



CONVENIENCE AND PRECARIETY:

Labour Rights Violations of Migrant Workers in Small, Unregistered, House-based Garment Factories in Mae Sot

Research by MAP Foundation

Convenience and Precarity: Labour Rights Violations of Migrant Workers in Small, Unregistered, House-based Garment Factories in Mae Sot

Ma Cheria – Researcher

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Introduction

Thailand is a main destination country for migrant workers in Southeast Asia, with over 3 million documented migrant workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, and Vietnam (MOL, 2024). Mae Sot is a border town in Tak Province, Northern Thailand, where migrants of various ethnicities from Myanmar come to work. Migrants are employed in labor-intensive sectors, such as construction, textile and garments, agriculture, food processing, and manufacturing. Some sectors operate within the informal economy, where workers do not receive proper labour and social protections. In some sectors, such as the garment industry, up to 70 percent of the labor force are migrant women from Myanmar who are of reproductive age (MAP Foundation, 2019).

In terms of the garment and textile sectors, Myanmar migrants are employed in both registered factories (formal) and unregistered factories or house-based factories (informal) (Pollock & Lin Aung, 2010). Despite the MoU mechanism and government initiatives of “regulating the irregulars” (Traitangyoo, 2008), many migrants choose the irregular channel due to high costs, time, and complicated mechanisms of formal registration. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), Thailand has ratified 21 ILO conventions ([NORMLEX](#), [ILO](#)). Of the conventions Thailand has not yet ratified are the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No 98), the first of which would mandate the Thai government to allow migrant workers to form labor unions. The inability to organize is a primary obstacle that leaves migrant workers vulnerable to exploitative working conditions.

This research investigates the working conditions of migrants working in the informal factories and house-based factories in Mae Sot area. Because of the flexible labor arrangements these workers find themselves under, they are particularly vulnerable to exploitative working conditions, including low wages, prolonged working hours, lack of social protections, restricted mobility, and other related conditions. The barriers to accessing legal protections for those employed in the informal factories, due to their legal status, further exacerbates their susceptibility to exploitation. In addition, this research looks at how gender roles and discrimination additionally burden women workers with the unpaid work of social reproduction.

This research draws on the direct experience of migrant workers by employing a mixed-methodology, using primary data obtained through a structured online survey with 50 respondents, and five focus group discussions with 15 women workers and 8 men workers. In addition, three semi-structured interviews with representatives from three labor organizations: Yaung Chi Oo, the Arakan Workers Organization, and the MAP Foundation were conducted. Follow-up interviews with women workers and a volunteer were also organized to examine the stories and experiences of women workers. This study begins with a brief literature review, followed by an outline of the research framework and methodology; it then presents the findings and analysis, and then a conclusion. This research and report was done with support by the ILO (International Labour Organization).

Section 1: Literature Review

Historical Context of Mae Sot's Economic Context

Thailand promulgated the Labour Relations Act (LRA) in 1975 which established codified labour rights and allowed the formalization of trade unions expressly for Thai labour. Employers continued to exploit legal loopholes while the state ignored labour violations in order to preserve investor confidence (Arnold, 2007). Then, in the 1980s, Thailand initiated its neoliberal economic reform through trade liberalization and financial deregulation in order to attract capital (Charoenloet, 2002). According to David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is a political project driven by the corporatist class, which prioritizes capital accumulation while largely disregarding collective labour rights. The rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, was labelled by labour scholars as the end of the “labour-friendly” regime (Mezzadri, 2008). Since the economic reform in 1980s, Thailand’s economy shifted from import substitution industrialization (ISI) to export-oriented industrialization (EOI) with technical assistance from the World Bank (Charoenloet, 2002). In the meanwhile, Thailand promoted the export sectors such as garment and electronics as a means for capital accumulation, and witnessed a booming economy in those sectors (Arnold, 2007).

This economic and labour reform attracted foreign direct investments into the country, mainly concentrated in the urban centers from 1980s to mid-1990s (Arnold & Pickles, 2011; Kusakabe et al., 2019). Then, in the 1990s, the Thai economy started relying on the cheap labour of migrants from poorer neighboring countries, namely Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar. These migrants filled the so-called “3-D jobs” - dirty, dangerous and difficult (or demanding), which the Thai citizens were no longer willing to take. In fact, as of September 2024, Thailand recorded just over 3 million registered migrants (DOE, Ministry of Labour, Thai Royal Government, Sept. 2024), which comprised an estimated 7% of Thailand’s labour force, with the IOM estimating another 1.8 million undocumented migrants from Myanmar alone (UN Network on Migration in Thailand, “Thailand Migration Report 2024,” p. 42). While in December 2023, the Foreign Workers’ Administrative Office of the Department of Employment indicated there were 119,050 migrants registered in garment production, of which 43,187 were men from Myanmar, and 57,639 were women from Myanmar. (Ibid, p.110)



In 1997, the Asian Financial Crisis hit Thailand hard and as a consequence, the profits gained from the manufacturing sector and labour-intensive industries declined significantly (Charoenloet, 2002). In order to sustain capital, manufacturers relocated to border regions with low production costs and abundant, cheap, migrant labour (Kusakabe & Melo, 2019). Meanwhile, the Thai government continued export-oriented industrialization by developing the economic corridors according to the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) and The Ayeyarwady - Chao Phraya - Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS)¹ schemes in order to survive the financial crisis. From the mid-1990s, Mae Sot, a border town in Tak Province of Thailand, was positioned to become a significant hub as a low-cost production center reliant on migrant labour at the sub-national level (Arnold, 2007). Mae Sot is part of the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) according to 2003 Economic Cooperation Strategy (ECS), and in 2004, the Thai Cabinet proposed establishing a special economic zone in Tak Province, encompassing the districts of Mae Sot, Phop Phra, and Mae Ramat (Pollock & Lin Aung, 2010). The establishment of special economic zones (SEZs) was carried out in two phases, and Tak Province was in the first phase, which began as a pilot project in 2015 (Kusakabe & Melo, 2019). Although it is stated that the aim of building SEZs is to enhance economic integration and development in the region, labour scholars pointed out that it effectively relocates industrial activities to border areas to exploit the cheap labour of neighboring countries (Arnold, 2007). The Thai-Burma Friendship Bridge connecting Mae Sot and Myawaddy, which was completed in 1997, can be seen as an easy pass for the Myanmar migrants to work in Mae Sot's industrial zones using short time regimes like the "Section 64" border pass (Section 64 the Foreigners' Working Management Emergency Decree, B.E. 2560 (2017)). These cross-border migrants are employed in various work, including factories that produce textiles, garment, ceramics and furniture.

Overview of Migrant Labour in Mae Sot

Since the 1990s, Burmese men and women have been crossing the border (Pearson & Kusakabe, 2012). Many of the migrant women find employed in the garment sector - a gendered sector that perpetuates gender norms which views women as "docile and manageable" (Kusakabe & Melo, 2019). In terms of the garment and textile sector, migrant workers are employed in both registered or formal factories and unregistered factories including house-based factories. Arnold (2007) states that outsourcing to house-based workers, with the orders coming from a manufacturer, particularly in the garment sector, represents a major form of flexible labour in Thailand's manufacturing sector. In 2007, there were an estimated 300 registered and unregistered factories in Mae Sot, with the former employing 100 to 1000 workers per factory, and the latter employing 5 to 20 workers per factory (Pollock & Lin Aung, 2010). Since COVID, due to the spread-out nature of the area the current numbers and types of factories are hard to assess as they have fluctuated with closures and openings, but there is an estimate of around 172 registered garment and textile factories as well as numerous smaller, informal "home" or "house-based" factories (Thomson Reuters Foundation, via Bangkok Post, "Thai factory probed by Starbucks," 5 Sept 2019).

In 1996, Thailand initiated a series of measures to exercise control over the influx of transborder migrants known as "regulating the irregular" as coined by Krongkwan Traitongyoo in 2008 (Pearson & Kusakabe, 2012). In 2003, Thailand signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Myanmar, which was not implemented until 2009. In 2004, the business-oriented prime minister

¹ The Ayeyarwady - Chao Phraya - Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) is a cooperation framework amongst Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to utilize member countries' diverse strengths and to promote balanced development in the sub-region.



Thaksin Shinawatra introduced a registration system for both workers and their dependents using a “Nationality Verification” system for workers who entered Thailand without proper documents (Pearson & Kusakabe, 2012). Despite the legal registration process of the MOU channel, many migrants have chosen the irregular path due to the high costs and lengthy processing time of the formal registration process (Kusakabe & Melo, 2019). As a testament to the problems of the MoU process, currently, out of the 2.9 million migrant workers from Myanmar documented in August 2025, only 244,270 were registered under the MoU system (DoE, Aug. 2025).

More migration policies to regulate irregular migration were introduced over time, including the Section 64 Border Pass scheme, which permitted workers to cross the border to work for 90 days and is primarily intended for agricultural work (Mekong Migration Network, 2020). However, in Mae Sot, the Section 64-border pass was used for various work but was exclusively available to residents of Myawaddy, requiring workers who came from other areas to obtain it illicitly through paying brokers and agents. It was then also misused to hire migrants in factories in Mae Sot where employers favored the Section 64 border pass option as it provided access to cheap labor more easily, while maintaining the workers’ temporariness and insecurity (Kusakabe & Melo, 2019).

For Myanmar migrants, migrating to Thailand is not just a response to poverty and economic disparities, it is also a survival strategy in the face of political and economic instability as a result of war, long-lasting conflicts, and natural disasters starting with Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Pearson & Kusakabe 2013; Campbell 2018). It is this immediate need that makes formal migration channels impractical for Myanmar migrants. Most recently, since the military junta staged a coup on 1 February 2021, there has been a significant influx of migrants to Thailand, with yet another large influx of undocumented workers to Thailand since the Myanmar Junta enacted a conscription law in February 2024. This has also resulted in increased distrust of their government, making the MOU even less desirable.

Although documented migrant workers constitute approximately 7.2% of Thailand’s labour force, they are prohibited from establishing labour unions as stipulated under the Labour Relations Act (1975), however, migrant workers are allowed to join unions formed by Thai nationals (Campbell, 2018, p. 40). The problem is that in the factories of Mae Sot there is an absence of Thai workers and no Thai Unions (Kusakabe & Melo, 2019).

Recently, there has also been an increase in anti-migrant sentiment nationally as indicated by social media and a protest organized by a network known as “Thai Won’t Tolerate,” (ไทยไม่ทน) who protested against a call for improved working conditions for Burmese migrant workers (Bangkok Post, 1 Feb 2025). In addition, the Thai Labour Minister at the time also publicly said that migrant workers are not allowed to organize in Thailand and if workers continued to demand this, suggested they should return to their home country (DVB, 2025).

Meanwhile, exploitative working conditions including low wages and prolonged working hours are commonly experienced by migrant workers in Mae Sot (MAP Foundation, 2019). In addition to notoriously bad working conditions, unhygienic living conditions, arbitrary dismissal, arrest, and deportation due to their legal status, migrants in Mae Sot are also subject to police extortion due to lack of legal documentation. Migrant women not only experience low wages and exploitative work conditions, they also face unequal gendered division of labour, limited reproductive health care, gendered constraints on mobility and personal agency, and the burden of being a caregiver (Pollock & Lin Aung, 2010).

While there are numerous migrants working in various jobs in the Mae Sot area, this study aims to provide insight specifically about informal garment factories and the precarious working conditions within this sector in Mae Sot, with a specific focus on the experiences of women workers in these settings using a gender lens to identify relevant issues of discrimination and resilience.

² In 2024, MAP won a precedent case on Section 64, where the court ruled that the border pass did not supersede the duration of the workers’ employment, and the migrant worker, regardless of being on a renewable, three-month visa, could therefore be considered a long-term employee of the factory with the right to proper benefits including severance pay.

Section 2: Research Framework and Methodology

As part of the MAP Foundation’s “**Migrant Advocacy for Rights**” project which aims to empower migrant workers in the informal agriculture and manufacturing sectors in and beyond special economic zones to realize their rights, this research aims to cover the following objectives:

- 1) To assess the wages and working conditions of Myanmar migrant workers in the informal factories in Mae Sot;
- 2) To assess the migrant workers’ rights and abilities to exercise their labor rights in the informal factories;
- 3) To support the evidence-based policy recommendations for future advocacy actions.

In order to achieve the research objectives above, this research will answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the exploitative working conditions experienced by migrant workers in unregistered, informal or house-based factories of Mae Sot?
- 2) Are there any particular gendered experiences among women workers?
- 3) How do the migrant workers in the informal garment factories exercise their labor rights? What are the policy barriers that may limit this ability?
- 4) What are the barriers to accessing health services and social protections?

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The research begins with a desk review of academic literature, project reports, news articles, and policy documents. Primary data was also collected through a semi-structured survey administered to 50 migrant workers (9 men, 40 women, and 1 non-binary individual), as well as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

The online survey was structured using Google Forms, and data collection was facilitated by MAP Foundation staff. Additionally, five focus group discussions were conducted, comprising 15 women workers—most of whom are married—and 8 men workers. These participants are currently employed in unregistered, house-based factories but possess prior work experience in registered factories. Furthermore, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from three labor organizations: Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association, Arakan Workers Organization, and MAP Foundation.

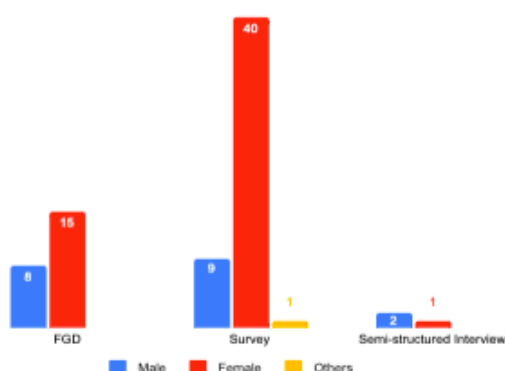
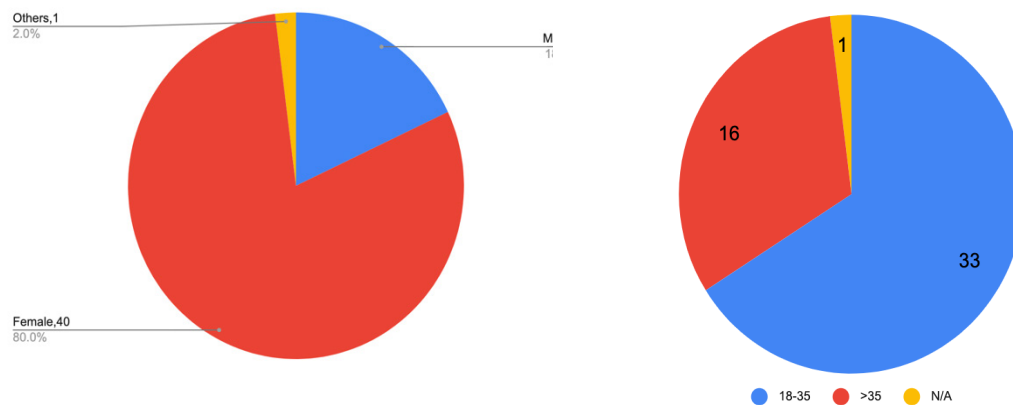
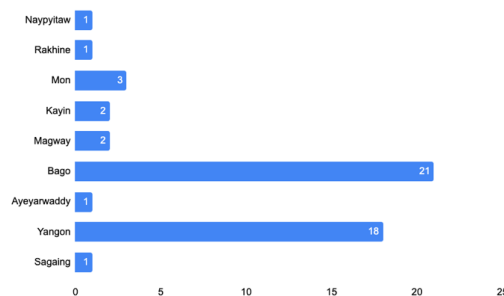
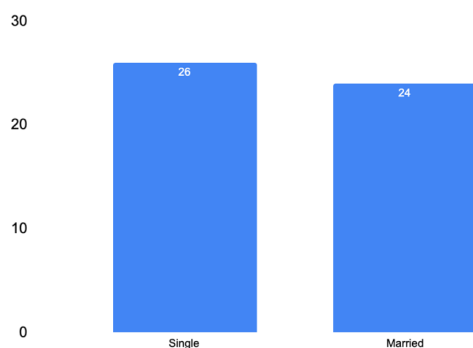


Figure 1: Number of Respondents (FGD, Survey and Interview)



Gender of the Respondents

Age



Marital Status

Region

Figure 2: Demographic Data of the Survey Respondents

As illustrated in Figure 3, a total of 50 respondents participated in the survey, comprising 40 women, 9 men, and 1 non-binary individual. Regarding age distribution, 33 workers fall within the 18–35 age range, while 16 workers are aged 35 and above. Additionally, 24 participants are married, whereas 26 participants are single. The respondents originate from diverse regions within Myanmar, with 21 individuals from Bago and 18 from Mon State.

Section 3: Analysis and Discussions

Home Work vs House-based Factories

- [ILO Convention C177 - Home Work Convention, 1996 \(No. 177\)](#) - (a) the term *home work* means work carried out by a person, to be referred to as a homemaker,
 - (i) in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer;
 - (ii) for remuneration;
 - (iii) which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used.

Home-based worker vs. homemaker terminology: “Homemakers are a subgroup of home-based workers. In addition to working from home, homemakers are defined statistically as employees or dependent contractors.” (ILO, *Working from Home*) Yet, what confuses the classification of homemaker in this case is that migrant workers do not get to choose their location for work. On one hand there are those who work as employees in informal factories which can be considered “home-based” or “house-based” factories, in either the employer’s home or a residential house. Considering this, herewith the terminology “Small, unregistered, house-based factories” shall be used to describe these workplaces. There are also cases of migrant workers who rent a residential room, which includes relevant equipment such as a sewing machine, oftentimes from the employer, and is then paid for per-piece production as a “homemaker.” This unfairly transfers much of the production cost to the individual workers and makes them ineligible for proper social protections. However, the research does not really cover the latter category, but it is worth mentioning for further attention.

Recent Changes in Migration and the Relationship to Small, Unregistered, House-based Garment Factories of Mae Sot

Since 2020, after a number of large garment factories in Mae Sot closed due to COVID, smaller, informal factories started sprouting up. It is believed that many of these smaller factories were constituted by the same investors of the large factories which had closed. According to Yaung Chi Oo and the Arakan Workers Organization, these house-based factories are sewing orders outsourced by the registered factories. This seems to be a similar scenario happening in other parts of the country in other sectors. For example, in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, it has been found that recruitment and employment of migrant workers in the construction sector is increasingly informalized under sub-contracting, which also results in decreased documentation of migrants and concomitant social protections and benefits. (Sciortino, R., Putthasiraapakorn, S., and Kattiya-aree, V., 2026, not yet published)

These small, unregistered, house-based factories in Mae Sot mainly employ undocumented migrant workers who are women. Workers employed in the house-based factories are from different regions of the country, with most from Bago and other areas including Sagaing, Rakhine, Yangon, and other parts of the country, indicating that recruitment is from the readily available labour pool of undocumented migrants already present and personal networks.

As the COVID recovery was starting, in early 2021 Myanmar suffered a coup followed by resistance and conflict which resulted in an increase in people crossing the border informally. Concomitantly,

there has also been an increase in the number of house-based factories in Mae Sot. Labour organizations explained that the increase in house-based factories is associated with the increase in migration caused by the heightened conflict and the conscription law, which was enacted in February 2024. The conscription law dictates that men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27, as well as men aged 18-45 and women aged 18-35 with special expertise are considered eligible and compelled to serve in the Junta's military under the conscription law (Irrawaddy, 2024).

Most of the employers in the small, unregistered, house-based factories are Thai citizens, who demonstrate experience of running large factories (formal factories) in the past. According to FGDs and surveys, all the employers are Thai nationals, but labour organizations mentioned that there are also Burmese employers. Labour organizations reported as follows:

"For the notorious exploitative working conditions, there are some registered (large) factories which had to shut down. Now these owners open the small factories and the orders come from the large factories.

Those informal factories are established so that they can avoid taxation and some Thai laws. They also target undocumented workers and are bribing the Thai authorities to function their business."



In the past, small, unregistered, house-based factories employed 5 to 20 workers (Pollock & Lin Aung, 2010). Now, while the majority of small, unregistered factories in Mae Sot employ approximately 10 to 15 workers, there are some that employ up to 70 or 100 workers, according to the workers and labour organizations. These workers primarily consist of Burmese migrants, with women representing the majority.

Based on responses from 50 surveyed participants, 14% (n=7) reported that their factories employ up to 10 workers, 34% (n=17) indicated employment of 11 to 20 workers, 40% (n=20) stated that their factories employ between 21 and 30 workers, and 10% (n=5) reported a workforce of up to 35 workers. Notably, one respondent indicated that their factory employs approximately 70 workers.

Formal factories supposedly only employ registered migrants who have proper documents, with hundreds to thousands of workers. Informal factories are smaller, and thus harder to find. Thus, it is more likely that they employ undocumented migrants.

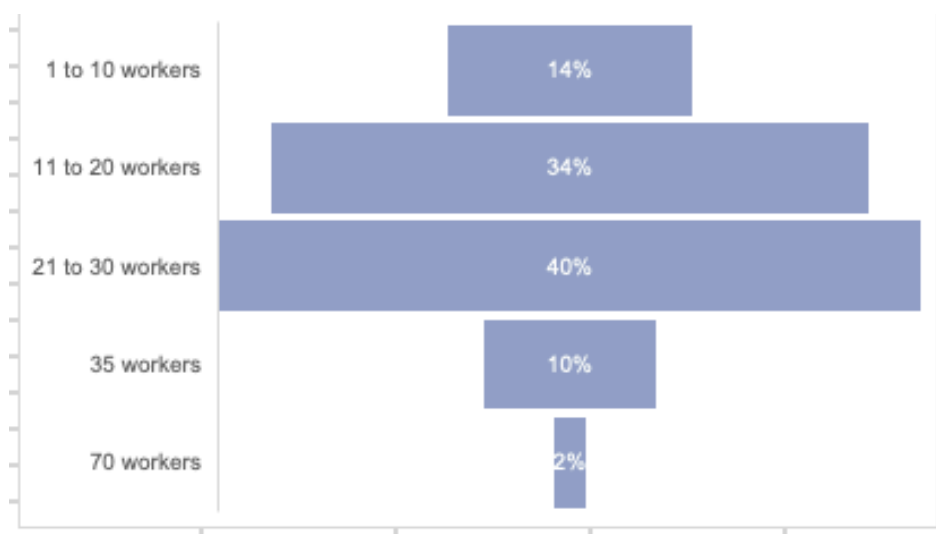


Figure 3: Number of Workers Employed

In previous years, around 2016, the common task in house-based factories was the trimming of loose threads, which is the finishing stage in garment manufacture (Campbell, 2016). The tasks in the small, unregistered, house-based factories today have changed, and some workers are engaged in the sewing of the whole garment and other tasks. According to the survey, 46% (n=23) of respondents are engaged in sewing, 14% (n=7) are responsible for whole garment sewing, and 12% (n=6) are assigned to quality control, as illustrated in Figure 5:

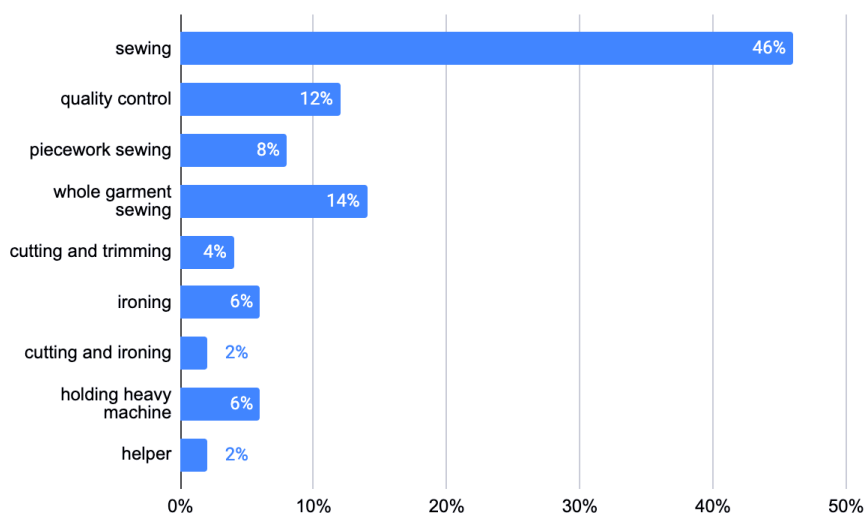


Figure 4: Tasks in the House-based Factories

Workers employed in informal house-based factories are mostly recruited through contact with workers who are already working in these factories, or sometimes directly from the employers. According to the survey, 68% (n=34) out of a total of 50 respondents mentioned that they were recruited through friends who were already working in the home-based factories. While 26% (n=13) indicated that they were recruited through family members, while only 6% (n=3) were recruited directly by employers.

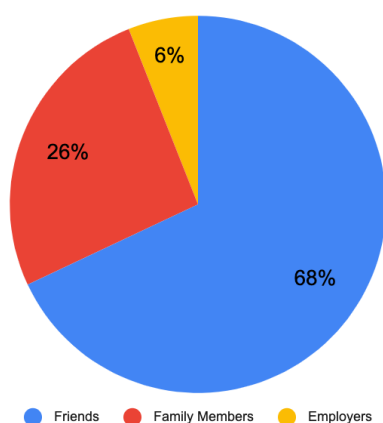


Figure 5: Channels of Recruitment

Reasons for Working in Small, Unregistered, House-based Factories

For migrant workers in small, unregistered, house-based factories, the reasons for migration to Thailand vary among individuals. During FGDs, most of the workers claimed that they migrated due to economic hardship in their home countries, while 7 workers (5 men and 2 women workers) recounted that they had recently migrated to evade the conscription law. According to the survey respondents, 58% (n=29) of the workers had reportedly migrated to Thailand after the military coup.

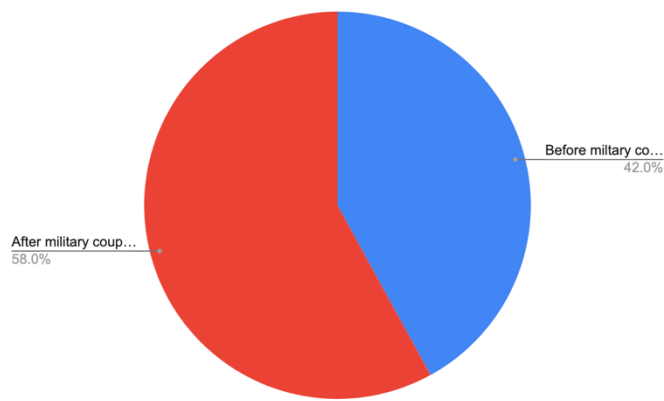


Figure 6: Migration to Thailand

During FGDs, the majority of the workers stated that they ended up working in house-based factories because they lacked legal documents. Women workers, who had previous experience working in registered factories, stated:

“We ended up working in the house-based factories after we bore children. We cannot look after children while working in the registered factories, as compared to unregistered factories. However, due to this, we are being paid based on the pieces we sew, not on the minimum wage.”

(Women workers, FGD)

“I am 50 years old now. In large factories (registered factories), young women are more likely to be recruited. In contrast, house-based factories do not impose such strict hiring criteria. Therefore, I ended up working here.”

(A 50-year old migrant woman, FGD)

It is evident that flexible recruitment criteria and permissive child care rules shape women workers’ decisions to be employed in small, unregistered, house-based factories. Furthermore, workers and labour organizations reported that recruiting child labourers is also common in informal factories although it is very rare in formal factories.

The survey respondents also indicated a variety of reasons for working in the unregistered factories. The following reasons were each chosen by around half of total respondents, each respondent was able to choose multiple reasons:

- No other choice (52%, n= 26)
- The factory is located in a close proximity (50% of total respondents, n=25)
- This is the very first job I was able to find (48%, n=24)

The other reasons for working in the house-based factories indicated by around 28% (n=14) are, “accommodation is provided” and “due to incomplete documents.”

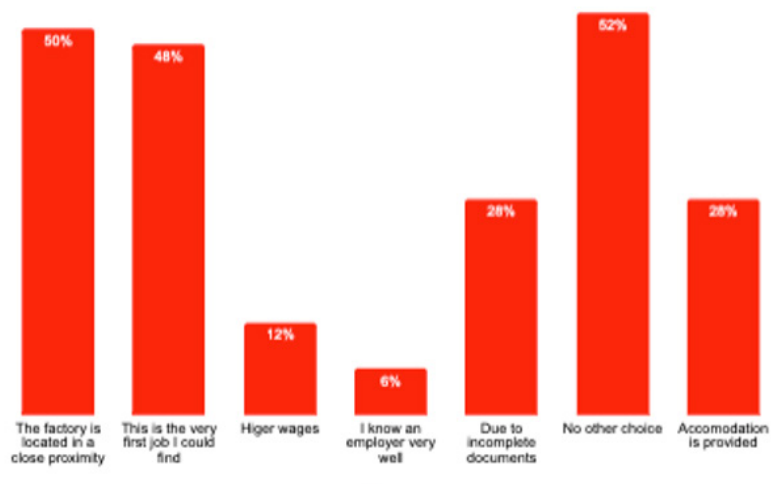


Figure 7: Reasons for Working in the House-based Factories

Wages and Working Conditions

In the survey, which used the Burmese language, the respondents reported working conditions in the house-based factories as characterized by the following conditions (could choose multiple conditions that relate to their situation): “low wages” indicated by 54% (n=27), “no overtime pay” (which is translated as “overtime without compensation at all” but can be voluntary) by 74% (n=37), “forced overtime” (which was translated as being overtime work that can be compensated or not compensated, but is involuntary) by 48% (n=24). Other working conditions mentioned by workers also include, not enough breaks, no holidays, no maternity leave, verbal harassment by employers and co-workers, and being forced to do unpaid house chores for their superiors.

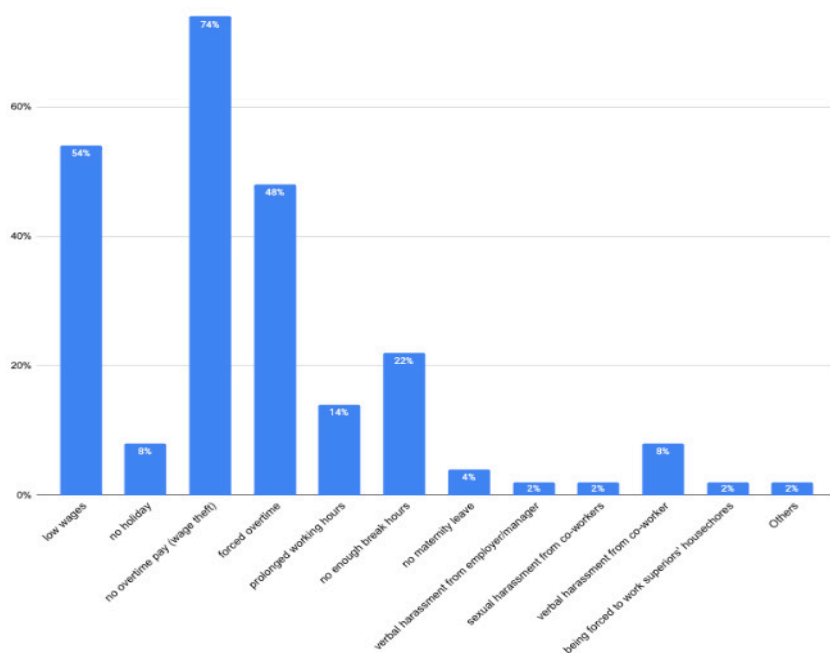


Figure 8: Overall working conditions

Wages

During the data collection period, the minimum wage rate was 332 THB, but as of December 2024, the minimum wage rate was raised to at least 352 THB per day for a regular full day of work. All workers in the Mae Sot area are now entitled to be paid this rate for a full day's work according to the law. In the small, unregistered, house-based factories, however, wages are calculated based on the production targets or pieces they produce, not according to the minimum wage as calculated based on hours worked. Under this payment scheme, workers employed in house-based factories typically receive a daily wage of 180–200 THB, inclusive of overtime compensation. At best, they may earn a maximum of 4,000 to 5,000 THB per month, which is approximately half of the wages earned in formal factories. In comparison, workers stated that a minimum income of 10,000 THB can be earned in formal factories.

Daily earnings reported by respondents: 17 individuals (16 women and 1 man) reported earning 150 THB per day; 12 respondents (9 women and 3 men) reported earning 180 THB per day; 10 individuals reported earning 200 THB daily (7 women and 3 men), and 14 respondents (10 women and 4 men) reported earning 250 THB per day. In addition, 5 respondents (4 women and 1 man) reported earning 300 THB per day, and a single male respondent reported receiving a daily wage of 350 THB.

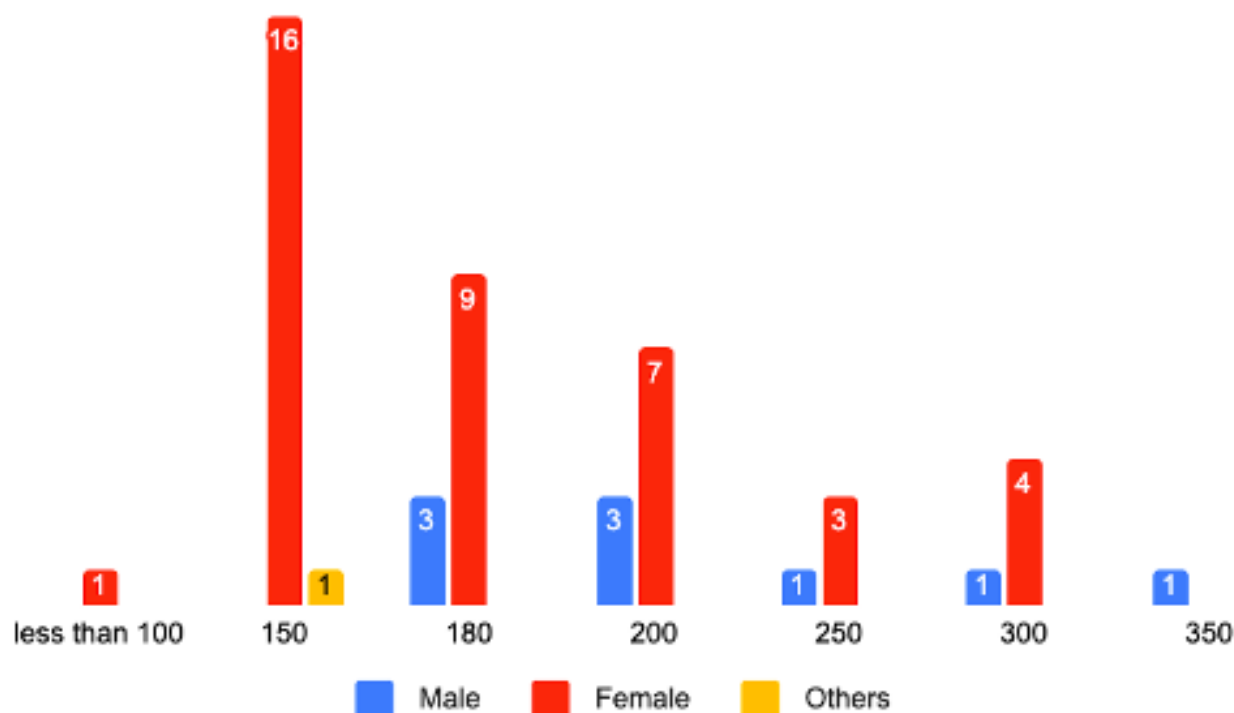


Figure 9: Wages earned in House-based Factories

According to the survey respondents, 78% (n=39) of total respondents are paid based on the pieces produced, while 18% (n=9) receive wages according to a points-based system. The rest and the smallest group, only 4% (n=2), are getting paid hourly and daily. (In a points-based system, workers are paid based on the points they produce: where the division of labour is a points system based on doing a particular task, for instance, cutting, trimming, or sewing collars or sleeves, or like that.)

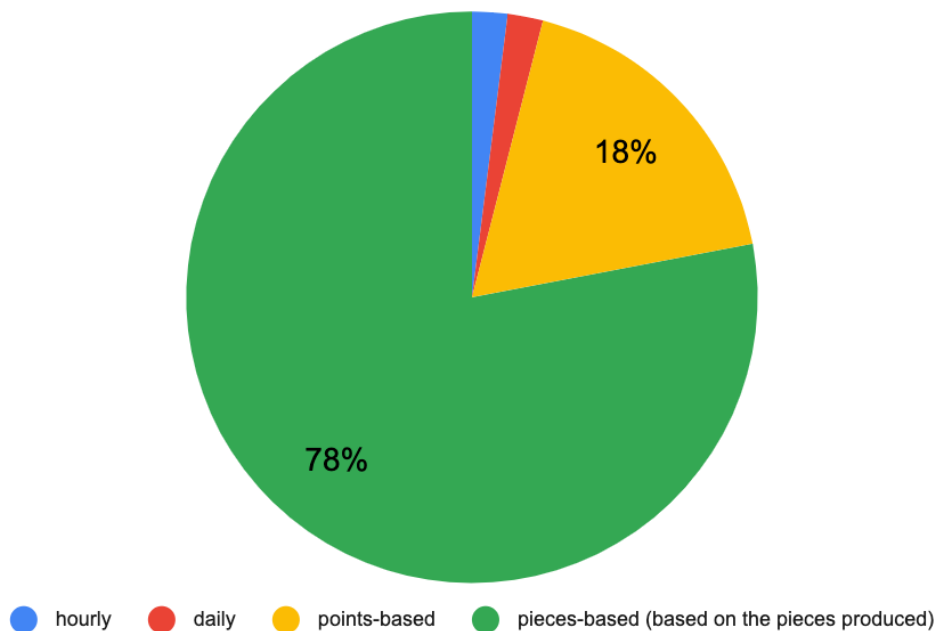


Figure 10: Calculation of wages

Moreover, this income is not consistently guaranteed, as it is contingent upon the availability of orders. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers claimed that the factories received many orders. During the rainy season, orders significantly decrease, and workers have reported experiencing financial difficulties as a result. During FGDs, workers frequently mentioned that the wages are insufficient for them to survive.

In the survey, the vast majority, 76% (n=38) of the total 50 respondents mentioned that “wages are not adequate,” while only 24% (n=12) reported that “wages are sufficient for them.” A woman worker with children recounted:

“The wages we earn are insufficient to meet our financial needs. My husband is also working as a construction worker, and therefore, we cannot live in the factory’s accommodation. Despite both of us working, our combined income is barely enough to sustain our household. After accounting for essential household expenses and tuition fees for our son, we are left with only 1,000 THB per month.”

(A woman worker, FGD)

The wages are paid twice a month, on the 15th and the last day of the month. In the very first month when the workers first start the job, they have to work 15 days without any pay, which is considered a deposit. The same rule applies to registered factories, where workers who resign without prior notice will forfeit their pay for the days worked “in advance.” In one factory, workers mentioned that they have to give 20 or 30 working days as a deposit, and this factory is also notorious for wage theft and exploitative working conditions.

“My primary task is ironing. I am not allowed to sit for the whole day. Under the previous owner, I earned 160 THB per day, along with an additional 20 THB for overtime. We were compelled to work overtime every day except Sunday. However, since the ownership changed recently, we now receive 180 THB per day, with 20 THB per hour for overtime pay,”

(A man worker, FGD)

Other workers in the same factory also reported facing delays in receiving their wages, which poses many difficulties for them. Other workers who have experience in this factory concurred, stating:

“This factory (mentioned above) is notorious for its exploitative working conditions. At the beginning of the first month they start work, the workers are required to provide 20 working days as a deposit. The former owner absconded with workers' money, which was promised to be used to get work permit documents.”

(Workers, FGD)

Regarding payday, there are different practices in different factories. In some factories, workers receive their wages on the day before their day off; in other factories, the workers stay at the factory so they receive the wages on their day off. Workers also mentioned some factories have delayed payment, but are usually notified in advance.

Working hours

Prolonged and irregular working hours were frequently mentioned by the workers in the FGDs. Nearly all workers in small, unregistered, house-based factories have to work from 8 AM to 5 PM while the lunch break is one hour. Thereafter, the majority of workers also have to work overtime again after 6 PM to 10 PM or sometimes until 12 AM. It is almost the same for every unregistered factory in this study. Two of the survey respondents indicated that they have to work from 16 to 18 hours in these small, unregistered, house-based factories. However, the majority of the workers, 66% (n=33) have to work around 12 or 13 hours, while 26% (n=13) stated that they have to work from 10 to 11 hours.

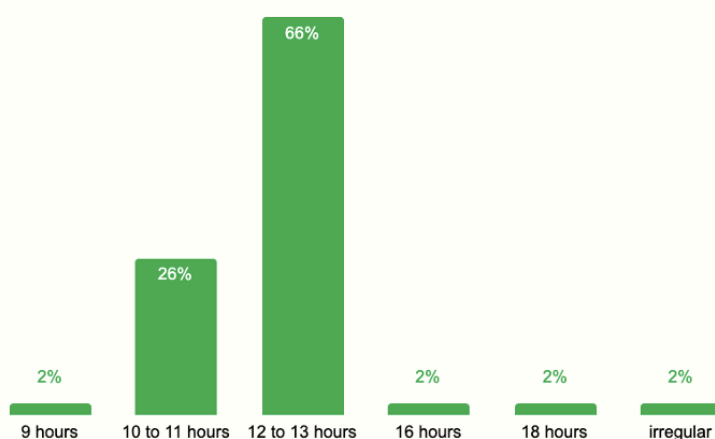


Figure 11: Working hours

Some workers mentioned that the working hours in the small, unregistered, house-based factories are more flexible compared to the registered factories. Workers are allowed to spend their personal time as they wish, if there are no orders. However, it varies across factories as suggested by some workers as follows:

“House-based factories seem more flexible with working hours as our wages are calculated by the production targets, not by the fixed minimum wage. In some factories, nevertheless, restrictions apply to breaktime and even the toilet time. CCTV cameras are also installed in some unregistered factories.

There are certain days where we don’t have to sew due to a lack of orders. However, during periods of high demand, we are required to work until midnight without rest to fulfill those orders.”

(Workers, FGD)

Most of the workers in the small, unregistered, house-based factories get overtime leave after 5 PM every Sunday and one unpaid day-off per month. However, some workers mentioned that they do not receive overtime exemption on Sundays, and therefore, have to work overtime after 5 PM as usual on a Sunday.

It is evident that prolonged working hours with mandatory overtime and irregular working hours are common in informal factories. There are also unreasonable increases in production targets.

Workers reported that:

“In our factory, the employer demanded unrealistic targets. Normally, we are able to provide high production targets per hour. However, employers ask for 40 production targets per hour which are extremely high.”

(Workers, FGD)

Verbal Abuse

Most of the workers who participated agreed that the verbal abuse is more common in the registered factories where workers earn the daily minimum wage. Since the workers in the house-based factories are paid based on the production targets, there is less pressure from the factory owners. In factories with few workers, there is no middle person or supervisor. In this setting the factory owner can typically also speak Burmese and there are only workers and the factory owner. However, in some house-based factories with large numbers of workers, with possibly up to 100 workers, the translators or middle persons, most of who are women, abuse workers verbally. These managers or translators, who are usually Thai nationals, are recruited by the factory owner, and verbal abuse is more common in this type of setting, mainly coming from the managers, not the factory owners. Workers reported:

“In small factories with few workers, verbal abuse is very rare since there is no middleman. Labour relations are only between the factory owner and the workers. The working conditions are flexible, and employers have nothing to lose since we get paid on the production targets. However, the translators or managers in factories with around 100 workers are bossy around the workers.”

(Workers, FGD)

In some cases, workers were asked to do domestic chores for the managers or sometimes give massages to the managers. Workers who resisted to do so reported being targeted. One worker who recently lost her job mentioned:

“In a factory where I previously worked, some of my co-workers were required to provide massages to the manager or assist with personal household chores. However, I chose not to engage in such tasks, as they were not part of my designated job responsibilities. I know about labour rights. Consequently, I faced significant targeting and unfair treatment in the workplace.”

(A female worker, FGD)

Working Environment

According to the workers, the work environment in the small, unregistered, house-based factories is not bad since there are fewer workers, unlike in the registered factories. Ventilation is good and fans are also provided. Bathrooms are also adequate. Workers felt free to give their opinions on the conditions of the work environment in unregistered factories.

As depicted in the figure below, 72% (n=36) of the total respondents evaluated the working environment as “neutral.” Additionally, 18% (n=9) described it as “bad,” while 10% (n=5) rated it as “good.”

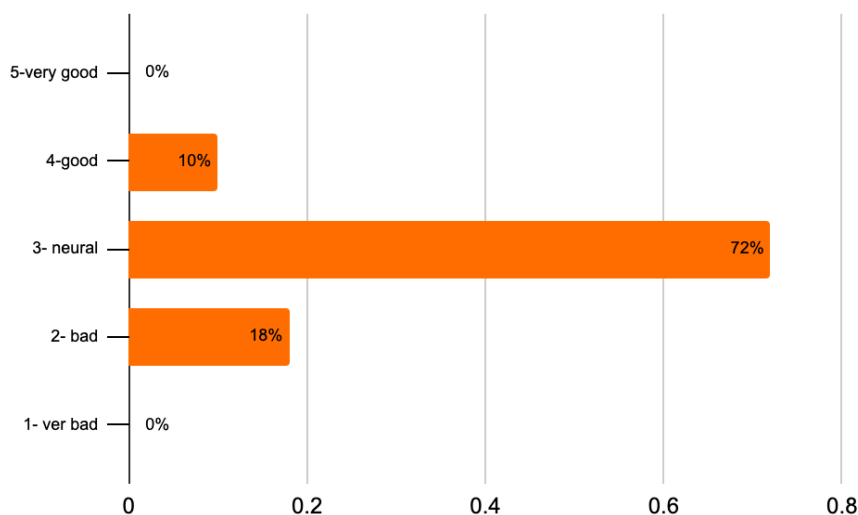


Figure 12: Perceptions on Working Environment

Restricted Mobility

Restricted mobility is very common among the workers in the small, unregistered, house-based factories. During FGDs, a majority of the workers stated that they do not have any legal documents. While a few workers mentioned that they are staying by paying for police cards, some are also applying for the official pink card registration. However, the fees are not compensated by the employers. Workers reported:

“Most of us don’t have legal documentation and we have to reside in accommodations provided under the guarantee of factory employers. However, this guarantee is only recognized by local authorities. Consequently, when officials from the national level conduct inspections, workers are required to hide. As a result, many individuals find themselves confined within the factory compound, limiting their mobility and access to external resources.”

(Workers, FGD)

According to the survey respondents, 54% (n=27) stated that they are holding pink cards (not confirmed to be valid) while 14% (n=7) said that they have police cards. However, 10% (n=5) do not have any legal documents. See below for details of other documents reported by respondents.

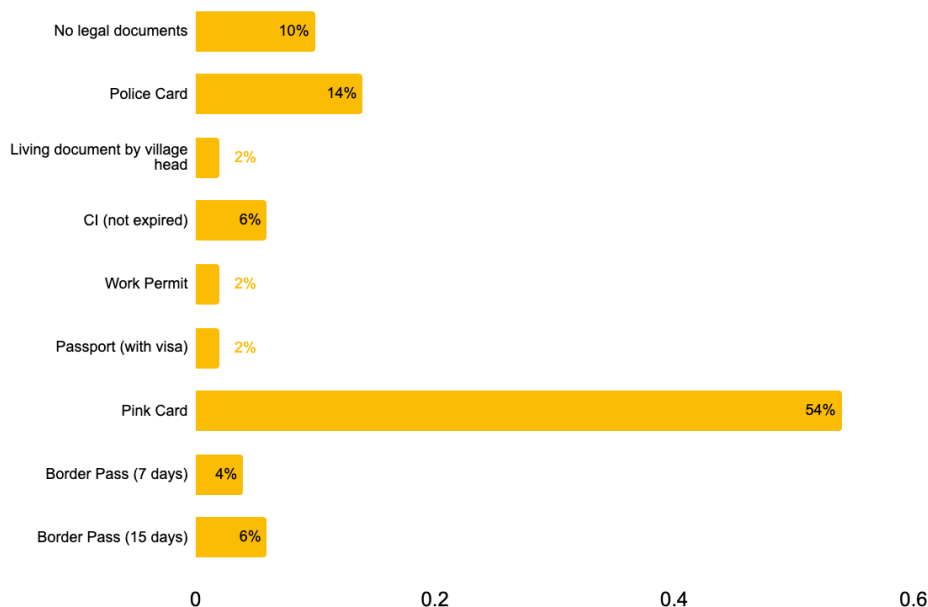


Figure 13: Documentation Status

Living Arrangements

Small, unregistered, house-based factories provide accommodations for some of the workers, especially single women, but unmarried couples are provided rooms only as long as both people work in the factory. Many of the workers have to rent a place in proximity close to the factories as most of the workers are married women who have children. Another reason for renting outside is because the rooms provided by employers are considered “low quality.” Single women workers who live outside the factory do so because the dorms provided by the factories feel unsafe for them. There is no privacy for the women workers and they have to share the space with men workers, even though bathrooms are provided separately. Since the number of spaces provided in the dormitories is inadequate, the workers who recently started working have to live outside the factories.

According to the survey respondents, 62% (n=31: single - 16, married - 15) responded that “they are living in rental rooms outside the factory” while 38% (n=19: single - 10, married – 9) indicated that “they are living in the dormitories provided by the factory.”

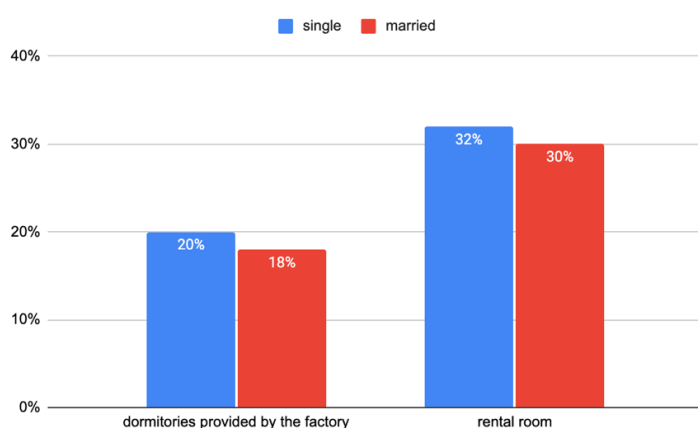


Figure 14: Types of Living Arrangements

In factory-provided dormitories, fans are installed; however, workers frequently reported inadequate ventilation. While a few factories provide rice, the majority fail to offer any basic food supplies. One labour organization shared their perspective on the living arrangements offered by these factories, stating:

“Even when some factories provide accommodations for workers, the quality of these living spaces must be critically examined. Workers are often required to share limited space with others, and the rooms are of very poor quality, lacking adequate ventilation and being excessively hot.”

(Labour Organization, Interview)

According to survey respondents, among the 19 individuals residing in factory-provided accommodations, 42% (n=8) rated the living conditions as “neutral,” 32% (n=6) described them as “bad,” and 26% (n=5) evaluated them as “good.”

Additionally, among the 31 respondents living in rental rooms outside, 97% (n=30) rated the conditions as “neutral,” while only 3% (n=1) described them as “good.”

Workers also complained that the wages are inadequate to cover the cost of living arrangements. The price of accommodation is getting higher day to day, and the wages they get merely meet their survival needs. In addition, reportedly, most of the factories do not pay the fees for workers' residential electricity or water use, even though one worker claimed that those charges are covered by the employer. Nevertheless, there is verbal abuse if the workers consume too much electricity.

Gendered Impacts and Social Reproduction

In the small, unregistered, house-based factories, the majority of the women workers are with children, most are married although there are also single women present too. Women workers who had previously worked in formal factories explained that their decision to be employed in the small, unregistered, house-based factories is, in part, influenced by their reproductive choices.

Migrant women workers lack access to childcare facilities. During FGDs, women who have experience working in registered factories reported that they must rely on neighbors to care for their children while they are at work, incurring a daily cost of 50–100 THB. However, women employed in unregistered factories often cannot afford this expense. For the women in the informal factories, they can bring their children to the workplace and look after them while working. However, when women become pregnant in the informal factories, they quit their job. This is because access to paid maternity leave is denied by the employers, and the workers are not registered with Social Security. This is, in part, because the factories are unregistered. It should be noted however, the manufacturing sector, even informal factories, is covered by the Labour Protection Act which grants maternity rights. Moreover, pregnant migrant women employees are often told that if there is a position open when they return, the women can return to work in that factory again. However, workers claim that most find work in different factories afterwards. In addition, the fees for breast-feeding milk bottles (with pump) are not supported in the house-based factories, although this expense is covered in some formal factories. In other words, employers in informal garment factories find ways to evade their responsibility to support the maternity rights of their women employees, but provide flexibility once they have children, enticing them to work under unfair conditions.

Among respondents in Mae Sot, many migrant women brought their family members to the host country, while some are long-term migrants who started a family here. According to Thailand's "education for all" policy in 2005, migrants' children are entitled to attend public education regardless of nationality or legal status (Pearson & Kusakabe, 2012). However, in practice, children of undocumented workers cannot attend Thai public schools if they lack a birth certificate or if the parents are not properly documented. When they face these obstacles and uncertainty in their future, workers said they send their children to the migrant learning centers run by the diaspora community. Workers in the unregistered factories reported that they feel a huge burden supporting their children's education due to the low wages they earn. One woman worker reported:

"Even when some factories provide accommodations for workers, the quality of these living spaces must be critically examined. Workers are often required to share limited space with others, and the rooms are of very poor quality, lacking adequate ventilation and being excessively hot."

(A woman worker, FGD)

3 This is an informal "protection" system by local authorities which is not linked to the national work permit and visa registration which is also known as the "pink card" registration, and acts in lieu of the National system locally.

Additionally, women workers bear a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities compared to their husbands. Even when both spouses are employed in the same factory, women are more likely burdened with household labor. These challenges are further compounded by the irregular working hours common in unregistered factories.

One woman worker shared her experience:

“I have to work from 8 AM to 5 PM every day. During my break from 5 PM to 6 PM, I must prepare dinner before resuming work from 6 PM to 12 AM. Afterward, I cook for the following day while my husband is asleep. As a result, I typically go to bed at 2 AM or 3 AM and must wake up again at 6 AM.”

(A woman worker, follow-up interview)

It is evident that women workers are obliged to take more responsibilities than their husbands in the family. According to Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), social reproduction labour includes not only biological reproduction but also other activities outside the wage system which are regenerative, encompassing such things as child care, domestic work, maintaining social bonds and recreational activities...These help regenerate the power of the workers to continue to labour. (Federici, 2012; Ferguson, 2017; Fraser, 2016). Due to the prolonged working hours in the factory, care responsibilities and unpaid domestic work, women workers disproportionately suffer physical exhaustion in addition to time poverty, meaning they have inadequate rest, even on their one unpaid day off per month. Women workers claimed:

“During our one-day holiday, we remain occupied with house chores such as washing and ironing the clothes. Even though our husbands can spend their leisure time at teashops or engaging in recreational activities such as playing football with other men workers; we, as women, are unable to take adequate rest, even on our holidays.”

(Women workers, follow-up interviews)

During FGDs, while workers claimed there is no gendered division of labour and no gendered wage gap in the small, unregistered factories, some workers mentioned that men are more likely assigned to the tasks of ironing and operating heavy machinery. In the survey, only 5 out of a total of 50 respondents claimed that there is a gendered wage difference of around 50-100 THB between men and women workers in unregistered factories. The actual situation is unclear.

According to the law, registered migrants are entitled to general health care benefits, and limited reproductive health care including contraception (Pollock & Lin Aung, 2010). However, women workers in the small, unregistered, house-based factories are denied these entitlements due to their lack of registration status and contraception must be obtained on their own. Without proper knowledge, limited access and language barriers, improper use and resultant unplanned pregnancy is common, and

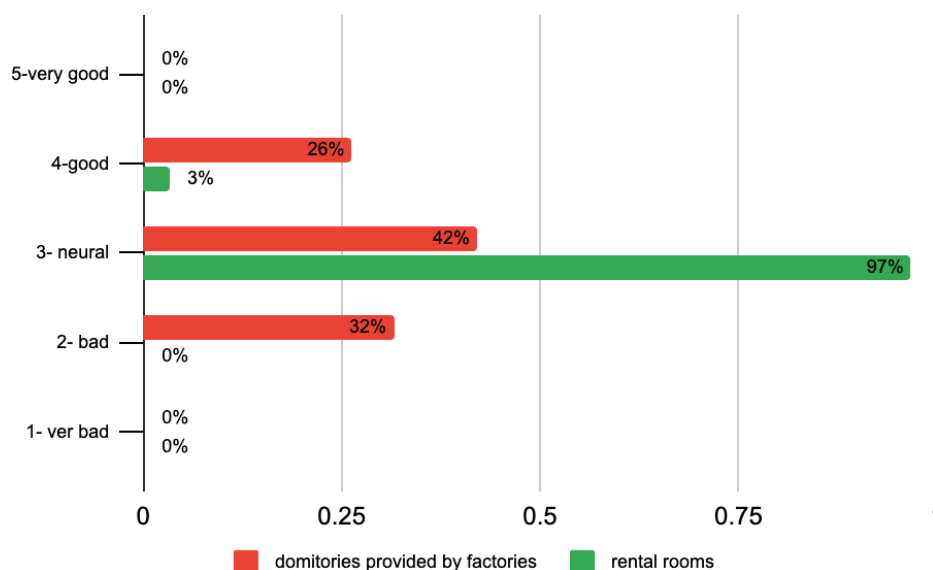


Figure 15: Perceptions on living arrangements

“Unsafe abortion is very common among women workers”, according to one volunteer interviewed. Kusakabe & Pearson (2010) also noted that abortion is common amongst migrant women due to challenges and hardships incurred during pregnancy, childbirth, and due to lack of childcare facilities.

Furthermore, labor organizations have reported that domestic violence perpetrated by husbands is a prevalent issue among migrant women workers. The majority of such cases remain unreported or are disclosed only after a significant delay, in part because of the fear of being deported, making it challenging to address and resolve these incidents immediately or effectively. There is a GBV network in the Mae Sot area which helps cases of domestic violence and aims to reduce incidents proactively, but its focus and the focus of its member organizations is more on agricultural workers.

Access and Barriers to Social Security and Healthcare Services

In the registered factories, workers cannot take sick leave easily. They have to undergo many administrative processes including getting a certification letter from medical personnel. In most of the unregistered factories, workers can take sick leave without a medical certificate, even though it is still necessary in some factories. If a worker wants to take sick leave for many days, a medical certified letter is required. Although there are some factories which are flexible with workers taking sick leave, one worker reported her experience:

“I injured my hand while sewing, but despite requesting sick leave, the manager refused. As a result, the injury worsened over time, and I only visited the Mae Tao clinic after three months. The doctor advised that I should have come to get the treatment earlier. It was only after receiving a medical certificate from the clinic that I was granted sick leave.

(Woman worker, FGD)

In the registered factories, workers are eligible to join the Social Security scheme. Under Social Security, workers are entitled to health and work accident insurance, support for childbirth, monthly child benefit payments, old age pension, and (supposedly) unemployment benefits. However, workers in unregistered factories are excluded from enrolling in the Social Security system because the factories are informal, meaning that they are unregistered, and also because of the high likelihood that the migrants are undocumented. So, when they get sick, these migrant workers go to the Mae Tao Clinic. Mae Tao Clinic has been providing free health care service to refugees, migrant workers and individuals who cross the border from Myanmar to Thailand since the 1988 pro-democracy movement. Due to their legal status, workers have security concerns going to the clinic to receive treatment, so some undocumented workers rely on volunteers from labour organizations to buy medicine from the pharmacy for them instead, and they have to cover their own costs. In addition, none of the unregistered informal factories provide first aid kits, while registered factories reportedly do.

For the undocumented workers, there is an option to join a health insurance system called M-Fund or Migrant Fund. M-Fund is a social enterprise that provides a low-cost health insurance option for migrants, which is not limited to undocumented workers. This insurance provides access to government health services. However, women workers in the unregistered factories claim that most of them cannot enroll since they cannot afford a monthly contribution with their low income. In the survey, 36% (n=18) of the total respondents reported that they seek medical treatment at the Mae Tao Clinic when they fall ill. Additionally, 54% (n=27) indicated that they rely on both the M-Fund system and the Mae Tao Clinic for healthcare services. A small number of respondents stated that they visit private clinics for medical treatment.

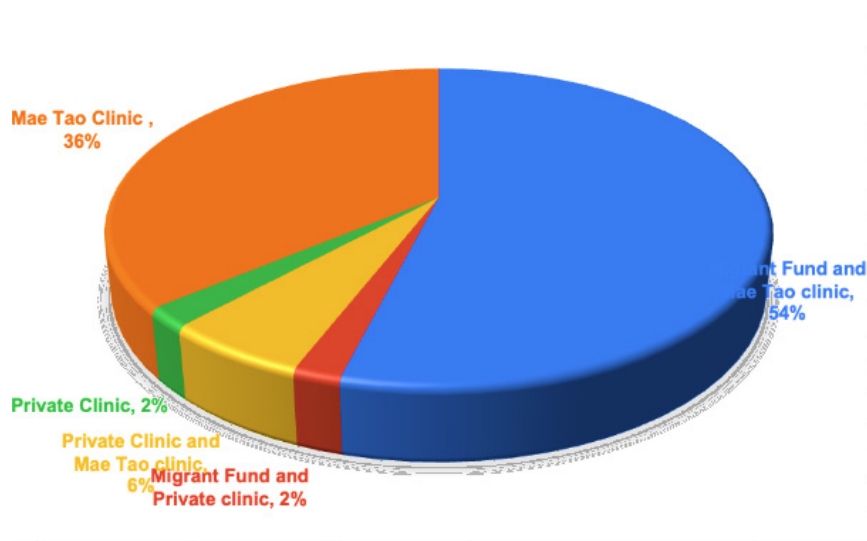


Figure 16 : Preferred options to access health care

During the survey, workers also identified various barriers that hinder their access to healthcare services. Among the respondents, 80% (n=40) cited “financial barriers” as a primary obstacle, while 70% (n=35) reported “transportation challenges.” Additionally, 42% (n=21) identified “security challenges” as a significant impediment to accessing healthcare services.

Workers mentioned that high costs, language barriers, and lack of legal documents are the major reasons why they do not go to private clinics. Even though they can get treatment at Mae Tao clinic, high transportation costs pose a significant barrier due to their undocumented status.

*“An alternative healthcare option available for undocumented workers is the M-Fund scheme. However, many workers are unable to afford the required monthly contribution of 180-200 THB. * As an alternative, they can seek medical care at the Mae Tao Clinic when necessary. Nevertheless, transportation costs remain prohibitively high, as drivers also face security concerns that contribute to increased expenses.”*

*(*For pregnant women workers, the monthly contribution is around 300 THB.)*

(Workers, FGD)

Access to Labour Rights and the Right to Collective Bargaining

Kusakabe & Melo (2019) contend that barriers still remain for workers in formal factories to access labour rights such as being able to legally form their own labour unions, and accessing legally entitled

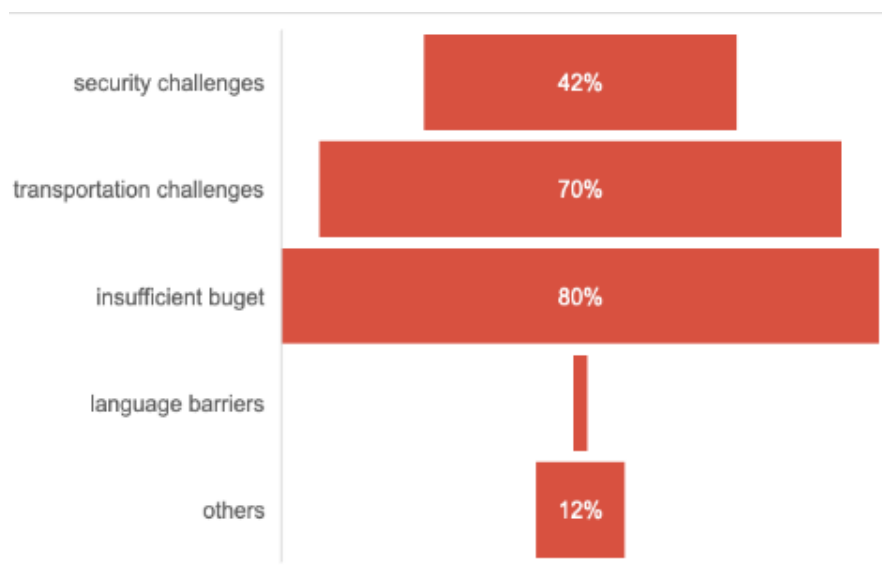


Figure 17: Barriers to accessing health services

social security benefits, such as paid maternity leave. According to the 1975 Labour Relations Act (LRA), while trade unions are legal, migrant workers are prohibited from establishing their own labour unions although they can join Thai ones (Campbell, 2018, p. 40). However, it remains challenging for migrant workers in the formal factories to exercise the right to organize due to the minimal presence of Thai workers and non-existence of unions in factories in Mae Sot (Kusakabe & Melo, 2019).

Yet, workers in all workplaces are able to submit demands to employers through collective bargaining if at least 15% of employees sign the demands. Migrant workers in formal factories in Mae Sot have been able to successfully use this mechanism to put forth demands through collective bargaining which has led to collective bargaining agreements (CBA). Another successful strategy is to demand the establishment of worker welfare committees, which are mandated under the Labour Protection Act (LPA) for workplaces with 50 or more workers. Worker welfare committees provide a direct channel of negotiation with the employer over issues of working conditions and benefits. The problem is that these small, unregistered, house-based factories are informal and mostly hire small numbers of workers, many of who are undocumented migrants. Because of these conditions they do not feel safe to collectively bargain; and because the number of workers is insufficient, there is no mandate for worker welfare committees.

Workers in small, unregistered, house-based factories, who experience labor rights violations face a seemingly insurmountable situation. They are confounded by the fact that they work in unregistered workplaces and are undocumented or improperly documented. These conditions also make them feel that legal protections are inaccessible. Even if they wanted to file a complaint, they feel that they would be unable to because their legal status makes them vulnerable to deportation. According to labour organizations:

“It is infeasible for workers to exercise labour rights in the house-based factories. Most important thing is majority of the workers do not know about their rights. Even if workers want to file the complaints or expose the exploitations, they do not have enough information about the factories’ names or what brands they are sewing. Lack of legal documents make them vulnerable and exposed to rights violations. The employers are bribing the Thai authorities and they have close relations which makes workers reluctant to file the complaints.”

(Labour organization, Interview)

During FGDs, some workers stated that they had heard about labour rights. Workers mentioned that MAP Foundation, Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association, and AAC (Aid Alliance Committee) have conducted labour rights awareness sessions with workers during their overtime holiday on Sundays.

According to the survey respondents, 58% (n=29) out of total 50 respondents stated that “we have heard about labour rights” while the rest 42% (n= 21) responded that “we have not heard.”

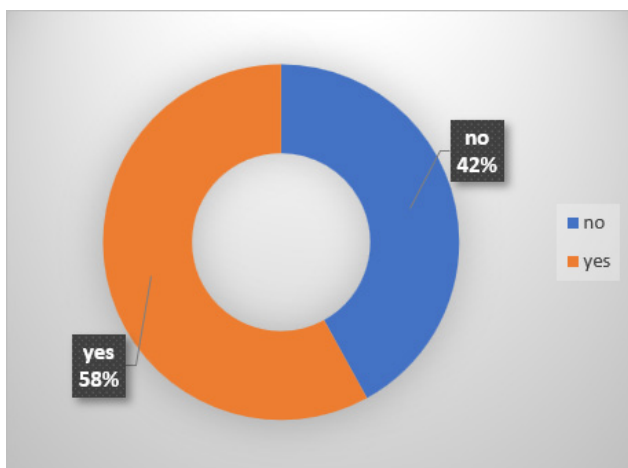


Figure 18: Labour rights knowledge

Those workers in the survey and in FGDs who responded “yes” that they have heard about labour rights, claimed that they know about the right to minimum wage, social security benefits, overtime pay and holidays. During the FGDs, workers stated:

“We previously attended awareness sessions organized by the MAP Foundation and Yaung Chi Oo at a volunteer’s house after 5 PM on Sundays, which were designated as our overtime holidays. However, these sessions took place a long time ago, and we have since forgotten much of the information regarding labor rights...”

(Workers, FGD)

During focus group discussions, most of the workers stated that they face barriers to reporting labour rights violations to the labour office or police. A main consideration is that there is a Facebook group formed by the employers. Whenever workers have problems with the employers, the employer posts the picture of the worker, effectively black-listing them, and that worker will have difficulties finding another job. During the survey, 96% (n=48) stated that, “they never heard of disputes encountered” while 4% (n=2) claimed that “they have heard of disputes encountered in their factories,” wherein the disputes were related with wage theft and verbal argument with the manager. However, in these cases, workers did not utilize the right to collective bargaining.

Workers claimed that if they encountered problems with the employers, they can lose their deposit of 15 working days. In addition, they will not file a complaint about their rights violations with the labour office or police due to fear of getting arrested and deported. This is compounded by the fear of the conscription law in Myanmar. In other words, while lack of legal documentation makes the workers more vulnerable to being subjected to exploitation it also influences workers’ reluctance to report rights violations. Migrants find themselves in a highly vulnerable position that makes them feel powerless.

A male worker who is a CDMer (the civil servants who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement after the military coup in Myanmar), claimed that:

“Even though we know the unfair working situation and labor rights violations, Burmese workers don’t report the cases, or fail to complain. This is because we are afraid of being blacklisted by these employers. For us, we cannot go back to our country. On the other hand, we need to survive here and if we exposed the rights violations, we would encounter difficulties in finding another job.”

(Male worker, FGD)

A female worker who is also a CDMer agreed:

“That’s true. For me, I always stood up against the employer’s mistreatment. When they asked for the increased production target or the manager committed verbal abuse, I didn’t comply with them. That’s why I got dismissed frequently, and now I am jobless.”

(Female worker, FGD)

According to the survey respondents, they identified the following barriers to exercising their labour rights: “it is not easy to find new jobs” 72% (n=36), “economic concerns” by 74% (n=37), “it is not easy to relocate” by 48% (n=24), “fear of getting fired” by 28% (n=14), “fear of security threats” by 22% (n=11) and “no solidarity among Burmese migrant workers” by 10% (n=5). In addition, out of total 50 respondents, 40% (n=20) stated they know organizations to contact when they experience rights violations; but, the other 60% (n=30) do not know who to contact.

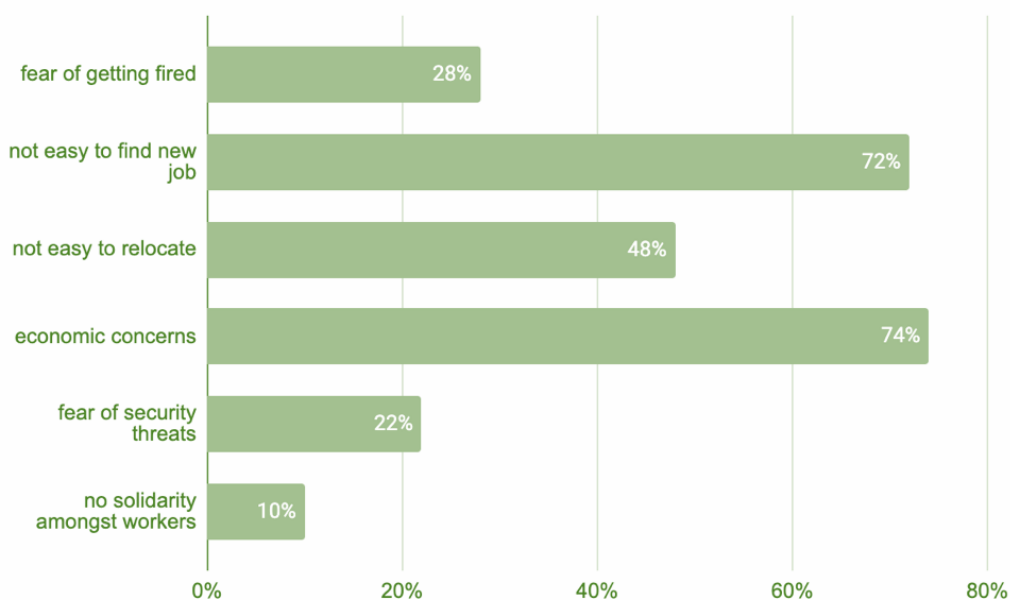


Figure19: Barriers to accessing labour rights

Types of Support Needed

During FGDs, workers reported they want improved wages and social protections. Workers also mentioned that they learned about labour rights on social media platforms or from labour organizations such as MAP Foundation and Yaung Chi Oo. However, workers have expressed the need for more knowledge-sharing sessions about labour rights and labour laws as well as legal support from individuals or organizations advocating for labor rights.

According to survey respondents, 65% (n=30) indicated a need for knowledge support, while 30% (n=14) expressed the necessity for organizational and legal assistance. Additionally, workers highlighted that disseminating information through accessible digital platforms, such as Facebook and TikTok, would be an effective means for them to access relevant knowledge and resources.

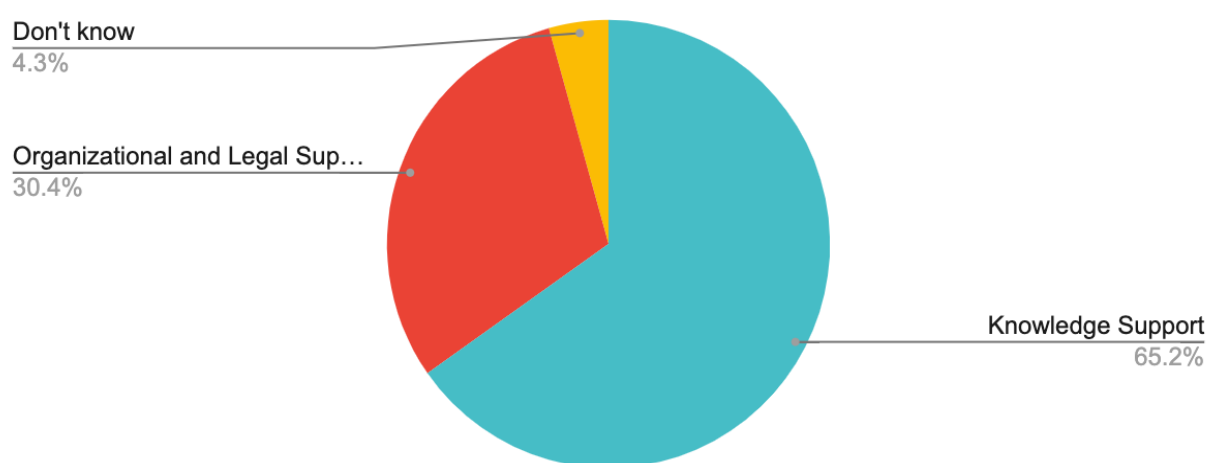


Figure 20: Type of Support Needed

In terms of conducting knowledge awareness sessions, one labour organization explained as follows:

“A long-term commitment is required rather than project-based funding, along with the implementation of consistent policies. Additionally, increased consultations by organizations and a systematic module are necessary. Organizations must demonstrate a stronger commitment to advocating for workers’ rights, particularly in informal factories.”

Additionally, this labour organization also noted:

“In advocacy meetings, it is crucial for workers to be actively involved in decision-making processes. Furthermore, workers require continued awareness and support, even after reporting cases, to prevent recurrence. Reporting such cases often entails significant sacrifices for workers; therefore, it is imperative for Thai authorities to conduct thorough and careful investigations to ensure justice.”

Workers also mentioned that establishing solidarity among the workers is crucial to exercise labour activism. Most of the workers in the house-based factories fear being arrested or deported and expressed that, *“We need to realize the rights violations against us. If we establish solidarity among us, it’d be easier to reveal grievances and access labour rights.”*

Conclusion

This study highlights the heightened vulnerability of migrant workers—particularly women—employed in small, unregistered, house-based garment factories in Mae Sot. The rapid expansion of these informal production sites following the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup in Myanmar has deepened workers' exposure to exploitation as the sector relies heavily on undocumented migrant labour operating outside formal regulatory frameworks. Workers commonly endure sub-minimum wages, forced overtime, no overtime pay, and inadequate housing, with little recourse to legal protections.

Undocumented or partially documented migrant women, especially those with young children, constitute the majority of the workforce in these small, unregistered, house-based factories. Their concentration in informal garment production is partly influenced by structural constraints, including the inability to access paid maternity leave, limited access to childcare, and exclusion from social security systems.

While workers perceive small, unregistered, house-based factories as offering greater flexibility—such as leniency around sick leave and permissive child care rules - this flexibility is primarily a function of the piece-rate wage system, which transfers economic risk to workers by paying them based on production targets. Under this payment scheme, workers employed in house-based factories typically receive a daily wage of 180–200 THB, inclusive of overtime compensation, and generally earn approximately half of the wages earned in formal factories. The migrant workers' precarious documentation status restricts their mobility and precludes the filing of workplace grievances. Fear of retaliation, arrest, or deportation discourages workers from raising grievances and collective bargaining, particularly in a context where employers maintain amicable relations with local authorities compounded by the threat of deportation to an active conflict zone. In fact, the worsening political and economic conditions in Myanmar, including the enactment of the conscription law, compels many workers to tolerate exploitative conditions in Thailand.

Migrant workers are deprived of proper social protections either by their legal status or their employer, while legal and practical barriers bar them from formally organizing. In addition, the small size of most house-based factories allows employers to evade the obligation of establishing worker welfare committees. Considering the complexity of vulnerability in the context of small, unregistered, house-based factories, labour exploitation remains largely unchallenged. Workers therefore emphasize the critical role of labour organizations and migrant solidarity networks in mitigating migrant workers' vulnerability and in advocating for improved wages and working conditions in this part of the garment sector. The missing piece is how to regulate an informal sector where a highly vulnerable population relies on an exploitative employment arrangement in an inherently unfair industry for a tenuous sense of security.

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MAP Foundation Chiang Mai

Address : 9/34 Moo 1 Ing Doi Village Liab
Klong Chonprathan Road, Chang Phueak
Subdistrict, Mueang District, Chiang Mai

50300 THAILAND

E-mail: map@mapfoundationcm.org

Phone: 053-328134



MAP Foundation Mae Sot

Address : No. 1/5 AminaUthit Road
Mae Sot Tak 63110

E-mail: map@mapfoundationcm.org

Phone: 055-536-685