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# LIFT Forum 2019: *People on the move: Migration and urbanisation*

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Network (MMN) • 13 June 2019*

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# Introduction of MMN

## Mekong Migration Network (MMN)

- Formally launched in 2003 in response to the need for a sub-regional collaboration on labor migration in Mekong
- Currently over 40 member orgs across Mekong.
- Areas of joint action:

\*Collaborative research;

\*Info monitoring;

\*Advocacy;

\*Capacity building; and

\*Networking.



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# Content

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- Urbanisation
- International migration
- Challenges



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# The urbanization (1)

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- The key driver of urbanisation in Myanmar is migration. The population density in Yangon is 10 times higher than the national average. (World Bank)
  - Over 9 million internal migrants in 2015 in Myanmar. 53 % of all internal migrants are women. (2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census)
  - Over 70 % of internal migrants are below the age of 35.
  - Movement across a state or region boundary is primarily rural-to-urban migration with Yangon and Mandalay being the main destinations (UNESCO et al., 2018). Yangon's population is expected to increase 34 % by 2030,
  - Only 20% have permanent wage jobs. The majority do not have regular wages or benefits. Nearly 80% of the workers in urban areas work in microenterprises. (World Bank)



# The urbanization (2)

- Thilawa SEZ is being designed to accommodate 500 factories and employ 200,000 workers. 6,220 workers, 64% of whom are women, are currently employed in 43 SEZ factories.
- Jobs in SEZs were expected to incentivise the return of some of the country's 4.25 million cross-border migrant workers (Buchanan et al., 2013; IOM, 2017). These ambitions have yet to be realised.
- Challenges urbanisation has brought include: lack of access to piped water, traffic congestion, informal settlements, infrastructure needs, lack of inclusive growth and skilled workers, spatial inclusion, inequitable opportunities, lack of transparency and fair decision making. (WB)



# International migration (1)

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- International migration has been a long feature of Myanmar people's lives.
  - Estimated 4.25 million international migrant workers. (Population census in 2014)
  - Destination countries include: Thailand, Malaysia, China and Singapore, Korea, Japan, and the GCC countries.
  - Remittances have helped meet immediate needs of migrants' families. Estimated total amount of remittance in 2017 was USD3.5 billion. (World Bank) The actual amount is much higher, as the figure does not include the billions more remitted through informal channels.



## International migration (2)

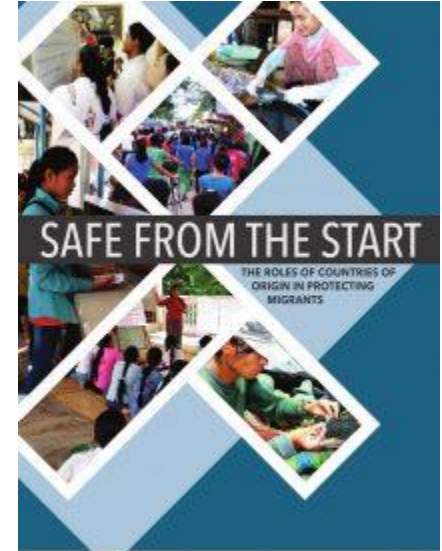
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- Intra Mekong migration, including that from Myanmar has been characterized by its mixed and informal nature for a long time. Recently, governments in the region have focused their efforts on regularization of migration. However, the vast majority of migrants continue to migrate through informal channels.
  - In addition to the cost and time, another important reason for migrants not to choose the regular migration channels is the lack of confidence that regular migration channels will assure them rights and better benefits.-> Strengthening the roles of countries in protecting migrants' rights may bring in a win-win situation as it will lead to more confidence among migrant workers about the benefits of regular migration.



# International migration (3)

In 2016-2017, MMN carried out the project to examine the roles of countries of origin in protecting migrants' rights. The roles were classified as the following:

1. Establishing migration mechanisms
  2. Information dissemination
  3. Regulation of recruitment agencies
  4. Provision of overseas assistance
  5. International Cooperation
  6. Provision of overseas welfare funds and social security
1. Facilitating reintegration



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## International migration (4)

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In the study, MMN looked at the policies and practices of other countries, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, and came up with good practices and lessons learnt. Some of the good practices included the following:

- \*Extensive pre-deployment/pre-decision education to help people make informed decisions.
- \*Strict licensing requirements for recruitment agencies, including those that seek to avoid corruption and conflict of interest.
- \*Ongoing low-level diplomacy with destination governments.
- \*Cooperation with other origin countries of origin.



## International migration (5)

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When MMN organised a Policy Dialogue on Roles of Countries to launch the report, Director General U Win Shein of Myanmar's Department of Labour under the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, declared that:

- "countries of origin should work to reduce the time and bureaucracy required for the migration process, provide education and information, improve the quality of life of migrants, and ultimately aim to reduce poverty for migrants...We want to collaborate and get recommendations from different sectors, as well as listen to one another through positive and active communication so that we can provide better resources to protect migrant workers."



## International migration (6)



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- While migration within the region is likely to continue, migration to countries outside the region is also growing.
  - Most recently, Japan is considered as the next “hot” destination country for Myanmar workers.
  - As of June 2018, there were 24,472 migrant workers from Myanmar, 6,800 of whom were working under the Industrial Technical Trainee Program. This number is likely to rapidly increase in the next few years.
  - In December 2018, Japan amended its immigration laws and created a new “special skill” visa. This came into effect in April 2019. Direct hiring is one of features. Migrants are classified for Tier 1 & 2 with varying degrees of rights.
  - This was the first time that Japan officially acknowledged that they need “workers” to fill the country’s labour shortage.
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# International migration (7)



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- Japan-the fastest aging country in the world- is targeting to recruit 345,000 migrant workers in the next 5 years. Myanmar is one of the key source countries for Japan. Myanmar and Japan signed the bilateral Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) on 28 March 2019.
  - The 14 industries listed as “sectors facing labour shortage” including care sector, construction, agriculture, manufacturing etc are allowed to hire migrant workers under the new system. Many of these industries have had poor record in the past regarding treatment of “trainees”.
  - These industries are expected to have 1.45 million labour shortage by 2024. Hence, if 345,000 migrant workers are recruited to Japan in the next 5 years,, it will fill only 20% of labour shortage. It is likely that Japan will continuously review its migration policies.
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# Challenges

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- Regarding migration to Japan, challenges identified in multi-stakeholder consultation meetings MMN organised include the following:
    - Lack of clear information available for prospective migrant workers about migration to Japan, hence impossible for people to make informed decision.
    - Limited experience on CSOs in supporting prospective migrants, migrant families, or returnees to/from Japan.
    - Challenge in transforming knowledge and skills migrant returnees bring back to Myanmar to sustainable employment back home, and/or linking to the country's human resource development strategy.
    - Complicated migration governance systems both in Myanmar and Japan, leading to many actors' involved in migration process, hence difficult to make those responsible for rights violation to be accountable.
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## Conclusions

*1. Regularisation of migration in the region is more likely to be successful if the regular migration channels become cheaper and more accessible, but more importantly, if migrants can see the convincing evidence that regular migration channels guarantee them rights protection and better benefit. Hence strengthening roles of countries of origin in protecting migrants' rights will bring about win-win situation where workers can enjoy their rights and where governments can govern outbound migration more effectively.*

*2. New migration trends such as the one to Japan has potential in diversifying opportunities for workers from Myanmar. However, the proactive approach on Myanmar side to make sure prospective workers are provided with accurate information and have access to recourse in case of rights violation, etc is needed.*

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**Thank you.**

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