

Impacts of migration on households in Myanmar's Dry Zone



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About the study:

This brief is based on a report, “Impacts of Migration on Households in the Dry Zone, Myanmar”, by Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan (School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University) and John Knodel (Population Studies Center, University of Michigan). They analysed findings from a survey carried out by Myanmar Survey Research in 700 households across two townships in Mandalay Region (Myingyan and Tuangtha) and two townships in Magway Region (Pakkoku and Yesagy). The study was commissioned by HelpAge International with funding from the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund. The full report is available online at <http://ageingasia.org/migration-impact-dry-zone-myanmar-report>. The report examines recent migration during the last five years. The focus is on migrants who moved beyond township for at least one year.

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Who are the migrants from the Dry Zone?

Migration is common in Myanmar's Dry Zone. About two thirds of migrants are men. Migrants tend to move first in their mid to late 20s. Most migrate for economic reasons, particularly for employment in non-agricultural sectors. The migration decision is usually made by migrants themselves in consultation with immediate family members such as parents and siblings. Nearly three quarters of migrants have received at least some financial support from origin households to set up at the destination.

Where do they migrate?

Internal migration to another region or state in Myanmar is more common than international migration (see table). It is more common for members of households in middle wealth strata to migrate outside the country, compared to those from the poorest or wealthiest households. Remittances sent home from international migrants tend to be significantly larger than those from internal migrants.

Table 1: About Dry Zone migrants¹

Gender	
Male	65%
Female	35%
Mean age in 2017	27.8 years
Mean age when first migrating	25.6 years
Education	
No education	8.4%
Some primary	12.1%
Complete primary	15.3%
Secondary and beyond	64.3%
Destination	
Same district (different township)	3.4%
Same region/state	7.4%
Yangon	16.4%
Another region/state (not Yangon)	54.4%
Another country	18.5%
Main reasons for migration	
Work/employment	87.8%
Education	4.3%
Marriage/followed family	7.6%
Conflicts/wars	0.3%

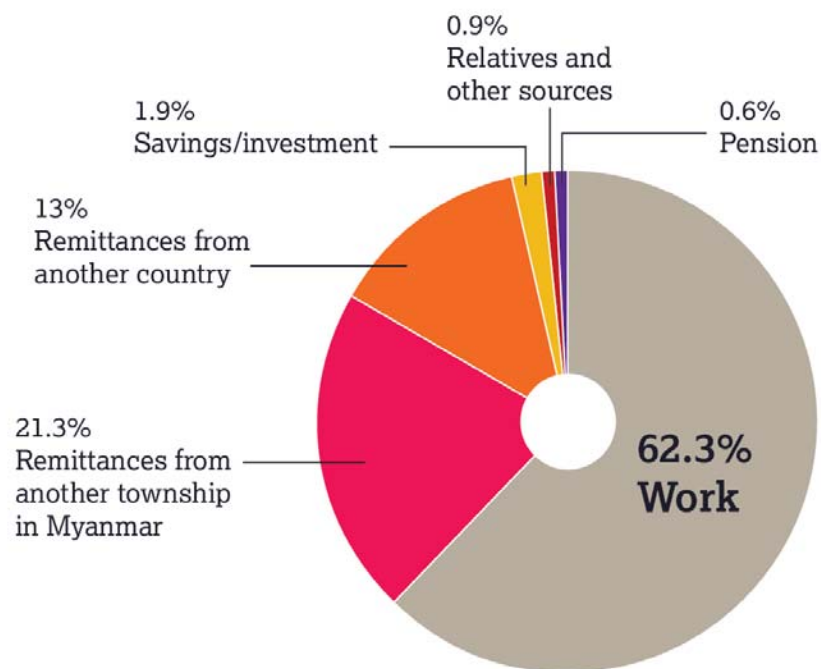


1. Characteristics of migrants and their migration patterns by migrant-source areas in the Dry Zone. The source for all tables/figures in this publication is the 2017 Dry Zone Migration Impact Survey conducted by this study.

How heavily do households rely on remittances from migrants?

The study did not find evidence that households in the Dry Zone are excessively dependent on remittances. Results show that a majority of both migrant-sending and non-migrant households rely on the work of household members as their major income source (see Figure 1). Only a quarter of urban migrant-sending households and a third of their rural counterparts rely on remittances as their main source of income. Slightly more than half of the households surveyed receive remittances, either from another township in Myanmar or from outside the country. All other sources of income (such as savings, pension, welfare) are relatively uncommon.

Figure 1: Work is the main source of income in migrant-sending households²



Are migrant-sending households disadvantaged?

The impacts of migration on origin households and their members can be interpreted in several ways:

- **The alarmist perspective** views extensive migration especially from rural to urban areas as having adverse effects on households and populations remaining in sending communities, potentially resulting in labor shortages and leaving young children and frail older persons in rural areas to fend for themselves.
- **The household strategy perspective** views migration more positively as a way to diversify economic risks for the origin households and to benefit both migrants and family members who remain behind.
- **The modified extended family perspective** suggests that advances in transportation and communication technologies permit household members to maintain relationships and fulfill at least some of their obligations to the household, although in modified forms.

2. Percent distribution of the main source of income for migrant-sending households in the survey sample.

The findings of this study are least consistent with the alarmist perspective. Migration has both benefits and disadvantages for migrant-sending households, but it appears that in most cases the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Thus, migrant-sending households do not appear particularly disadvantaged. Migrant-sending households in rural areas do not suffer from a shortage of adults to perform work, as they tend to be larger and have more adults in prime working age than non-migrant households. Migrant-sending households are better-off in terms of household wealth and size of land ownership. They are also less likely to report inadequate income.

However, given the nature of the study, it is limited in determining causality between migration and the material wellbeing of the household. That is, the study cannot explain whether households are better-off because of migrants' remittances or because well-off households are more likely to use migration as a wealth accumulation strategy in the first place.

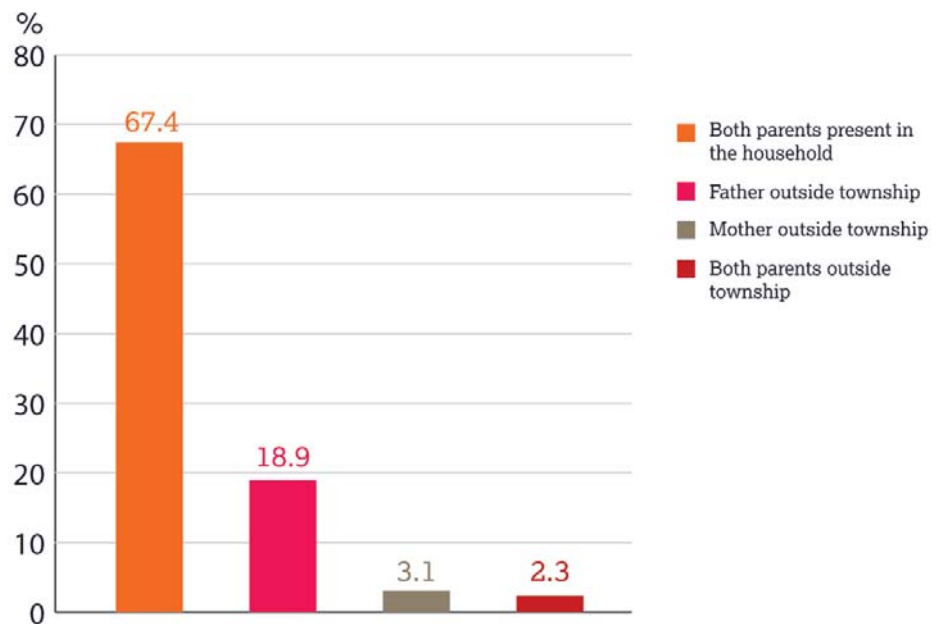


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Are remaining children, older people, or people with disabilities disadvantaged by migration?

Also contradicting the alarmist perspective, the study found few negative effects on children under age 15 from the migration of their parents. The study's results indicate that nearly all children (94 per cent) live in the same household as their mother. Migrants tend to be fathers rather than mothers (see Figure 2). Adverse impacts on children appear limited to the small number whose mother or both parents migrated beyond the township. Results also indicate that people with disabilities in migrant-sending households are not worse off than their counterparts from non-migrant households in terms of receiving care and having unmet care needs. Nevertheless, the study shows that the unmet need for care is still high for people with disabilities in the Dry Zone, regardless of their type of household.

Figure 2: Children rarely lose their mother or both parents to migration³



A common assumption is that when adults migrate from rural areas for work, they leave older persons behind in a disadvantaged situation. However, the frail family members (often elderly parents) that need assistance are often cared for by the migrant's siblings who remain in or near the origin household. Migrants also typically enjoy benefits from their households in the origin community. For example, many leave their young children in the care of adult family members who remain in origin households.



Mutual dependence benefits both migrants and family members who remain behind.

What might explain the lack of negative impacts of migration on origin households?

The lack of (or very limited) evidence from the study on the negative impacts of migration is possibly explained by the current patterns of migration in Myanmar, which may change over time. Larger households and those with some landholding and assets are more likely to have one of their members migrate compared to smaller households and those with limited material resources. This is perhaps

3. Migration status of parents of children under age 15 in households sampled in the survey. The analysis does not consider those whose mother or father are deceased or whose parents' location is unknown. Migration refers to movement beyond one's township. Percentage of father/mother outside township include cases in which either one or both parents are outside the township.

because they can afford to do so – in terms of the number of household members available to migrate and migration-related expenses. Evidence from this study further suggests that households may have strategies to limit the number of adult members who migrate away from home at the same time. Migrant-sending households tend to have enough members to cover household needs (for example, providing care for children and disabled household members).

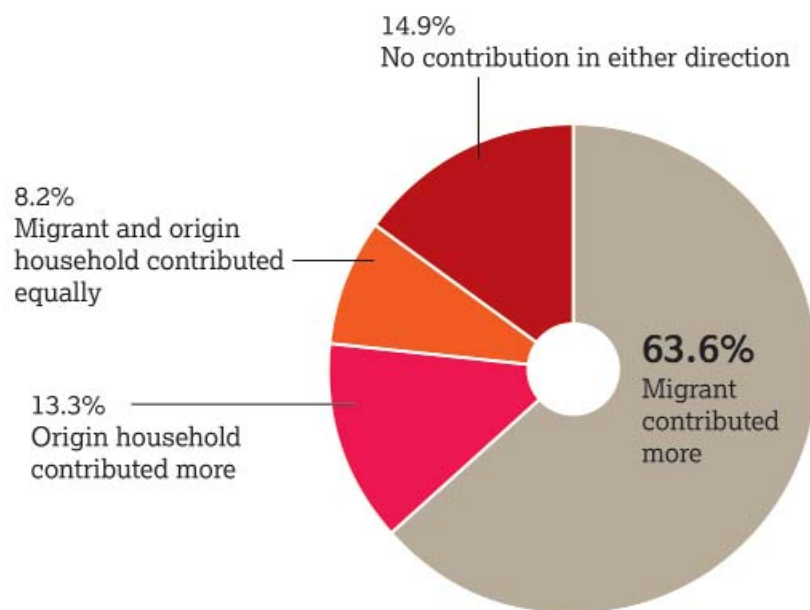
Do migrants support and stay in touch with their families?

Frequent exchanges take place between most migrants and origin households. Most economic migrants contribute more materially to their households of origin than they receive (see Figure 3). For migrants who left behind young children, origin households provide care and assistance and pay for some daily necessities for the children including school expenses. This mutual dependence benefits both migrants and family members who remain behind.

The recent expansion in mobile phone technology in Myanmar has greatly enhanced the ability of migrants and origin households to maintain social contact and possibly other aspects of intergenerational support. Almost two thirds of migrants are in daily or weekly phone contact with origin households. It is extremely rare (less than 1 per cent) for economic migrants to desert their origin households completely by not providing regular financial support, visits, or phone contacts.



Figure 3: Migrants usually contribute more than they receive from their households⁴



What are the likely trends for the future?


Looking ahead, migration flows are expected to increase as Myanmar becomes more developed and urbanised. The country's transition to smaller family sizes poses new challenges to families in migration-source areas. The current situation – in which some household members migrate while others remain with dependent children, frail household members, or elderly parents – will be more difficult to maintain. The study's findings provide a useful baseline. But continual monitoring of migration trends and their implications in Myanmar's changing socio-demographic context is critical for developing informed policies and programmes that address needs of migrant-sending households and prepare them to manage the risks associated with migration.



Migration has both benefits and disadvantages for migrant-sending households, but it appears that in most cases the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

4. Patterns of material exchanges between migrants and origin households in the Dry Zone (all migrants in the sample, entire period of migration).

HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.

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