

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



IOM partner, CHRO, providing WASH items to road construction workers. © IOM 2020

OVERVIEW

This rapid assessment was conducted by the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), with the technical support of IOM and in close coordination with the Department of Labour. The assessment covered seven townships of Chin State, namely Matupi, Kanpetlet, Tedim, Thantlang, Falam, Hakha, and Mindat.¹ The objectives of the assessment were to:

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

RETURN MIGRATION

Of the 2,311 returned migrants surveyed, 387 have returned to Myanmar's Chin State (155 women; 232 men).² 295 (76%) of Chin State returnees returned from abroad, 92 (24%) from within Myanmar.

Among international Chin State returnees, 28 per cent had returned from China, 28 per cent from India, 26 per cent from Malaysia and 11 per cent from Singapore (3% had returned from Thailand, 2% from Japan, 1% from South Korea, and another 1% said none of the options were applicable to them). The majority of internal migrants had returned from Yangon (64%), another 11 per cent had returned from Sagaing Region, and a further 10 per cent from within Chin state. A further 4 per cent had returned from Mandalay Region, 3 per cent from Kachin State, 3 per cent from Magway Region, 2 per cent from Nay Pyi Taw, and 2 per cent from Shan State.

27 per cent of returned migrants to Chin said that they returned because they lost their job due to COVID-19 (28% men; 25% women). 16 per cent said that they returned because they got scared and ran away (17% men; 14% women), 11 per cent said that their family asked them to return due to COVID-19 (10% men; 12% women). A further 32 per cent returned for other reasons (but still related to the pandemic). A further 7 per cent reported returning due to increased hardships at destination, the

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.

Funding for this assessment was provided by the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT)



Livelihoods and Food Security Fund



managed by UNOPS

Thingyan holidays, or because they wanted to escape a COVID-19 lockdown.

There were some differences in reasons for return depending on the country of destination. 35 per cent of Chin State returnees from China said they returned for reasons unrelated to COVID-19, 34 per cent said they returned because they lost their job as a result of COVID-19 and 11 per cent said they got scared and ran away. 38 per cent of migrants who returned to Chin from India said that they lost their job as a result of COVID-19 and 20 per cent said they got scared of COVID-19 and ran away. 38 per cent of returnees from Malaysia said they returned for reasons unrelated to the pandemic, 20 per cent said they lost their job due to COVID-19, and 16 per cent said their family wanted them to return due to COVID-19.

Prior to returning home, 20 per cent of migrants from Chin State said they had experienced increased psychological stress (16% men; 24% women), 12 per cent said they had experienced discrimination/stigma (12% men; 13% women), and 12 per cent said they had experienced psychological abuse (Figure 1). A further 10 per cent reported experiencing threats or physical abuse, while 41 per cent said none of the aforementioned were applicable.

Since returning to Chin State, migrants reported around the same level of stressors and 19 per cent said they had experienced increased psychological stress (16% men; 24% women), 14 per cent said they had experienced discrimination/stigma, and 11 per cent said they had experienced increased psychological abuse. A further 9 per cent reported experiences of physical abuse or threats. 42 per cent said that none of the options were applicable to them. This emphasises the importance of incorporating mental health and psychosocial

support services (MHPSS) into ongoing COVID-19 response activities in Chin State.

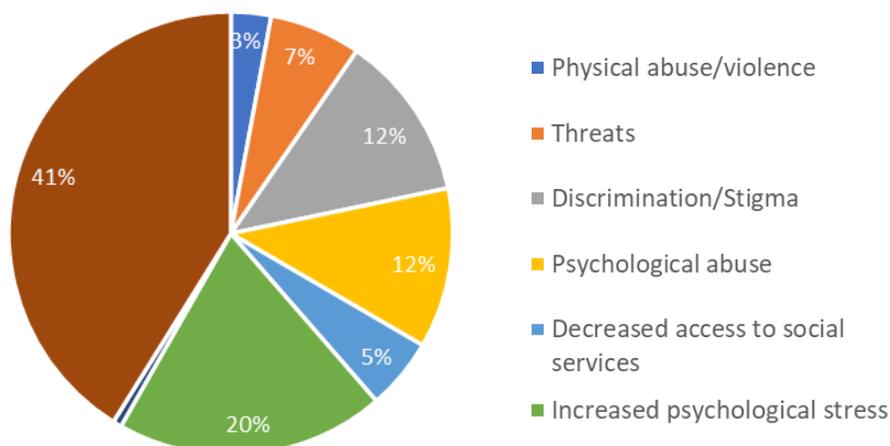
Returnees from within Myanmar and abroad have been required to quarantine in either community facilities or at home. In Chin State, 68 per cent of returnees said they had been requested to carry out some form of quarantine and 28 per cent reported they were not requested to quarantine (the remainder could not remember what they were asked to do or said that they were not told to do anything). Subsequently, 71 per cent said they quarantined, while 28 per cent said they did not, suggesting a strong correlation between requests to quarantine and returnees' actions.

Of those who quarantined in a community facility, 28 per cent said there was not enough protective items and hygiene items, while 16 per cent reported that there were not enough non-food supplies, such as cloths, blankets and mattresses. A further 14 per cent reported a lack of sufficient WASH facilities, such as handwashing stations. 13 per cent cited "other" challenges while in quarantine, 11 per cent said the facilities were unsafe/not appropriate, 7 per cent said there was not enough psychological care, and 5 per cent said there was not enough food for returnees. Men and women reported similar challenges in quarantine.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

The pandemic has forced a growing number of migrant workers to return home to Myanmar. As a consequence, migrants and their families have had to contend with losing an important income source. Households in Chin State appear to be faring marginally better than those in other surveyed states and regions (Figure 2). 31 per cent of Chin State returnees said remittances were their main/only source of income and that they were no longer

Figure 1: Experiences before return



receiving this income (38% men; 21% women). 39 per cent said that remittances were not their households' main source of income (33% men; 49% women).

The loss of remittances has impacted migrants, their families and communities in different ways. In Chin State, households appear to have less savings, compared with households in other states and regions. For example, 79 per cent of surveyed returnees in Chin State said that their households do not have any savings (81% men; 76% women), and 14 per cent said that they have savings but are using them at an increased rate. Only 8 per cent of returnees to Chin State said that their households have savings but did not need to use them.

Households that were no longer receiving remittances have had to look for alternative sources of income to fill the economic gap. For some families, this means borrowing money and accumulating debt. In Chin State, 49 per cent of returnees said that their households were not in debt, although this figure was higher in the households of women returnees than men (55% vs 44%). Another 29 per cent said that their household is in debt and that the debt has worsened since the pandemic. 23 per cent said they are in debt, but the debt has not been affected by the pandemic.

INTENTIONS

Although the pandemic appears far from over in Myanmar and around the world, returned migrant workers are having to consider what they will do to support themselves and their families. For some, remigration remains the best option. 197 (51%) Chin State respondents said that they plan to remigrate. Of the 197 individuals who plan to remigrate, 80 per cent said they plan to go as soon as possible, 9 per cent said they plan to go in the next 1-3 months,

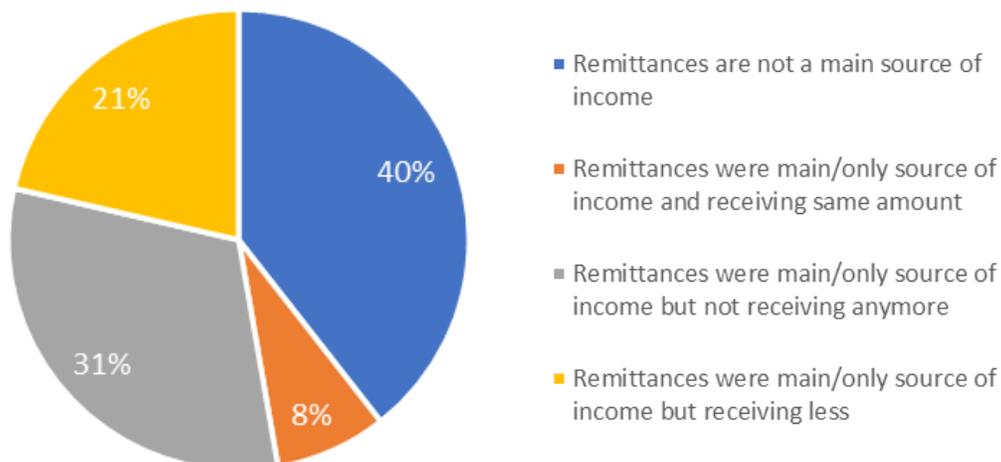
and 5 per cent said they plan to leave sometime in the next year. 7 per cent said they do not know what they will do.

Similar to returned migrants surveyed in other parts of the country, 83 per cent of Chin State returnees who plan to remigrate said that they intend to go back to the same place they were previously working (79% men; 89% women), and 17 per cent said they plan to go to a different place. 70 per cent said they intend to work the same job they worked before the pandemic. Among Chin State returnees not intending to remigrate, over half (53%) said they plan to work in the agricultural sector, with men more likely to do so than women (61% vs 40%). Women were more likely to seek casual work than men (26% vs 16%), while a further 10 per cent said they plan to work in jobs not listed in the survey. 9 per cent said they plan to work in either childcare, construction, domestic work, factory work or a family business; and 6 per cent said they did not know what they would do.

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. Over a quarter (28%) of Chin State returnees surveyed said that food support is of greatest importance, 22 per cent said livelihood support, 13 per cent said hygiene items were needed, and a further 12 per cent said civil documentation was needed immediately. A further 25 per cent said they needed shelter (8%), medical care (6%) clothing (6%), and psychological care (5%). 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

Figure 2: Remittances



migrants and their families, beyond satisfying immediate needs (Figure 3). 27 per cent of Chin State returnees surveyed said skills training would be of greatest help (26% men; 29% women), 26 per cent said that they would benefit from business start-up support (27% men; 24% women), and 14 per cent said they would benefit from help with remigration/finding employment abroad (13% men; 15% women). These forms of assistance would contribute to recovery efforts, while giving returned migrants options other than immediately migrating for work.

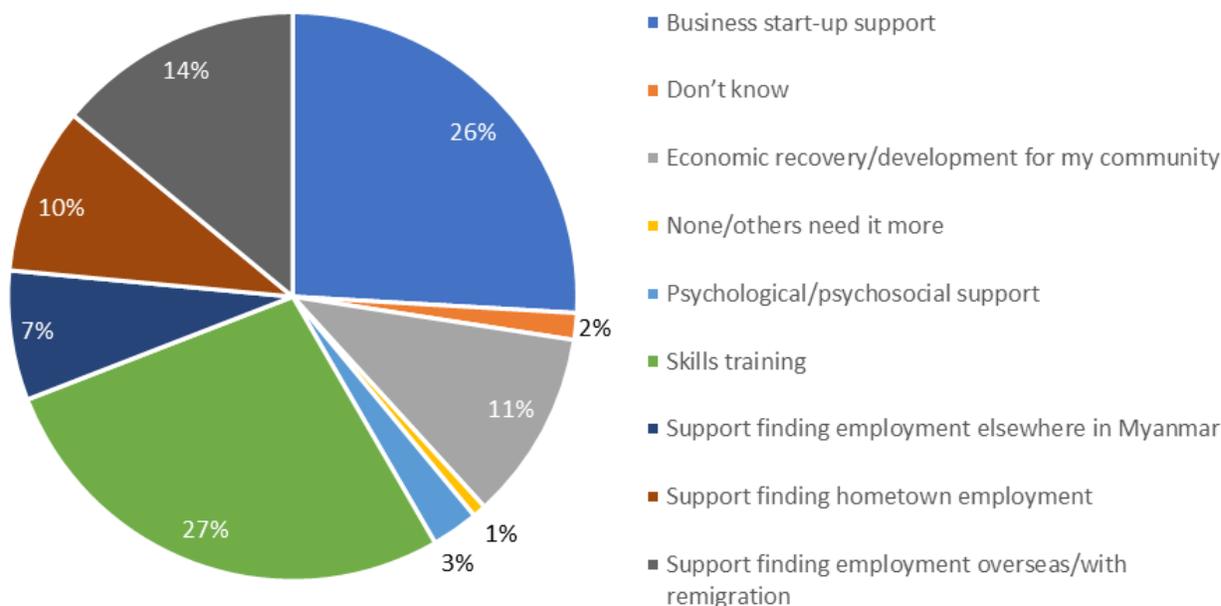
CONCLUSION

Findings on the experiences of returned migrant workers to Chin State indicates that the psychological impacts of the pandemic and associated economic stress have been keenly felt by migrant workers from Chin State and their communities. Prior to and following Chin State migrants' return home, around half of respondents reported some form of psychological stress or abuse, discrimination, threats or physical abuse. Such traumatic experiences indicate an ongoing need for incorporating mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) into COVID-19 response activities in Chin State. Compared to

other states/regions, a lower proportion of returnees reported being requested to quarantine, while around half of those who did quarantine reported a lack of food, non-food items and WASH facilities, indicating the need to continue support measures to quarantine facilities. Around a third of respondents in Chin State reported an immediate need for food support, while a further 22 per cent said they needed livelihood support.



Figure 3: Most beneficial support if situation improves



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

No (50/B), Thiri Mingalar 2nd Street, Ward (8), Kamayut Township, Yangon, Myanmar.
 Phone: (+96) 9 73236679-80, (+95) 1 532279, 523509 Fax: (+95) 1 532279 Email: iomyangon@iom.int
 Website: myanmar.iom.int/en Facebook: facebook.com/MissMigration