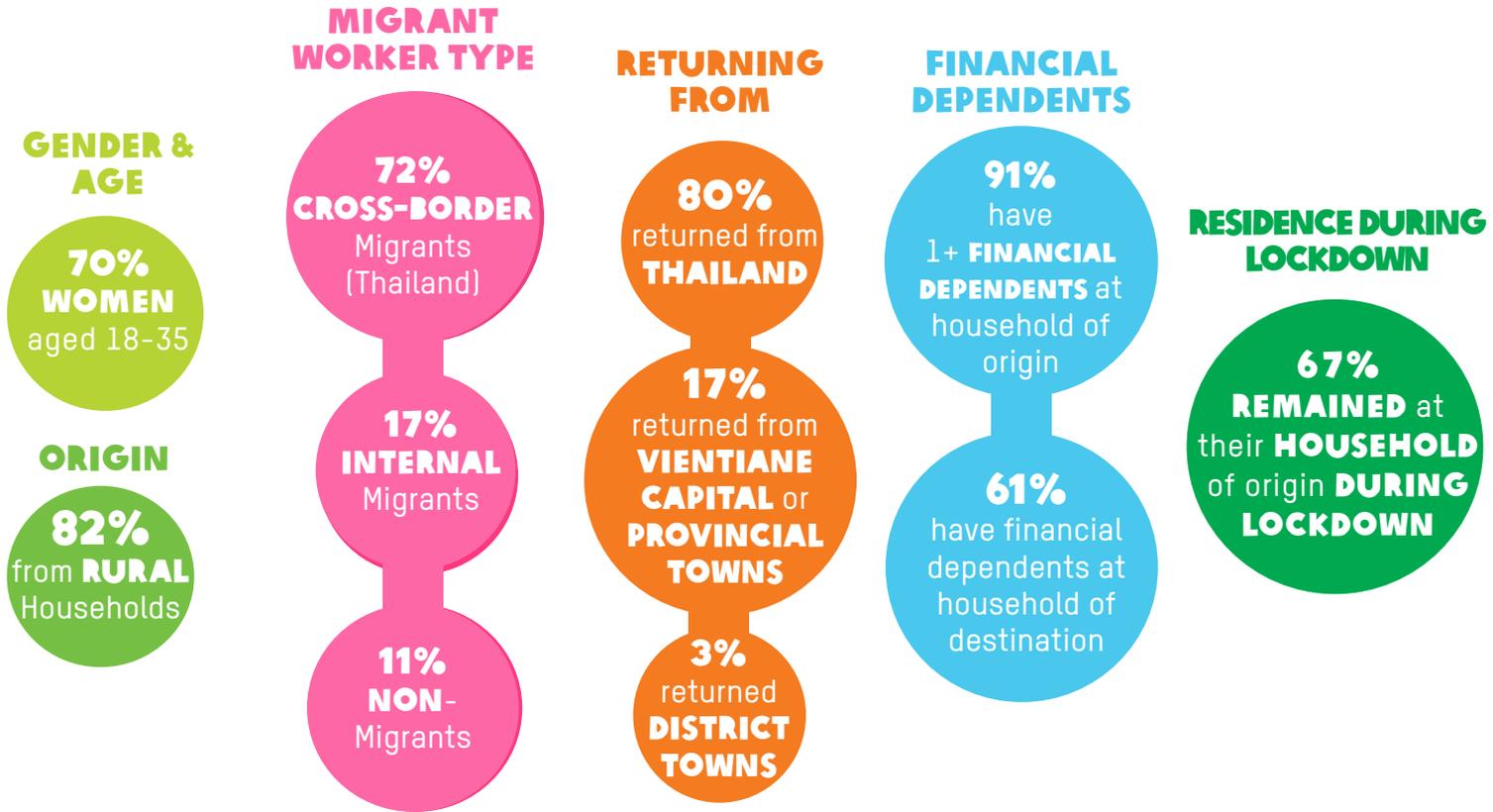


1000+ RESPONDENTS
across 9 Provinces &
Vientiane Capital

ASSESSING COVID-19 RELATED SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON RETURNEE MIGRANT WORKERS IN LAO PDR

To increase the understanding and evidence-base on perspectives and needs of returnee migrant workers in informal jobs in Laos, particularly women, in the context of the COVID-19 situation. This will support the Government of Laos and its development partners to develop appropriate social protection approaches.

DEMOGRAPHICS



WHAT ARE THE KEY SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON WORKERS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN, AS WELL AS THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES?

- Almost half of respondents lost their job during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Over 60% of respondents reported increased unpaid household work due to the lockdown, particularly for women.
- Before the lockdown, only 7% of respondents did not have a monthly income, which increased to 64% during the lockdown.
- Almost half of respondents agreed with the statement that women and girls are at increased risk of gender-based violence during the lockdown.
- Average income loss during the lockdown was 64%. Most affected were cross-border migrant workers and least affected were non-migrants.
- Almost half of respondents did not know where to seek help if they saw a friend or neighbor experiencing violence.
- Over 60% of households receiving remittances experienced a reduction during the lockdown. In these households, remittances constituted half or more of household income.
- 40% of respondents felt discriminated or stigmatized at the place where they stayed during the lockdown. Migrants were more likely to have felt discriminated against than non-migrants.
- 44% of families ran out of food on at least one day during the lockdown. On average this happened on nine days (from March to June).
- Almost 60% of respondents felt unsafe when returning to their household of origin, with 88% of them reporting that community members made them feel unsafe. Women mentioned more often than men that relatives or family members made them feel unsafe.
- 39% of families could not access the same types of foods during the lockdown, mainly due to less income.

WHAT COPING MECHANISMS, INCLUDING SOCIAL PROTECTION RELATED SERVICES, DO WORKERS USE TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THEIR LIVES?



Only 9% of respondents had access to unemployment insurance, of which 90% was in Thailand. However, being registered for unemployment insurance did not translate to immediate and sufficient support during the lockdown.



Only 12% of respondents had health insurance, of which 90% had insurance in Thailand. Only 26% of registered workers used their health insurance during the lockdown.



52% of workers received some type of paid sick leave. However, only 36% of respondents thought employers would pay the entire salary if workers took sick leave.



55% of respondents accessed different types of foods to cope with the lockdown.



Most respondents tried to inform themselves on the health, economic, and social impacts of the COVID-19 situation.



Around half of respondents tried to spend less money during to the COVID-19 situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR GOVERNMENT

- ✓ Disseminate information on labor rights and social protection policies to communities and migrant workers. Information to be available in ethnic languages and accessible for workers who cannot read.
- ✓ Identify and map current needs of employers and labor market demands in Laos and in Thailand as the major country of destination for migrant workers.
- ✓ Develop a national labor market strategy plan for better identification and linking of current and potential migrants with the job market in Laos.
- ✓ Support cross-border migrants to officially register for immigration permission, work permits and social security (including healthcare) in destination countries.
- ✓ Provide training to government officers, local authorities and workers to increase understanding on the 3 main pillars of Laos' Social Protection System: healthcare, social security and social welfare.
- ✓ Divide clear responsibilities between Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and Lao Federation of Trade Unions, increasing the latter's involvement in supporting migrant workers.
- ✓ Extend social security coverage for all groups of workers. For migrant workers, improve portability of social security entitlements.
- ✓ Provide guidance on how INGOs and CSOs can support strengthening the social protection system in Laos
- ✓ Develop a migration sensitive national action plan on violence against women to address prevention and response to gender-based violence and discrimination.

FOR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING RESEARCH PARTNERS

- ✓ Disseminate to all groups of workers the following information that is clear and user-friendly, available in ethnic languages and accessible for workers who cannot read on: Labor rights and social protection policies; Gender-based violence and associated risks during lockdowns; Where to seek help in case of experiencing or witnessing any type of violence; and Accurate public information about COVID-19.
- ✓ Collect information on skills of migrants for labor matching, including what are key skills that migrants need.
- ✓ Provide small grants to businesses that have had their value chains affected by closed borders, but could resume and/or expand their operations with the help of returnee migrant workers now in Laos.
- ✓ Support cross-border migrants with official registration procedures for immigration permits, work permits and social security schemes in destination countries.
- ✓ Provide training (financial and technical) to government staff on implementation of social protection policies.
- ✓ Provide more analysis/information on the impact on gender-based violence, including what makes women returnee migrant workers feel unsafe.
- ✓ Ensure coordinated quality services responding to gender-based violence, tools to ensure cross-border referral and case management when needed are available for all migrants.
- ✓ Facilitate vocational training, specifically cross training from skilled migrant workers to unskilled workers in Laos, for better access to decent work.
- ✓ Provide cash transfers and/or small grants for economic empowerment activities for migrant workers, especially at risk groups.

WHAT ARE WORKERS' FUTURE OUTLOOKS AND THEIR SOCIAL SERVICE NEEDS AFTER COVID-19?



Most respondents felt optimistic about their household being able to cope with the lockdown. Yet only 3% considered they could earn enough income if a similar situation happened again.



49% of respondents preferred to re-migrate, 24% preferred to stay in their household of origin and get a job, and 7% preferred to stay and rest. However, 19% of respondents said they had yet to decide.



52% of internal migrants and 38% of cross-border migrants mentioned regulation of migratory status as an important pre-condition for re-migration.



Respondents considered the most needed social services to be free water/electricity, free health care and cash support. Free financial credit was least urgently requested.



Respondents mentioned most frequently labor rights, health care and financial support as key priorities for workers in informal employment. Training had the lowest priority.



More than 90% of respondents said that public offices are critical for better preparation for any future situations similar to COVID-19.