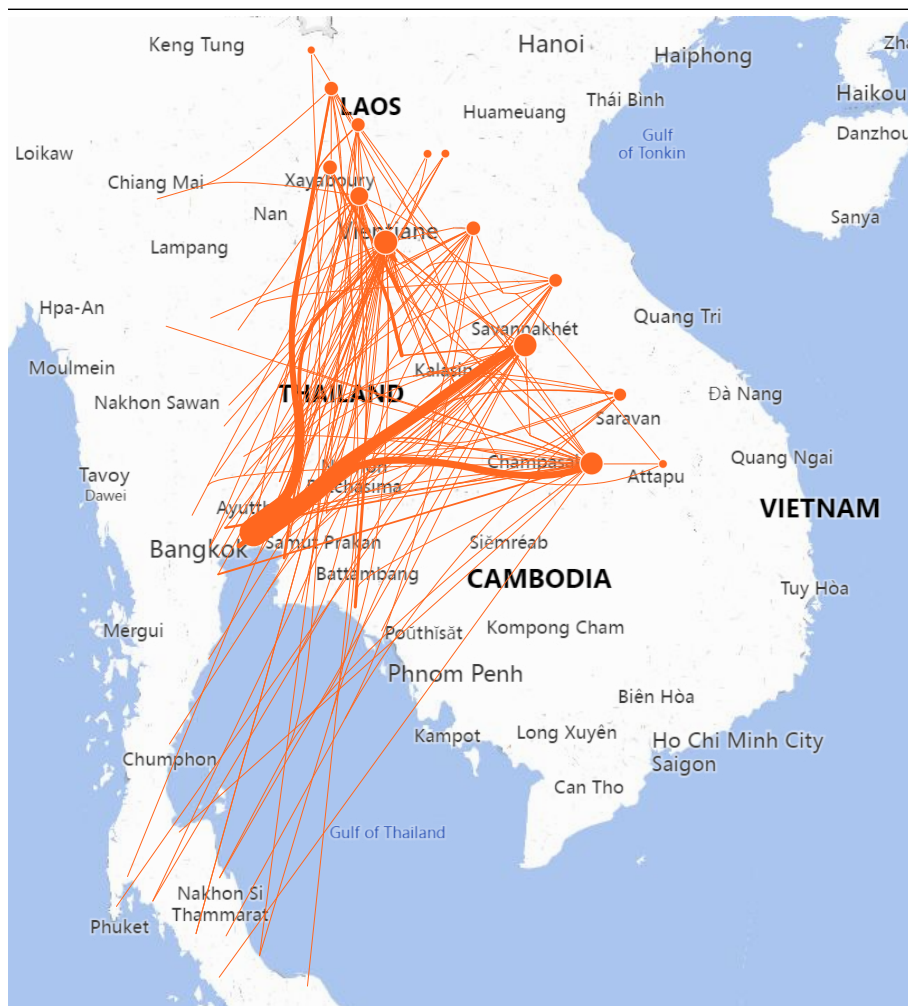
Note: n = 377

Thematic Area 2 - Drivers of Migration

Previous Employment

Prior to leaving Lao People's Democratic Republic, the interviewed migrants were mostly working in regularly salaried jobs (24%), followed by unpaid family work (22%) and unemployment (18%). Seventeen per cent indicated working as daily wage earners, 14 per cent were working self-employed.

Figure 8: Employment Status in Lao People's Democratic Republic

- Regular salaried
- Unpaid family work
- Unemployed
- Daily wage earner
- Self-employed
- Other
- Student
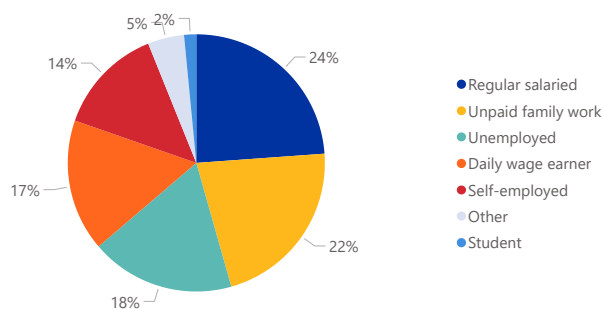
Note: n = 524

The most common sector of employment was found to be agriculture and fishing (24%). Apart from that, 19 per cent reported working in manufacturing and factory work, 17 per cent in construction.

Year on Year Comparison

This year's data shows fewer respondents engaged in unpaid family work (22% in 2022, 32% in 2020) or were unemployed (18% in 2022, 28% in 2020) prior to migration in comparison to the 2020 Flow Monitoring report. Moreover, this year's share of respondents with no income prior to migration, including unpaid family worker, unemployed individuals and students was 41 per cent, compared to 69 per cent in 2020, and 58 per cent in 2019.

Drivers of Migration

A large majority (76%) of respondents decided to migrate to Thailand for higher income. Nearly half of the respondents (42%) cited struggles to find a job or income generating activity in their home country and 30 per cent cited a desire to experience life outside their home country as reasons to migrate.

Figure 9: Drivers of Migration
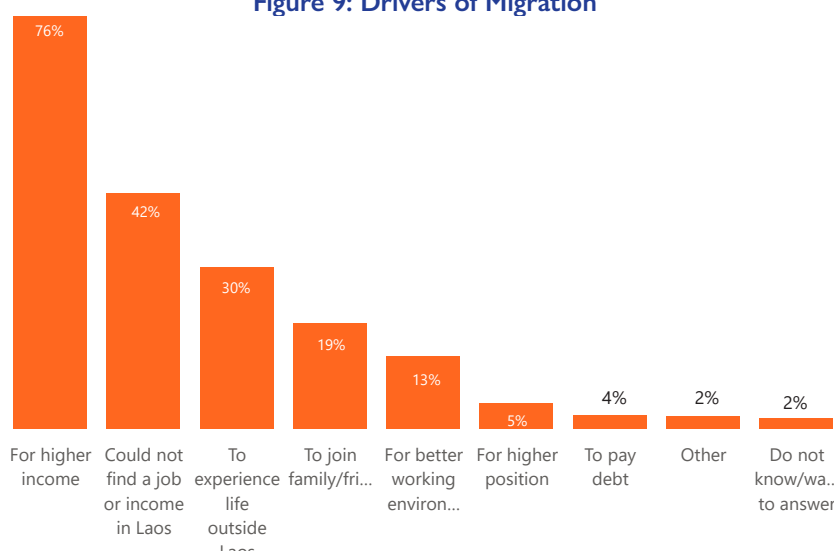
Note: n = 524, Multiple Answers Allowed

Events as Drivers of Migration

Inflation	19%
Job market change due to COVID-19	14%
Unfavorable currency exchange rate	7%
Do not know/want to answer	3%
Natural disasters	1%

Note: n = 524, Multiple Answers Allowed
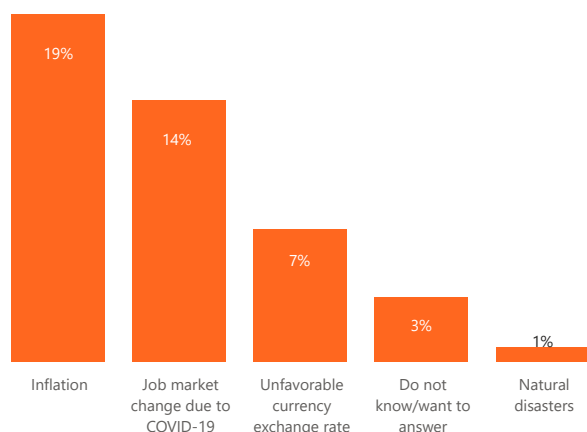
To further understand drivers of migration, the surveys have asked participants if any of the recent major economic events and natural disasters have impacted their decision to migrate internationally. While most respondents (72%) responded "No", 97 respondents (19%) reported that inflation, 73 respondents (14%) change in the job market due to COVID-19 and 37 respondents (7%) unfavourable currency exchange rate has impacted their decision to migrate. Four respondents (1%) have reported that natural disasters, namely floods have driven them to migrate.

Factors for Choosing Thailand over other Destinations

Figure 11: Factors for Choosing Thailand over other Destinations

	Outflow		Inflow	
Factors	**Average rating (1-5)**	**Do not know/want to answer**	**Average rating (1-5)**	**Do not know/want to answer**
Salary is higher	4.4	5%	4.4	1%
Language barrier is less	4.3	3%	4.5	0%
Working condition is better	4.1	18%	4.2	3%
Safer to live	4.1	15%	4.1	2%
Living condition is higher	4.0	16%	4.1	1%
Easier to travel there	3.8	4%	4.1	1%
I have family and friends there	3.8	3%	4.0	0%
Easier to find jobs	3.8	10%	3.9	3%
There's a big Lao community there	3.9	8%	3.8	1%
Migration journey is cheaper	3.7	11%	3.8	5%
Easier to access public services	3.6	18%	3.6	9%
Easier to get official documents	3.6	4%	3.6	1%

Once the reasons for international labour migration of Lao people were inquired, the surveys attempted to establish which factors were most important in selecting Thailand as a labour migration destination over others. The respondents were asked to rate listed factors, selected based on literature review and previous Flow Monitoring activities, from 1-5 based on their importance, 1 being not important at all and 5 being very important.

The most important factors were "language barrier is less", "salary is higher" and "working condition is better", and the least important factors were "migration journey is cheaper", "easier to access public services" and "easier to get official documents".

"Easier to access public services" as a factor received the highest percentage of respondents (9% for Inflow and 18% for Outflow) answering "I do not know" or "I do not want to answer", potentially indicating the lack of information and awareness on available public services in Thailand amongst Lao labour migrants.

Outflow and Inflow Comparison

The average ratings for each factor did not differ between Inflow and Outflow for more than 0.2 points, indicating similar reasoning to choose Thailand as a labour migration destination amongst both groups.

However, the outflow survey had higher per cents (3-18% per factor) of respondents answering "I do not know" or "I do not want to answer" than Inflow survey (0-9% per factor) in this section, likely since 58 per cent of the Outflow survey respondents had never worked in Thailand before, thus are less familiar with the country.

Employment Arrangements

A large majority of the respondents, 84 per cent of Inflow and 91 per cent of Outflow survey respondents, had obtained an employment in Thailand before their departure to Thailand.

Figure 12: Employment Obtained before Migrating to Thailand

● I do not know ● No ● Yes

Outflow	1% 8%	91%
Inflow	16%	84%
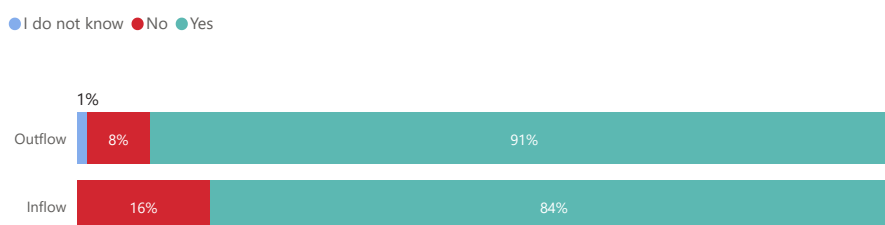
Note: n = 524

Year on Year Comparison

In the 2019 Flow Monitoring report more respondents (99% of Inflow and 97% of Outflow) reported that they had obtained employment prior to their departure to Thailand. The 2020 Flow Monitoring report did not contain related data.

Figure 13: How Employment in Thailand was Obtained

● Outflow ● Inflow

Through relatives/friends in Thailand
- 53%
- 60%

I approached a recruitment agency
- 19%
- 6%

I was approached by a recruitment agency
- 12%
- 6%

Through relatives/friends in Laos
- 9%
- 10%

I know the employer/Employer approached me
- 5%
- 10%

Other
- 2%
- 5%

Job vacancy or advertisement online
- 2%
- 1%

I do not want to answer
- 1%

%GT Perc of total
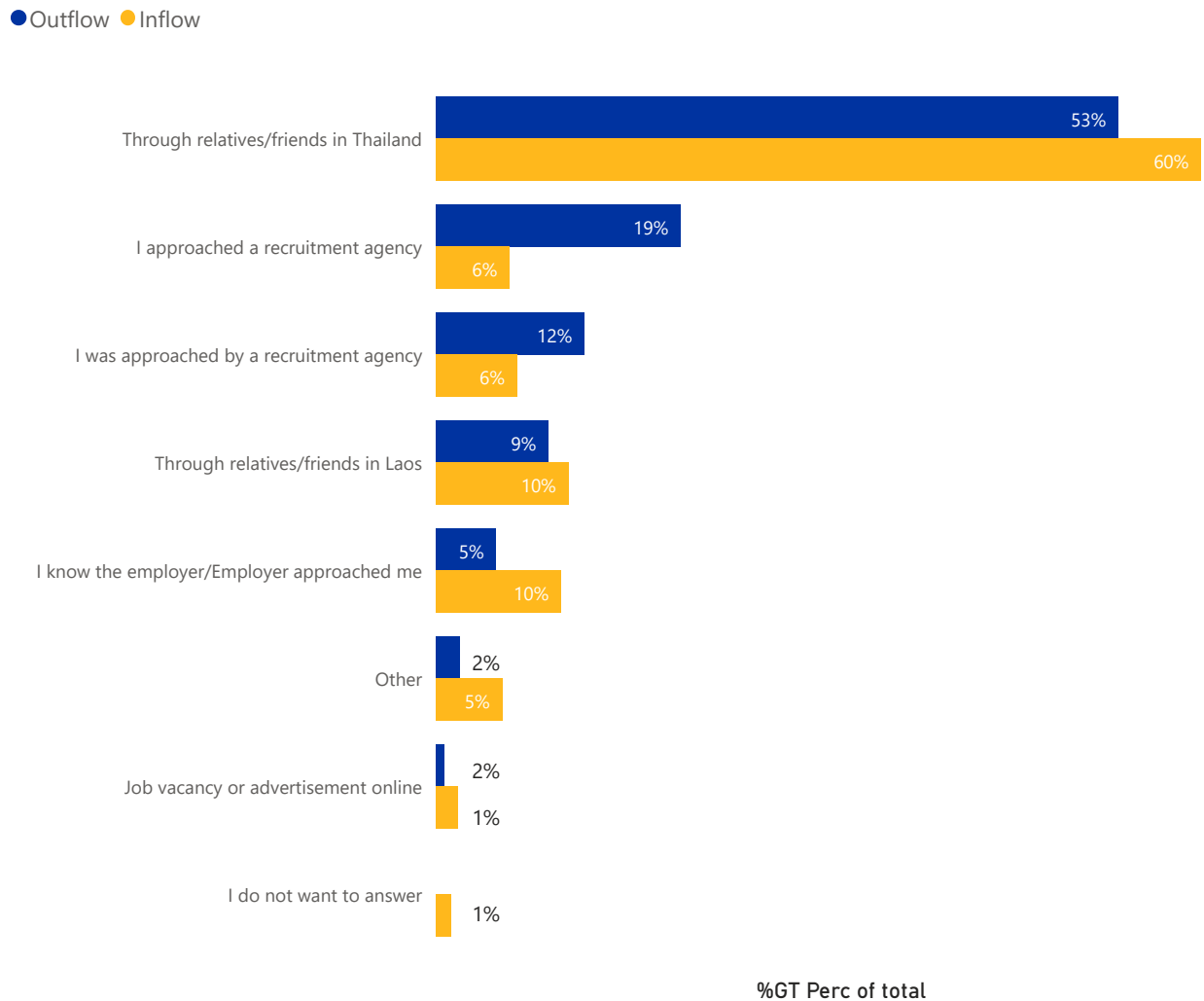
Note: Outflow, n=319, Inflow=174

Those who found employment before departing to Thailand in the Outflow group (n=319) and all Inflow respondents (n=174) were asked how they obtained their first employment in Thailand.

The majority of Outflow (52%) and Inflow (64%) respondents had found employment in Thailand through relatives or friends in Thailand. Finding employment through job vacancy or advertisement online was the least common method amongst both groups.

Outflow and Inflow Comparison

The usage of recruitment agencies to find employment in Thailand was 17 per cent higher amongst Outflow respondents than Inflow respondents. Ten per cent of Inflow respondents reported that they had found employment through direct connection with the employer, compared to 5 per cent of Outflow respondents.

Thematic Area 3 - Pre-migration Arrangements and Migration Journey

Information Gathering

When asked what channels the respondents have used to collect information regarding life in Thailand before their departure, almost half (49%) of all respondents cited family or friends in Thailand as the source of information. Social media, recruitment agencies, media channels and family or friends were used by 13-21 per cent of respondents for the purpose. Thirteen per cent of all respondents had stated that they did not have any information regarding Thailand.

Figure 14: Channels Used to Gather Information Regarding Thailand

Channel	Percentage
Family/friends in Thailand	49%
Social Media/website/internet	21%
Recruitment agencies	17%
Television/radio/print media	16%
Family/friends in Laos	14%
I did not have any information	13%
Through people who have previously lived/worked in Thailand	3%
Previous visits to Thailand	2%
Other	2%
I do not want to answer	1%
Thai government sources	0%
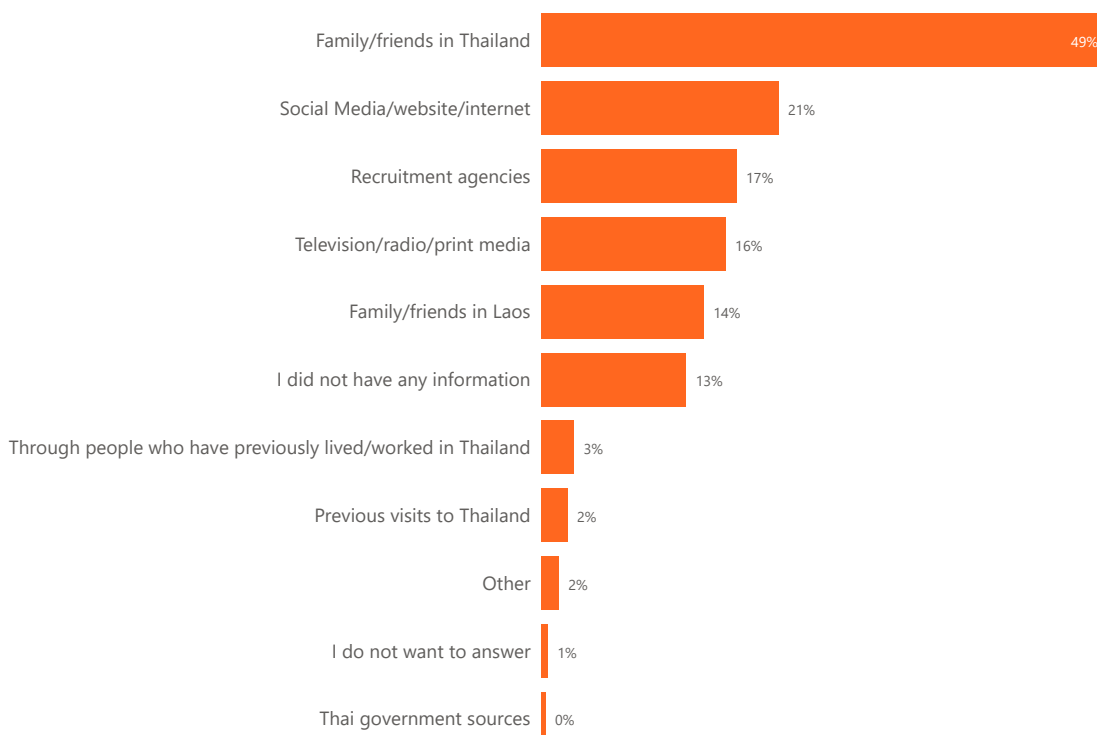
Note: n = 524, Multiple Answers Allowed

Employment Arrangement

Figure 15: Employment Status in Thailand

- Regular salaried — 65%
- Daily wage earner — 30%
- Other — 3%
- Self-employed — 1%
- I do not want to answer
- Unpaid family work
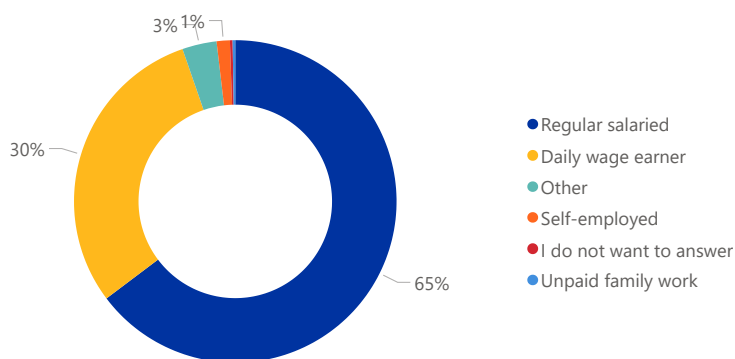
Note: n = 377

All returning respondents and outgoing respondents who already indicated to have a job lined up, were asked about their employment status in Thailand. A majority of 65 per cent disclosed that they would work or had worked as regularly salaried, another large group of 30 per cent expected to or had worked as daily wage earners.

> ## Outflow and Inflow Comparison
>
> Nearly the same share (66% for outgoing, 64% for returning) of respondents stated that their employment status in Thailand would be or had been regularly salaried. For outgoing respondents, 28 per cent expected to be working as daily wage earners, whereas an actual share of 32 per cent of returning migrants indicated this as their employment status.

Figure 16: Sector of employment in Thailand

Outflow - Intended sector of employment in Thailand			Inflow - Sector of employment in Thailand		
Sector of employment	#	%	Sector of employment	#	%
Manufacturing/ Factory work	44	22%	Hospitality	49	29%
Hospitality	32	16%	Manufacturing/ Factory work	32	19%
Agriculture/ Fishing	31	15%	Agriculture/ Fishing	18	10%
Maintenance services	21	10%	Wholesale and retail trade	18	10%
Construction	20	10%	Maintenance services	13	7%
Domestic work	15	7%	Construction	10	6%
Wholesale and retail trade	14	7%	Domestic work	9	5%
Food processing	7	3%	Food processing	6	3%
Other	6	3%	Other	6	3%
Repair of motor vehicles	6	3%	Repair of motor vehicles	2	1%
I do not want to answer/ I don't know	4	2%	Arts, Entertainment	2	1%
Transportation (Tuktuk/Taxi/Bus)	2	1%	Transportation (Tuktuk/Taxi/Bus)	2	1%
			Human health and social work activities	1	1%
			I do not know/ I do not want to answer	1	1%

Note: Outflow n=203, Inflow n=174

Overall, the largest sectors of employment in Thailand for both Outflow and Inflow respondents were found to be the hospitality industry (21%), followed by manufacturing or factory work (20%), and agriculture or fishing (13%).
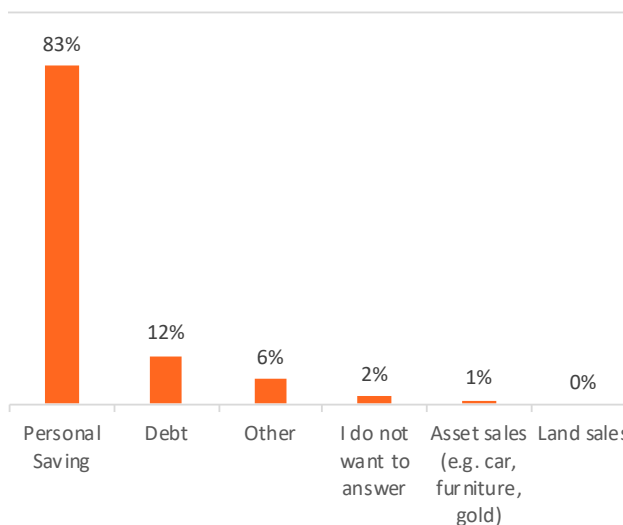
Migration Cost

On average respondents had spent or expected to spend 6,684,797 LAK on their migration journey. Both Outflow and Inflow respondents had mostly (79% and 81% respectively) funded their migration journey through personal savings. Ten per cent of Outflow and 13 per cent of Inflow respondents had taken out a debt to pay for the migration journey. Most common sources for debts were family or friends (67% of respondents who had incurred debt for the migration journey), employer in Thailand (11%) and recruitment agency (8%).

Figure 17: Migration Cost

Cost type	Average Cost
Recruitment agency	3,662,330
Passport	857,025
Visa	1,092,595
Work Permit	327,665
MOU	250,694
Transport	315,010
Food	75,892
Lodging	71,971
Unregulated tips or commission	31,615
Total	6,684,797

Note: Cost in LAK, Outflow n = 253[1], Inflow n = 131[2]

Figure 18: Funding Source for Migration Journey

- Personal Saving: 83%
- Debt: 12%
- Other: 6%
- I do not want to answer: 2%
- Asset sales (e.g. car, furniture, gold): 1%
- Land sales: 0%

Note: n = 524, Multiple Answers Allowed

The Journey

Concerning the Point of Entry to Thailand, the vast majority (98%) used International Land Border Checkpoints to enter Thailand. Only six respondents (1%) came via International Airports, and only two respondents (< 1%) had used unofficial border crossings. The choice of Point of Entry could be influenced by the choice of interview location, which was an International Land Border Checkpoint (First Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge)

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[1]   97 out of 350 Outflow respondents (28%) did not know the cost or did not want to answer.

[2]   43 out of 174 Inflow respondents (25%) did not know the cost or did not want to answer.

Figure 19: Migration Journey Companionship

Outflow (n=350)   **Inflow (n=174)**

	Outflow	Inflow
Alone	17%	34%
Friends	38%	30%
A group of people	27%	18%
Partner/Spouse	16%	16%
Relatives/family member	12%	11%
Agent/broker	2%	2%
Children	1%	1%
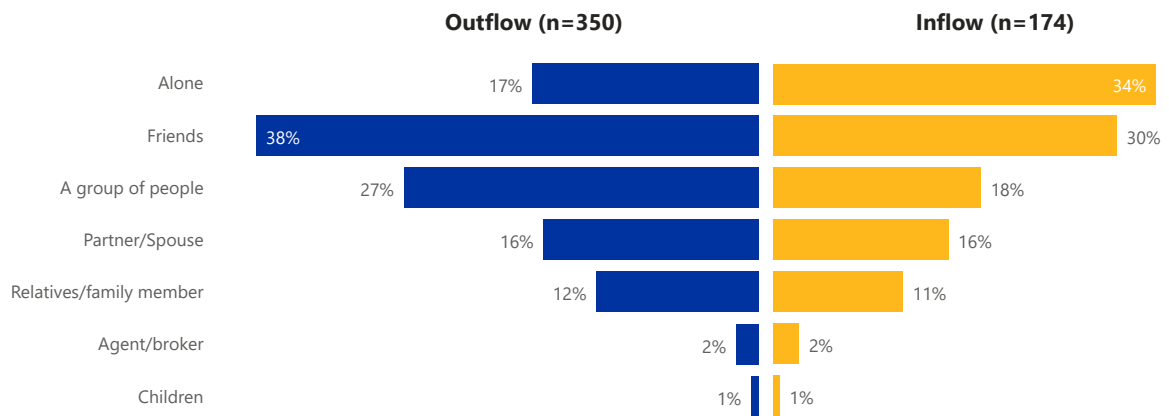
Note: Multiple Answers Allowed

Year on Year Comparison

This year's data resembles the data of the Flow Monitoring reports from 2019 and 2020. The only noticeable difference was the share of respondents using an unofficial border crossing (< 1% in 2022, 6% in 2020).

Outflow and Inflow Comparison

The share of respondents traveling or had travelled to Thailand alone differs significantly from 17 per cent of Outflow to 34 per cent of Inflow.

The most common travel companions for the migration journey to Thailand were friends, a group of fellow migrants, partner or spouse, followed by relatives. Very few respondents were travelling with agents or their children.
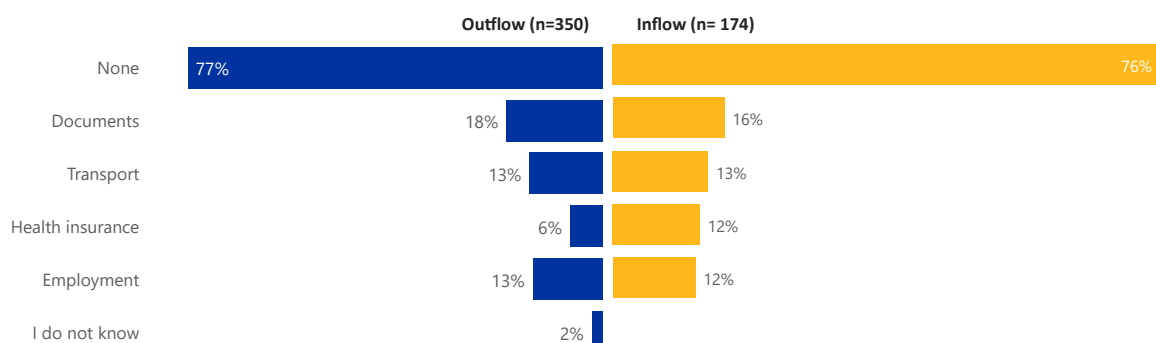
Year on Year Comparison

This year's data presents a different migration journey compared to previous reports. The largest difference is the share of respondents travelling with their children to Thailand, which was 38 per cent in the 2019 Flow Monitoring report compared to only 1 per cent this year. This difference could be explained by the data collection period and school terms. August (2019 data collection period) is the end of summer break when mobility was high, and September (2022 data collection period) is the beginning of school term when mobility was limited. Another notable difference was the share of respondents travelling alone in 2019 was 40 per cent, while both 2020 and this year's data shows 26 per cent, indicating a downward trend of migrants travelling alone.

Figure 20: Migration Journey Preparation Assistance

Outflow (n=350)   **Inflow (n= 174)**

	Outflow	Inflow
None	77%	76%
Documents	18%	16%
Transport	13%	13%
Health insurance	6%	12%
Employment	13%	12%
I do not know	2%	

Note: Multiple Answers Allowed

Recruitment agencies assisted the largest share of respondents for both groups (32%) followed by family and friends in Lao People's Democratic Republic (15%) and in Thailand (17%), employer in Thailand (12%). Thirty-seven per cent of all respondents had arranged their migration journey without the assistance of others.

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Outflow and Inflow Comparison

The percentage of respondents who had received assistance from recruitment agencies for their migration journey preparation was almost double in the Outflow population (41%) than in the Inflow population (22%), whereas the percentage of Inflow population (7%) reported to had received assistance from their employers in Thailand was 10 per cent more than the Outflow population (17%).

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Year on Year Comparison

The share of respondents who had prepared for their migration journey without assistance from others (37%) has increased greatly compared to the 2019 Flow Monitoring report share of 22 per cent. Following the trend of this year, the 2019 Flow Monitoring report reported that recruitment agencies were the most common assistance provider. However, friends and family in Thailand had provided more assistance than friends and families in Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2019, unlike this year. The 2020 Flow Monitoring report did not contain related data.

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All respondents were asked if they have attended pre-departure orientation prior to migration to Thailand. Sixty per cent expressed not having had any pre-departure orientation, 21 per cent attended orientation organized by their recruitment agency. Only 17 per cent attended pre-departure orientation organized by their employer in Thailand.

Figure 21: Pre-Departure Orientation

Category	Percentage
None	60%
Recruitment Agency	21%
Employer	17%
I do not know/ I do not want to answer	2%
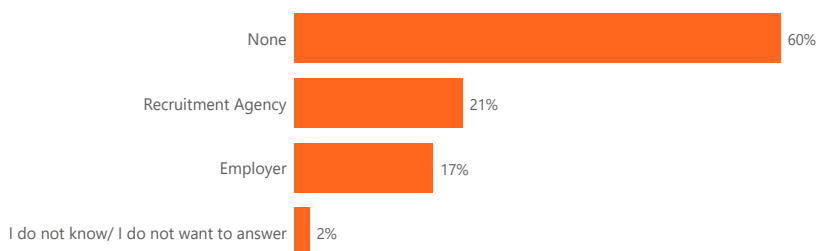
Note: n = 524

Pre-Departure Challenges

Most outgoing (77%) and returning (76%) respondents did not face any pre-departure difficulties. Besides that, most common difficulties faced by the respondents were obtaining documents (18% for outgoing, 16% for returning respondents), and transportation (13% for outgoing and returning respondents).

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Outflow and Inflow Comparison

When comparing the responses of outgoing and returning respondents, it is noticeable that only 6 per cent of Outflow respondents indicated problems concerning health insurance while for Inflow respondents this makes up double the share of concerned respondents.

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Figure 22: Pre-Departure Difficulties

	Outflow (n=350)	Inflow (n= 174)
None	77%	76%
Documents	18%	16%
Transport	13%	13%
Health insurance	6%	12%
Employment	13%	12%
I do not know	2%	
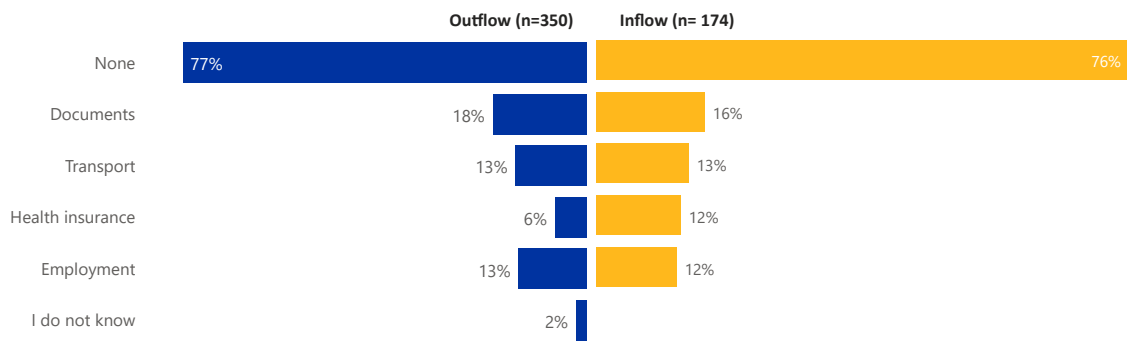
Note: Multiple Answers Allowed

Thematic Area 4 - Financial Status

## Salary and Working Hours

Outflow respondents who have stated that they had obtained employment prior to departing to Thailand (see Figure 23) and all Inflow respondents were asked about their contract, wage and working hours.

Before their departure to Thailand, nearly half of the respondents had not seen their working contract (47%) while another share of 47 per cent had seen the contract. Of the group of respondents that has received their contract, 97 per cent indicated that they were able to read and understand the contract.

Moreover, 53 per cent of the respondents have agreed on a monthly salary before migrating, followed by 30 per cent who were not informed about their salary and 16 per cent who did not wish to answer the question. Outflow respondents who have obtained employment prior to departure to Thailand, expected to earn 6,000,000 LAK per month on average. The actual salary received by Inflow respondents exceeded the expectations, amounting to 6,300,000 LAK on average. This is in line with the previous Flow Monitoring reports.

Regarding working hours, Inflow respondents had worked nine hours per day on average. When respondents who have reported to work more than 8 hours a day were asked if they received compensation for overtime, most (68%) replied that overtime compensation was paid to them, 7 per cent said that they did not know or did not want to answer. The other 25 per cent did not receive any compensation for extra hours.

Figure 23: Monthly Salary Agreement

- Agreed Prior Migration
- I do not know/ I do not want to answer
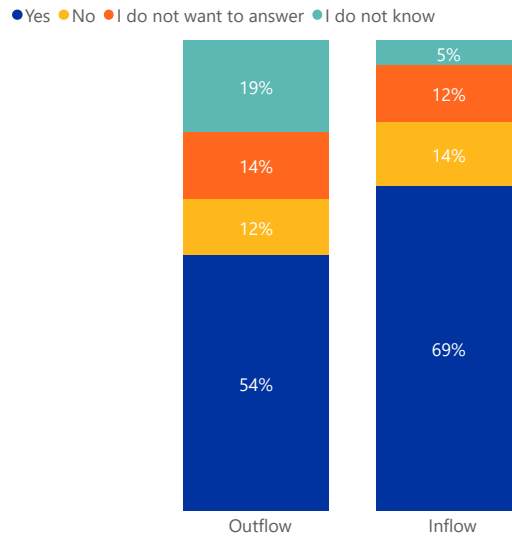- Not Agreed Prior Migration

14%
53%
33%
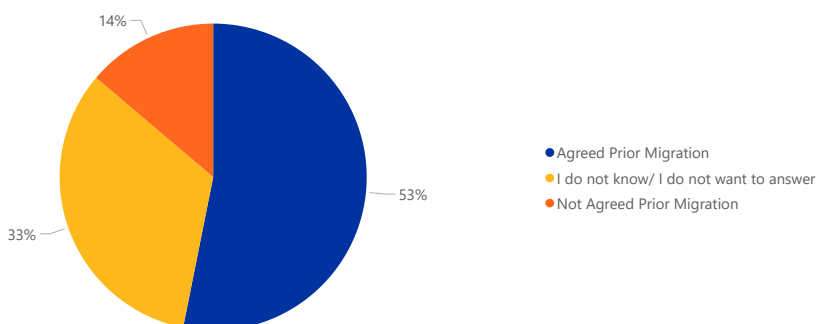
Note: n = 493

Remittance

When looking at Figure 25, it is noticeable that the majority of both, outgoing (Outflow, 54%) and returning (Inflow, 69%) migrants planned to or had sent remittances to their families in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The returning respondent on average sent 3,680,000 LAK per month to Lao People's Democratic Republic with an average remittance fee of 201,000 LAK per month. The most popular remittance channels indicated were banks (39%), followed by unofficial money transfer services (32%). Only 7 per cent used Cash via friends or family to send remittance to their families in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Disclosed spending objectives by the families receiving the remittance (Multiple answers allowed) were household good, clothes, toiletries and other necessities (60%), food (59%), housing (28%), and education (27%).

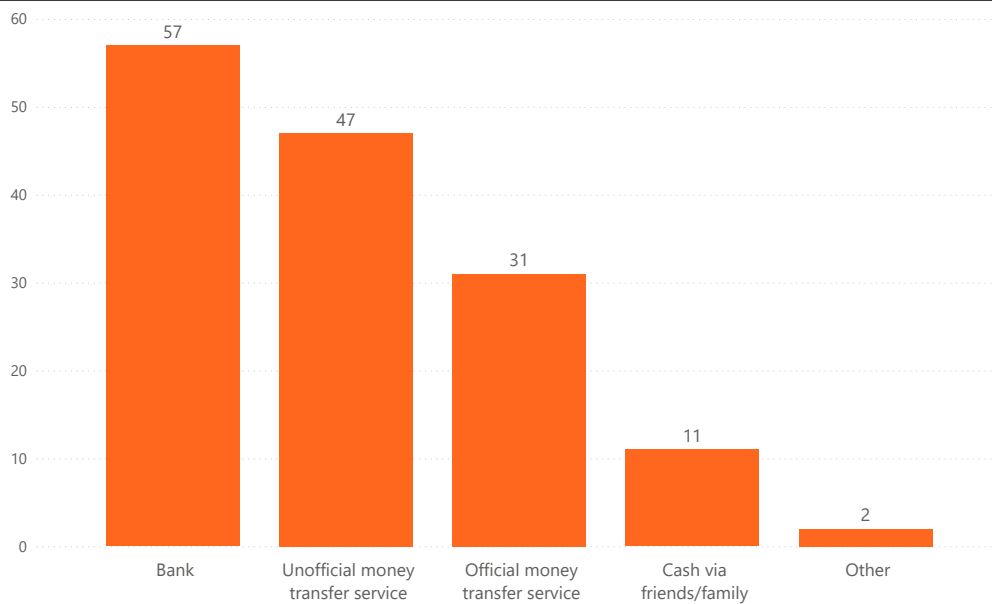**Figure 24: Expected / Actual Remittance to Lao People's Democratic Republic**

● Yes ● No ● I do not want to answer ● I do not know

	Outflow	Inflow
I do not know	19%	5%
I do not want to answer	14%	12%
No	12%	14%
Yes	54%	69%

Note: n = 524

Outflow and Inflow Comparison

The most evident difference between Outflow and Inflow respondents is 19 per cent of Outflow respondents did not know if they would send remittance to Lao People's Democratic Republic yet compared to 5 per cent of Inflow respondents. In addition, outgoing respondents estimated their remittance to be 2,630,000 LAK, which was over one million LAK less than what Inflow respondents had sent.

Figure 25: Remittance Channels

Bank	Unofficial money transfer service	Official money transfer service	Cash via friends/family	Other
57	47	31	11	2

Note: n = 120, Multiple Answers Allowed

Figure 26: Average remittance expected vs. sent

2.63M

Average amount per month (in LAK)

3.68M

Average amount per month (in LAK)

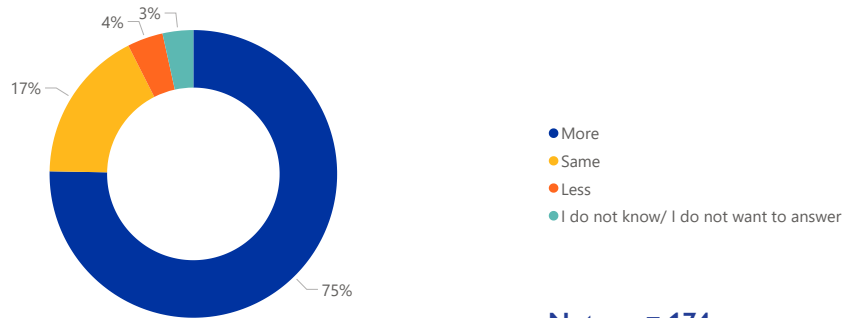**Note: Inflow n=173, Outflow n=111**

Savings

Upon being asked about their savings, 75 per cent of all returning respondents expressed having more savings now than prior to departing to Thailand.

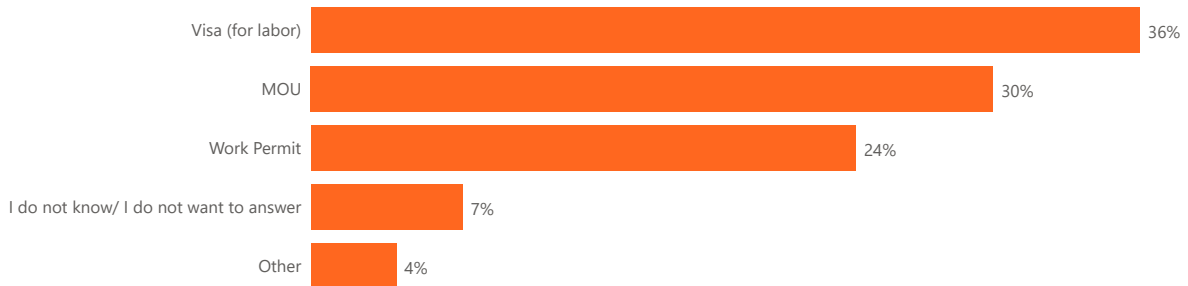# Thematic Area 5 - Migrant Vulnerabilities

Documention Status

The vast majority of the respondents (98%) used international passports as documentation to enter Thailand. Only two respondents travelled with their Lao ID (1%), one with a permission letter, one with a temporary border pass, and one without any document. Most common document for working in Thailand was visa for labour (36%), followed by permission under the memorandums of understanding (MOU) (30%) and work permit (24%).

Figure 27: Saving of Returning Migrants Compared to Pre-Departure

- More
- Same
- Less
- I do not know/ I do not want to answer

4% 3%
17%
75%

Note: n = 174

Figure 28: Document for Working in Thailand

Visa (for labor)	36%
MOU	30%
Work Permit	24%
I do not know/ I do not want to answer	7%
Other	4%

Note: n = 484
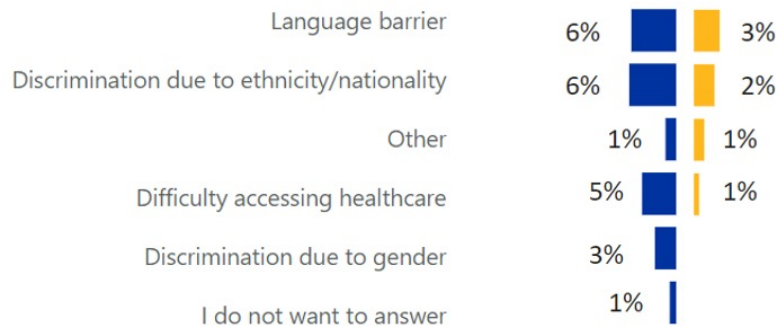
Year on Year Comparison

In comparison to the 2020 Flow Monitoring report, the amount of respondents working in Thailand with a labour visa increased (36% in 2022, 25% in 2020), whereas the share of respondents with a MOU declined (30% in 2022, 34% in 2020). Furthermore, in 2020, more respondents (6%) disclosed travelling to Thailand without any documents (<1% in 2022, 0% in 2019).
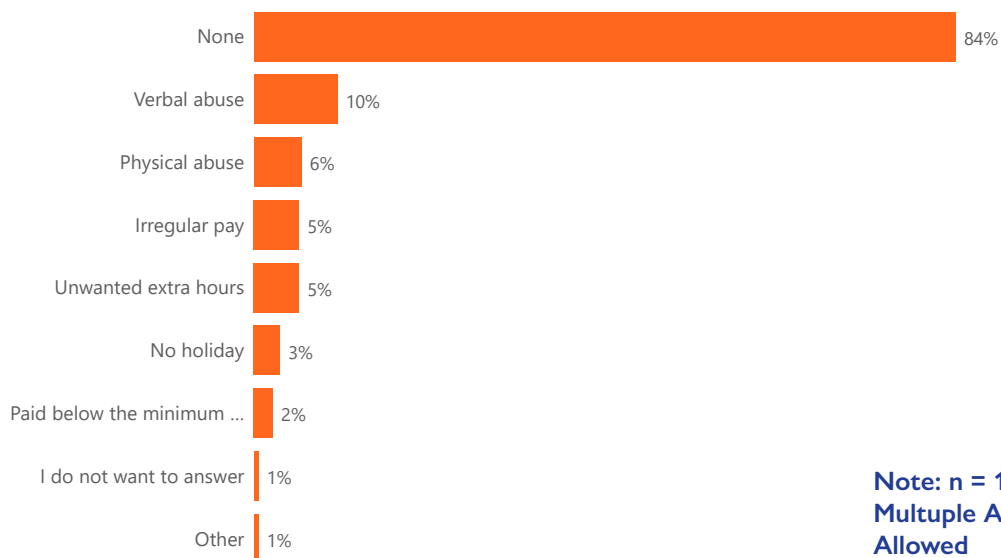
Problems encountered En-Route and in Thailand

Most Outflow respondents (86%) did not expect to encounter challenges and problems while living in Thailand and most Inflow respondents (94%) did not dace any challenges while living in Thailand.

Figure 29: Expected / Actual Problems While Living in Thailand

	Outflow	Inflow
Language barrier	6%	3%
Discrimination due to ethnicity/nationality	6%	2%
Other	1%	1%
Difficulty accessing healthcare	5%	1%
Discrimination due to gender	3%	
I do not want to answer	1%	

Note: Multiple Answers Allowed

Figure 30: Encountered Problems at Workplace in Thailand

None	84%
Verbal abuse	10%
Physical abuse	6%
Irregular pay	5%
Unwanted extra hours	5%
No holiday	3%
Paid below the minimum …	2%
I do not want to answer	1%
Other	1%

Note: n = 174, Multuple Answers Allowed

Outflow and Inflow Comparison

The most prominent challenge mentioned amongst both groups was language barrier (6% for Outflow, 3% for Inflow). However, there were differences for the expected challenge of discrimination due to ethnicity, as well as gender which accounted for 9 per cent of expected challenges for outgoing respondents but only made up 2 per cent of experienced challenges for returning respondents.

Furthermore, of all returning respondents, 84 per cent did not encounter any workplace problems. Eight per cent disclosed verbal abuse as a workplace problem, followed by irregular pay (3%), and no holidays (2%).
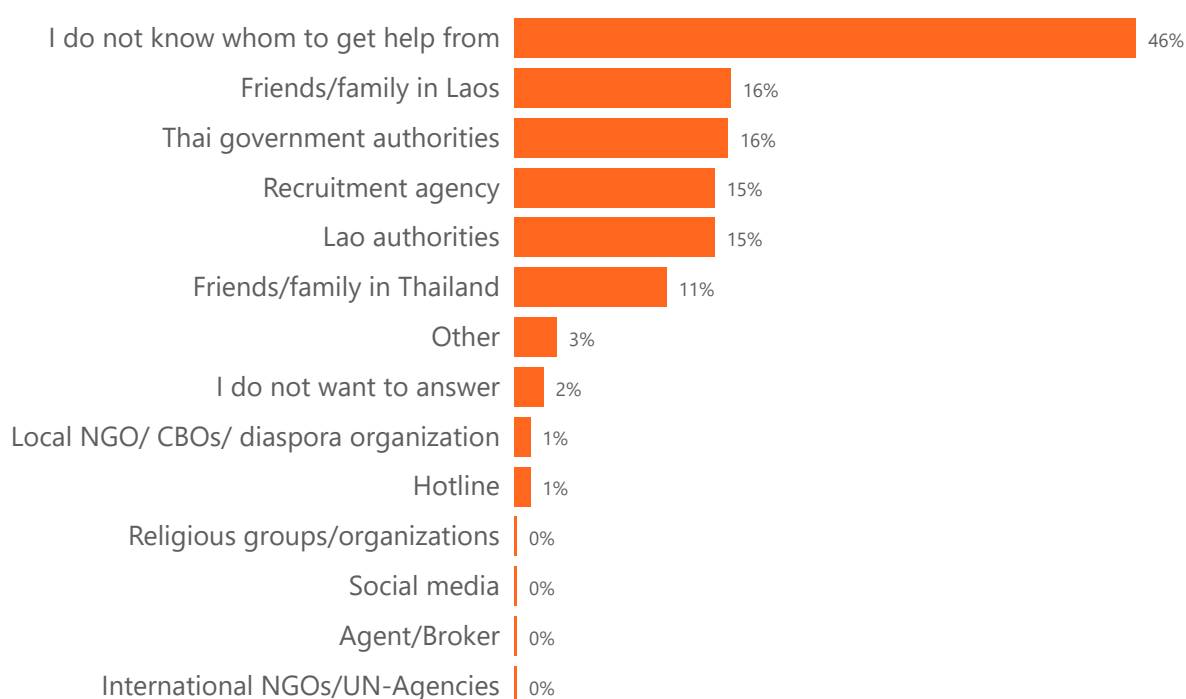
Support Mechanisms

All respondents were asked if they knew where to get support in case of workplace problems during their employment in Thailand. The vast majority of 46 per cent indicated that they did not know who they would get support from. Besides that, friends and family in Lao People's Democratic Republic (16%), Thai authorities (16%), the recruitment agency (15%), and Lao authorities (15%) were mentioned as the most common support systems.

Figure 31: Awareness in case of Workplace Problem

I do not know whom to get help from — 46%
Friends/family in Laos — 16%
Thai government authorities — 16%
Recruitment agency — 15%
Lao authorities — 15%
Friends/family in Thailand — 11%
Other — 3%
I do not want to answer — 2%
Local NGO/ CBOs/ diaspora organization — 1%
Hotline — 1%
Religious groups/organizations — 0%
Social media — 0%
Agent/Broker — 0%
International NGOs/UN-Agencies — 0%

Note: n = 509, Multuple Answers Allowed

Out of the 19 migrants who faced workplace problems, 10 sought help. Out of the 10, four migrants were assisted successfully in resolving the problem, and another 4 did not get resolution, while two migrants got partial resolution. Out of the 4 people who got their problems solved, 2 contacted Thai government authorities and 1 their recruitment agency, 1 friends and family in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Those who did not get resolution for the problem all sought help from friends and family in Lao People's Democratic Republic or Thailand. In addition, problems concerning the salary were not as successful to be resolved as problems regarding verbal abuse.

Figure 32: Support sought for actual workplace problems

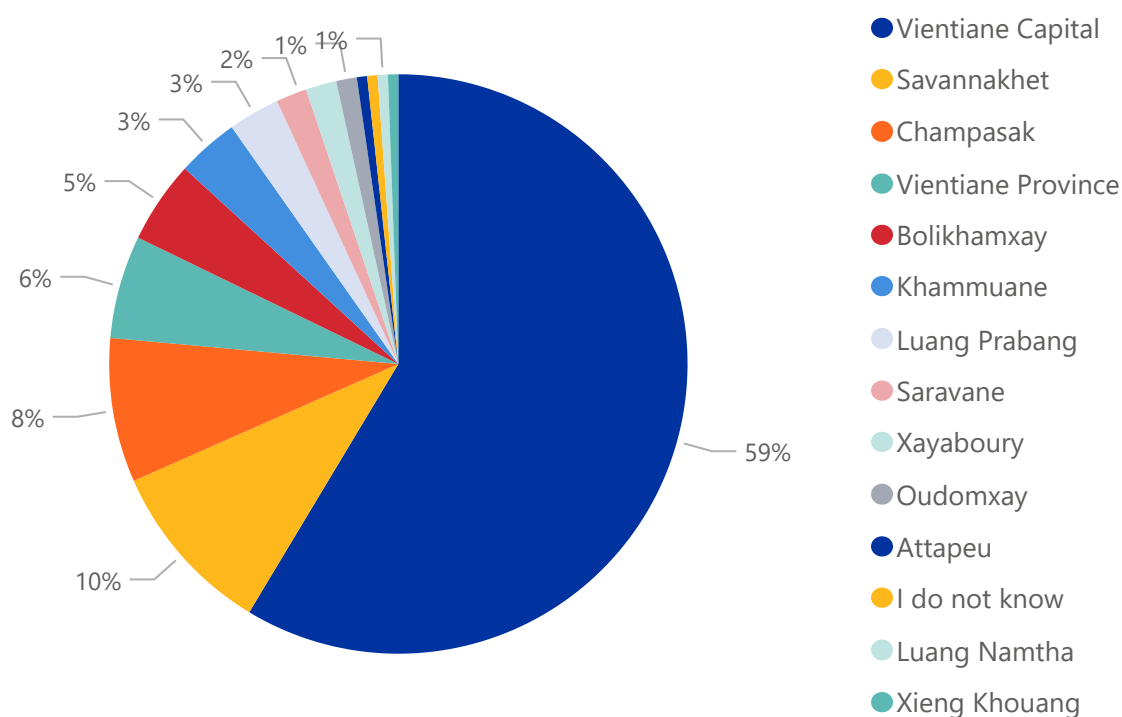| Category	Percentage
I did not seek help	42%
Friends/family in Laos	37%
Friends/family in Thailand	32%
Thai government authorities	11%
I do not want to answer	5%
Lao government authorities	5%
Recruitment Agency	5%
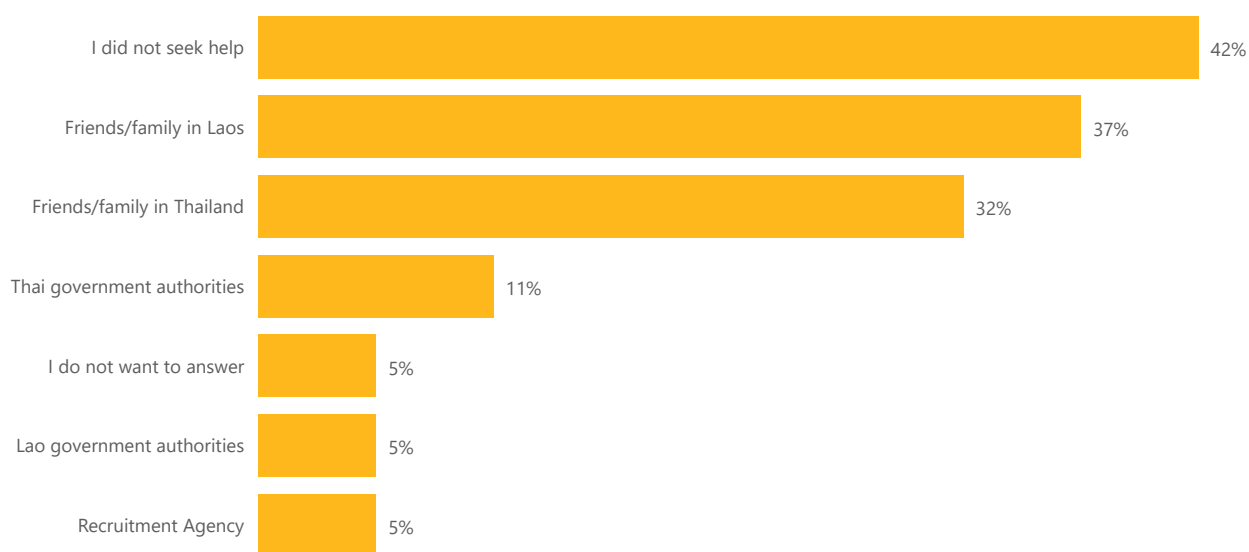
Note: n = 19, Multuple Answers Allowed

Thematic Area 6 - Return

Migration Journey to Lao People's Democratic Republic

Of all 174 returning migrants, with a share of 59 per cent, most respondents indicated Vientiane capital as their final destination in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Even though this largely reflects our choice of interview location, 10 per cent of respondents were returning to Savannakhet, 8 per cent to Champasak, two provinces in the South of Lao People's Democratic Republic. The most common reasons for returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic were short visits (49%), followed by end of visa/work permit (43%). Other reasons such as daily commutes, family requests to return to Lao People's Democratic Republic, COVID-19 or starting a new job in Lao People's Democratic Republic stayed below a share of 5 per cent each.

Figure 33: Final Destination in Lao People's Democratic Republic

Legend:
- Vientiane Capital
- Savannakhet
- Champasak
- Vientiane Province
- Bolikhamxay
- Khammuane
- Luang Prabang
- Saravane
- Xayaboury
- Oudomxay
- Attapeu
- I do not know
- Luang Namtha
- Xieng Khouang

Pie chart values: 59%, 10%, 8%, 6%, 5%, 3%, 3%, 2%, 1%, 1%

Note: n = 174

Figure 34: Reasons for Returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic

Reason	%
Short visit	49%
Visa/ work permit ended	43%
Other	8%
Daily commute	5%
Family request	4%
COVID-19 pandemic	2%
Life/work was not as expected	2%
No contract renewal	2%
Taking a job in Lao PDR	2%
Unemployment	2%
I do not want to answer	1%
Deportation	1%
Retirement	1%
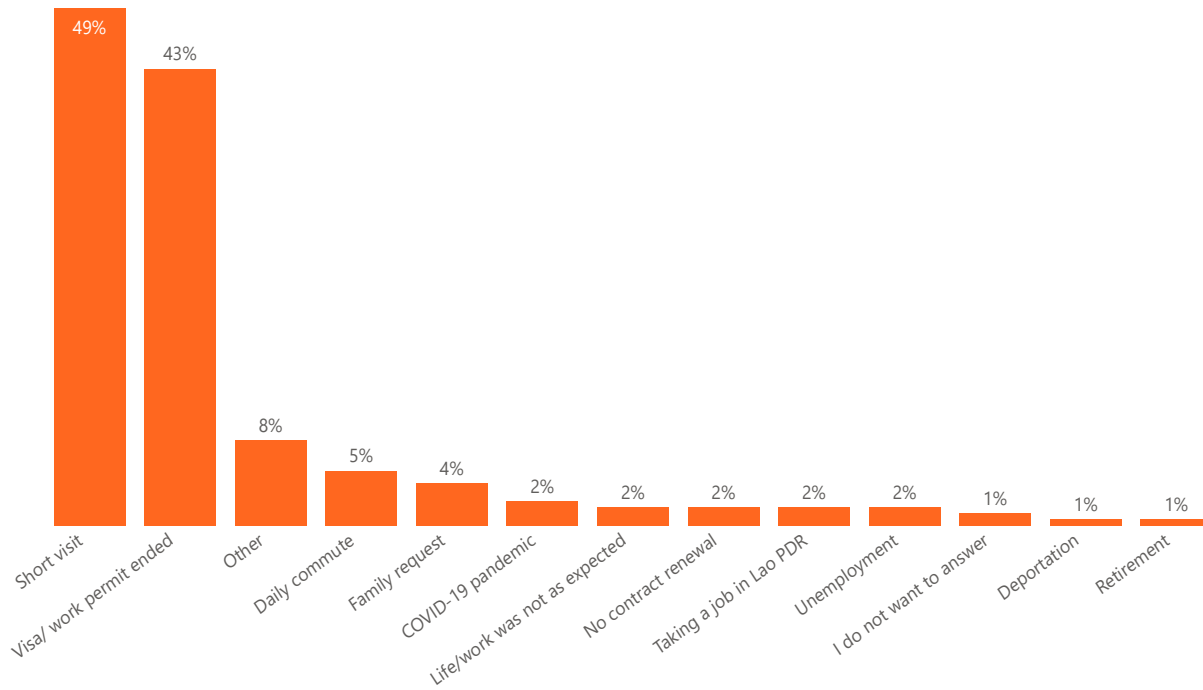
Note: n = 174, Multiple Answers Allowed

Problems expected within Return to Lao People's Democratic Republic

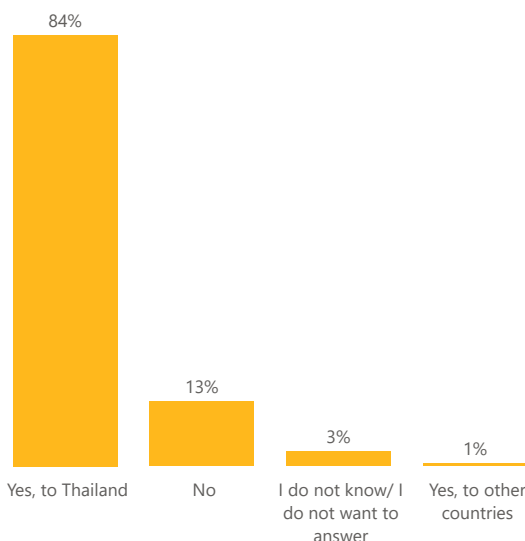Upon being asked about expected problems within the return to Lao People's Democratic Republic, the vast majority of returning respondents (75%) expressed that they did not expect any challenges. Negative reactions due to their migrant status or lacking social support only amounted to under 3 per cent of all returning respondent's expected problems. Even though only 6 per cent disclosed finding a job in Lao People's Democratic Republic as an expected challenge, of those returning migrants seeking to live in Lao People's Democratic Republic, only 14 per cent had a job lined up in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Figure 35: Returning Migrant's Openness to Migration Again

Response	%
Yes, to Thailand	84%
No	13%
I do not know/ I do not want to answer	3%
Yes, to other countries	1%

Note: n = 174

Attitude towards Future Migration

All returning respondents were asked about their openness to migrate again in the future. Eighty-four per cent were open to migrating to Thailand again, 13 per cent share that they would not consider migrating again. Only one respondent was considering migrating to other country than Thailand, namely the Republic of Korea.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study are useful in providing empirical data to confirm or challenge anecdotal knowledge or preconceptions about cross border movements and labour migration between Thailand and Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The data collection took place in September 2022 at Vientiane Central Bus Station, First Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge and on various buses that run between the two locations. The Inflow survey had 174 valid responses and the Outflow survey had 350 valid responses. In addition to reporting on data collected this year, the report draws key trends and changes amongst previous Flow Monitoring reports with data collection periods in 2019 and 2020.

The below section summarizes main findings and key trends for each thematic area.

Migration Profiles

The socio-demographic profiles of the 524 Lao labour migrants interviewed mirrors the samples from the Flow Monitoring Activities conducted in 2019 and 2020 in most aspects. Half of the interviewed migrants were 21-30 years old, the female-to-male ratio was almost 1:1, and less than 1 per cent of respondents this year reported to have a chronic health condition. This year, more migrants were married and had children, but the share of migrants living with their children in Thailand has decreased. Education levels were lower this year compared to the 2020 Flow Monitoring report but similar to the 2019 report.

More than half of the respondents had already worked in Thailand with very few having worked in other countries besides Thailand, mostly in neighbouring countries of Lao People's Democratic Republic. Most migrants were from Champasak, Savannakhet, and Vientiane capital, and Bangkok was the most popular labour migration destination in Thailand. In comparison with previous years, Udon Thani (was second most popular in 2019) has become a less prominent destination for Lao migrants.

Drivers of Migration

This year, a significant decrease in migrants with no income prior to migrating to Thailand was recorded, with a noticeable drop of migrants engaging in unpaid family work or were unemployed compared to 2020, potentially indicating a recovery of the job market in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Nevertheless, the most influential drivers of migration were higher income levels in Thailand and lacking job opportunities in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Migrants reported economic events in their home country to be additional factors but did not report that climate change induced natural disasters as a push factor. Most popular reasons for choosing Thailand as a destination country were low language barrier, higher salaries, and better working conditions. Prior to migrating to Thailand, the vast majority of Lao migrants had obtained employment and the most common ways to obtain employment were through relatives and friends in Thailand and recruitment agencies. However, obtaining a job through family and friends is decreasing in popularity compared to data from previous reports.

Pre-migration Arrangements and Migration Journey

When gathering information regarding Thailand prior to migration, half of the people relied on information of family and friends in Thailand, and a big share used the internet including social media. Regarding employment, most migrants were working as regularly salaried workers in Thailand, another great share as daily wage earners. In comparison to the previous reports, construction work is decreasing in popularity, while the manufacturing and hospitality sector remain the top sectors for Lao migrants in Thailand. The average costs spent on migrating to Thailand was 6,684,797 LAK, mostly funded through personal savings. If debt was taken out for the migration journey, it was mostly borrowed from family and friends. The average migration journey of respondents from Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand proceeded through international land border checkpoints and involved the companionship of friends or groups of fellow migrants. A sharp decrease of migrants travelling with children or alone was identified. A growing number of migrants are not receiving any assistance on preparing for their migration journey. However, most respondents indicated no pre-departure difficulties. Less than half of migrants had attended pre-departure orientation organized by recruitment agency or employer.

Financial Status

Prior to their migration journey, only half of the respondents who had obtained employment had seen their working contract and had agreed on a monthly salary. In line with previous Flow Monitoring reports, Lao migrants earned more than they expected. Similarly, the amount of remittance to families in Lao People's Democratic Republic was also higher than the expected amount. The average salary was 6,300,000 LAK per month, with an average of nine working hours per day and overtime was mostly compensated for. Most Lao labour migrants in Thailand sent monthly remittance to family and friends in Lao People's Democratic Republic with an average of 3,680,000 LAK per month. Most common remittance channels were banks and unofficial money sending services and monthly remittance fee was 201,000 LAK on average. Seventy-five per cent of all returning migrants recorded more savings now than before migrating to Thailand.

Migrant Vulnerabilities

Most Lao migrants were travelling with international passports, nearly none was travelling without any documents, which represents a decrease in comparison to the Flow Monitoring report of 2020. Documents used to work regularly in Thailand were predominantly labour visas, and permissions under the MOU, the latter losing popularity over the years. The vast majority of outgoing migrants did not expect to face any challenges while living in Thailand, which matches the experiences of returning migrants. This is similar to the expectation and experience of migrants regarding workplace problems. Among workplace problems, verbal and physical abuse made up the largest part, followed by salary concerns. Most migrants indicated that they did not know where they would get help from in case of a workplace problem. Most respondents turn to their family and friends in case of a problem and only a small minority could resolve their problems through this mean.

Return

Only one third of all respondents were returning to Lao People's Democratic Republic permanently or semi-permanently with majority indicating that their return was for a short visit only. More than half of them indicated Vientiane capital to be their final destination in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The most common reason for returning, besides short visits, was ending of visa or work permit for Thailand. Of those migrants who returned to Lao People's Democratic Republic, not including short time visitors, only a small share had a job lined up in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Yet, most of the returning migrants did not expect to face any problems upon their return. Over 80 per cent of returning migrants were open to migrating to Thailand again.

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