

Small Dreams Beyond Reach:

The Lives of Migrant Children and Youth
Along the Borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand

Written By: Therese M. Caouette

A Participatory Action Research Project
of Save the Children(UK)

I cannot read and do not know what to say. If possible I would like to stay in one place and not move anywhere again. I just dream because in real life things will not be that simple.

**A 21 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State
working as a day labourer along the Thai border**

I would like to have a home and chance to study. I like to draw and would like to have hope for a future that is better than now.

**A young girl from Myanmar
living on the streets along the Thai border**

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This project was conceptualised by Save the Children (UK) staff in 1998 in realizing the need to learn more about the realities faced by migrant children and youth along the borders in Southeast Asia. Based on these efforts a project proposal was presented for a Participatory Action Research project among migrant children and youth along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand. This project was fully funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID/UK)

The project was co-ordinated by Save the Children's Southeast Asian and Pacific Regional Office (SEAPRO), a Regional Project Co-ordinator and country teams established in China, Myanmar and Thailand. Each country team was staffed by a National Co-ordinator, National Researchers, Field Researchers, Youth Volunteers and project translators. The project benefited tremendously from the support and leadership of the Programme Directors and the SEAPRO staff who were actively involved in the planning, implementation and review of the project.

All of those involved in this project have made amazing contributions to their communities and behalf of their communities becomes advocates for action and change. Many of those directly involved in this project are unable to identify themselves by name for reasons of safety and security. Thus, it was agreed that the names of all those directly involved in this project will be withheld. Those who have worked with this project know who they are and will undoubtedly take great pride in the skills they have mastered and amazing work they have done.

The project would not have been possible without the numerous partners, (including community members, organisations and other stakeholders) who supported this project throughout its implementation. They provided invaluable insight and guidance in creatively reaching out to children and young persons in the context of their realities.

Last but not only in hopes of remembering most of all, the hundreds of children and young persons who so patiently joined us with amazing energy and determination to find words to describe their world and ways to move forward towards a more hopeful future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past ten years, the borders between China, Myanmar and Thailand have seen the largest flow of migrants in decades. Those from Myanmar have made up the largest proportion of this mobile population. People are moving in unprecedented numbers between these borders for tourism, trade, business, refuge, employment and other opportunities. Few of the available statistics on the total number of migrants in the Mekong sub-region include individuals overstaying their travel permits or those without documentation. Based on knowledgeable estimates, the number of migrants in the region involves millions of people.

Those most impacted by migration are the peoples along the mountainous border areas between China, Myanmar and Thailand, who represent a variety of ethnic groups. In addition, there are also the dominant ethnic populations of each country, the Bamar, Han Chinese and Thai who are migrating to the border areas in increasing numbers.

Although it is hard to find age and gender breakdowns in the limited data available, both the countries of origin and countries of destination find that those migrating are largely young people and often include children. There is a significant demand for female labour and a disproportionate number of female migrants without documentation. This is due largely to the types of jobs female migrants undertake, their isolation (due to fear and confinement), the unwillingness of employers to register them and the lack of sensitivities to their particular situations, needs and rights.

Though many acknowledge the growing numbers of children and youth migrating and/or their families, there is little awareness as to their concerns and needs, with extremely few interventions undertaken to reach out to them. In an effort to fill this void, SC(UK) implemented a project for Participatory Action Research (PAR) with migrant children and youth along the shared borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand from April 1999-March 2001 with funding from the Department for International Development (DFID, UK Government).

The majority of the cross-border migrants were young, came from rural areas and had little or no formal education. Along all the borders, young people began migrating on their own at about the age of thirteen. Though some children under thirteen also migrate on their own, most are accompanied by their parents or relatives.

The decision to migrate is complex and usually involves numerous overlapping factors. The participants in this study did not give one reason exclusively, but an explanation that included economic survival, war, refuge, government policies, personal problems and envisioned opportunities abroad. The majority of migrants first explained their need to move to find work as necessary for their daily survival.

Migrants travelled a number of routes that changed frequently according to their political and economic situations. The vast majority crossed without documentation and even those with travel permits, often stayed beyond their expiration or did not abide by the

restrictions placed on their visit, ultimately resulting in being identified as illegal immigrants.

Generally, migrants leave their homes not knowing for certain what kind of job they will actually find abroad. Even when they think they know, they often find it is not what they expected. The actual jobs available to migrants were very gender specific. Migrant girls and women sought jobs in factories, shops and restaurants, sex work (direct or indirect), the entertainment industry or as domestic workers (cleaning and care taking). Male migrants found jobs in the fishing and agricultural industries, or as manual day labourers, or construction workers.

Though the living and working conditions of cross-border migrants vary according to the place, job and employer, nearly all the participants noted their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse without protection or redress. The interviews in this study revealed extensive debt-bondage, sexual abuse, illegal confinement, confiscation of documents, arrest and extortion, forced overtime, few basic resources and poor living conditions that were overcrowded, insecure and often violent. Sexual abuse was commonly reported among girls and young women, particularly among those involved in sex work and domestic service.

The general health problems impacting children and young people were identified as malaria (the most common illness reported), tuberculosis (TB), dengue fever, diarrhoea and malnutrition. Reproductive health issues were a major concern among youth and adults at all the project sites.

For all illnesses, most of the participants explained that it was difficult to access public health services due to distance, cost and/or their illegal status. Many reported trying to treat their problems themselves or through traditional healers or military medics. Only when these efforts did not work and their illness progressed to a serious state did they attempt to access public health services or private medical care.

Along all the borders, most of the children did not attend school and among those who did only a very few had finished primary level education. Those who were displaced or had migrated across the borders cited constant mobility, remoteness, insecurity and lack of documentation as the reasons why their children did not attend school. Economic instability and language barriers were other important factors. There was also an attitude among participants in several of the study sites that formal education would not lead to a good life, even if young people were to finish higher levels of schooling. Cross-border migration was seen as an opportunity to obtain experience and develop practical skills. Consequently, many children reported not going to school or dropping out of school early. These children began working at an early age and were vulnerable to exploitation as a result of their limited knowledge and skills.

Drug production, trafficking and addiction were critical issues identified by the communities at all of the research sites along the borders. Participants noted the problem of drug addiction, particularly among young people, with children as young as nine and

ten years old considered vulnerable to experimentation and addiction. Young migrants also reported being introduced to amphetamines by their employer in order to work harder and longer hours. In addition, migrants along all three borders noted the ease of recruiting migrants into the drug trafficking business, and expressed frustration with the inability to deal with drug-related problems in their families and communities.

Child labour was found in all three countries, particularly along the border areas and among migrant populations. This was largely a result of extreme poverty and of children left orphaned or abandoned by their parents. Many young children were observed working largely in the service and entertainment sectors (such as teashops, restaurants and hotels that often included direct and indirect sex work), in agricultural related jobs, or as day labourers or beggars. In addition, child soldiers, both in the army and with armed opposition groups, were found in Myanmar. According to the attitudes and perspectives of those in this study, children were of a 'workable age' as early as six or seven years old.

Trafficking of persons, predominantly children and youth, was common at all the study sites. The majority of young women and children were trafficked into sex work, marriage, domestic work or begging. This study found that the majority of girls from migrant communities along the Thai-Myanmar border left their border villages for jobs further in Thailand. Typically, girls were recruited during the fifth and sixth grade. Trafficking of girls and young women into marriage was also frequently reported by girls and young women from minority communities in Northern Shan State, who often were forced into marriages deeper into China. Many domestic workers from Myanmar also reported being trafficked into domestic work and forced into arrangements and conditions without their knowledge or agreement. Trafficking of young children and babies was also reported from Myanmar into China.

Orphaned children along the border areas were found to be the most vulnerable, often living without assurance of their most basic needs. These children were the most likely to be exploited and trafficked. Abandonment was a common problem, related to drug trafficking and addiction, HIV/AIDS, and loss of contact with family during migration. In addition, migrants' illegal status often leads to arrest, detention and deportation, with children reporting being treated as adults during this process, often separated from their family and communities. Large-scale migration in the Mekong sub-region has led to increasing numbers of children without citizenship.

Migrants frequently considered their options and opportunities to return home. For many, the decision to return revolved around issues of security and logistics. Discriminatory attitudes towards those who have migrated, especially girls and young women, made the reintegration process extremely difficult, often resulting in further migration.

At the conclusion of many of the interviews and focus group discussions, participants were asked about their future hopes and aspirations. The simplicity of their dreams highlights the struggles of many along the border, including migrant children and youth. The study also explored responses by community members, government departments and

support organisations, non-government agencies, religious bodies, employers and other stakeholders.

Based on the project's findings, SC(UK) has provided recommendations at the conclusion of this report to address the critical issues faced by migrant children and youth along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand. These recommendations include: methods of working with migrant youth, effective interventions, strategies for advocacy, identification of vulnerable populations and critical issues requiring further research.

In conducting this project, SC(UK) used Participatory Action Research (PAR) to provide opportunities for children and youth to identify their concerns, vulnerabilities, needs and interests. Project participants were encouraged to develop interventions, take responsibility for implementation and document their progress as a means of learning and educating others about their lives and concerns. Given that few (if any) interventions had previously been undertaken with migrant children and youth, this approach provided a great deal of insight and interest among the community, and national and regional partner organisations and advocates. The pilot interventions undertaken included a wide-range of activities and a variety of implementation strategies for raising awareness, and strengthening capacity building, life skills training and outreach services. The PAR process used in this project and the interventions that emerged from it will be presented in a separate report.

SC(UK) found the participatory approach to research and the development of pilot interventions to be effective ways of involving children and youth. This approach is particularly helpful when working with vulnerable populations and a wide-range of sensitive issues. The tentative situation in which many migrant children live requires a tremendous amount of flexibility and sensitivity, as well as open exchange with project participants. The ongoing challenge of including the participation of diverse ethnic populations with their various languages, cultures and circumstances is an essential component of working with migrants. Another invaluable component of working with migrants whose lives transcend national boundaries is cross-border exchanges and collaborative efforts. These exchanges and efforts need to be extended to a network of partners at the community, provincial, national and regional levels.

Based on the participatory research process used in this study, the following interventions were identified as most effective in empowering migrant children and youth in the Mekong sub-region: life skills training and literacy education, strengthening protection efforts, securing channels for safe return and providing support for reintegration to home countries. These efforts need to be initiated in tandem with advocacy efforts to influence policies and practices that will better protect and serve migrant children and youth. SC(UK) has identified vulnerable children and youth populations as in need of further outreach and intervention, and recommends adapting the participatory research methods of this study to other borders in Southeast Asia (such as the border regions of Vietnam-China, Laos-China, Laos-Thailand and other areas along the Myanmar-Thai border), as well as other populations in the region (such as migrants from China living in Thailand).

SC(UK) hopes that together with a broad base of partners the critical issues that deny so many children and youth life's most basic securities and rights will be addressed and appropriate interventions will be made to reduce the exploitation of these young people.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the borders between China, Myanmar¹ and Thailand have seen the largest flow of migrants in the Mekong region. People from Myanmar have made up the largest proportion of this mobile population. The concerned governments have acknowledged over two million people from Myanmar have migrated into neighbouring countries including China, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand.² Many international and non-governmental organisations estimate significantly higher numbers of migrants from Myanmar into neighbouring countries. There are also significant numbers of people from China migrating through Myanmar into Thailand and further abroad.³ However, exact numbers are difficult to determine due to the migrants' mobility, porous borders, the hidden and isolated lifestyles of undocumented migrants, and because many of the migrants along the border are often indistinguishable from the local ethnic population.

Thailand has been the major destination and transit country for migrants in the Mekong Region. The Thai government has officially acknowledged over one million undocumented migrants (the vast majority from Myanmar) currently employed in eight employment sectors in just over half of the provinces in Thailand. If these estimates included migrants in a wider range of labour sectors, the unemployed (including accompanying family members) and the remaining provinces throughout Thailand, the number of migrants crossing the borders into Thailand would be considerably higher.⁴ In addition, the number of migrants from Myanmar residing in major border towns in Thailand is equal to or, in some cases, more than the local population in the area.

Since 1988, there has been a steady increase of migration across the Myanmar-China border. Those migrating from Myanmar into China are largely illegal, either lacking documentation or not abiding by the terms granted in their entry permits. Little is known about the cross-border migrant population into China. One source estimated 140,000 persons from Myanmar have relocated to live along or across the Chinese border.⁵

There exists no data on the number of people from China transiting through Myanmar to Thailand and beyond, though studies in China have confirmed this migration.⁶ The steady

¹ The name of the country was changed from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. This report will refer to the country name Burma when speaking specifically about the country and government prior to 1989.

² Archavanitkul, K. & Guest, P. (1999). *Managing the Flow of Migration: Regional Approaches*. Bangkok: Mahidol University and International Organisation for Migration.

³ There are also increasing reports of Chinese entering and residing in Myanmar. Most are able to do so legally and have established their own businesses. This migrant population is predominantly Han Chinese entrepreneurs and is not included in this study.

⁴ Caouette, T.M. (1998). *Needs Assessment on Cross-Border Trafficking in Women and Children in the Mekong Sub-Region*. Bangkok, Thailand: United Nations.

⁵ Smith, 1996. *Fatal Silence: Freedom of Expression and the Right to Health in Burma*. London: Article XIX.

⁶ Yunnan Children Development Center. (1998). *Analytic Report on Cross-national Outflow of Yunnan Frontier Women into Southeast Asian Countries*. Unpublished research report.

influx of Chinese migrants into Thailand has also been noted by Thai Immigration Detention Centres (IDCs), which hold significant and consistent numbers of detainees from China. According to research conducted in China, the numbers of migrants leaving Yunnan Province and entering into (or through) Thailand increased throughout the 1990s.⁷ According to discussions with local Chinese government officials in Xishuangbanna Prefecture,⁸ migration diminished or stabilised following the economic crisis in Thailand, which resulted in fewer jobs and trade opportunities, limited profits and stricter border restrictions imposed by the Chinese and Thai authorities. However, as a Thai immigration official explained, the trends and actual numbers from China are difficult to ascertain. Consideration must be given to the fact that more migrants are travelling with false or no documentation. Consequently, if arrested most of the migrants from China claim to be from Myanmar as it is easier (and cheaper) to be deported across the Thai border to Myanmar than returned directly to China by air.

Although it is hard to find age and gender breakdowns in the limited data available, both the countries of origin and destination find that those migrating are largely young people and often include children. Data on foreigners detained by the Thai immigration department between March 1995 and August 1997 shows the average age of those detained to be twenty-three years old with 20 percent of the detainees under the age of eighteen.⁹ Current trends of those migrating from Myanmar show more people coming to Thailand with family members than in the past, including an increasing number of younger children, with more ethnic Bamar migrating from areas deeper inside Myanmar.¹⁰

There is a significant demand for female labour and a disproportionate number of female migrants are without documentation. This is due largely to the types of jobs female migrants undertake, their isolation (due to fear and confinement), the unwillingness of employers to register them and the lack of sensitivities to their particular situations, needs and rights. This was evident in the Thai registration process during July-November 1996 with over 300,000 registered migrants¹¹ of which almost one third were females.

Save the Children (UK)¹² is aware of the limited understanding of the impact of migration on children and youth, and the few efforts made to address the critical issues they face. In 1997-98, SC(UK) conducted and published *An Inventory of Organisations*

⁷ Archavanitkul, Kritaya. (1998a). *Combating the Trafficking in Children and their Exploitation in Prostitution and Other Intolerable Forms of Child Labour in Mekong Basin Countries*. Bangkok: International Labour Organisation / International Programme of the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC).

⁸ Xishuangbanna means “12 areas” in Shan (Dai) language and is referred to in Thai as “Sipsongpanna.”

⁹ Archavanitkul, K. (1998).

¹⁰ Beyrer, C. (1999). *The Health and Humanitarian Situations of Burmese Populations Along the Thai-Burma Border*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University.

¹¹ Among the approximate 300,000 registered 87 percent were from Myanmar, 9 percent Cambodian and 4 percent Laotian.

¹² Save the Children (UK) will be referred to hereafter as SC(UK).

*Involved in Cross-border Programming in the Mekong Sub-region.*¹³ This report found limited information available regarding migrant children and youth along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand. Though many of those interviewed acknowledged the growing numbers of children and youth migrating and/or their families, there is little awareness as to their realities, concerns and needs, with extremely few interventions undertaken to reach out to them. In an effort to fill this void, SC(UK) initiated a project entitled: *Participatory Action Research (PAR) with Migrant Children and Youth in Cross-border Areas in China, Myanmar and Thailand*, which began in April 1999 with funding from DFID-UK. This report presents the process, findings and recommendations that emerged from this project.

2. Background

Cross-border migration of children and young persons has grown at an alarming rate along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand, often extending from borders to large urban areas and beyond to other countries in East Asia and the West. Migration has grown both in magnitude and complexity with a wide range of inter-related issues converging on the communities and impacting on the vulnerability of children and young persons. To provide some context for this report, this background section presents an overview of the relevant factors that strongly impact the realities, trends and issues involved. Such factors include a description of the migrant populations and the geographical, political, economic, and societal dimensions of migration in the region. The section concludes with a discussion of the particular vulnerabilities of children and youth.

2.1. Population

A variety of ethnic groups populate the mountainous border areas between China, Myanmar and Thailand. Each of these major ethnic groups has numerous sub-dialects and cultures within their population. The major ethnic groups found in China, Myanmar and Thailand are the Shan,¹⁴ Kachin,¹⁵ Kayin,¹⁶ Kayah,¹⁷ Mon, Wa, Pa-O, Akha,¹⁸ Lahu,¹⁹ Lisu and Palaung.²⁰ Most of these ethnic populations speak several languages but few are literate in any of them. In the past, these people have lived and moved irrespective of the political borders, which do not conform to their traditional origins. In

¹³ Hennessy, C. & Nwe Nwe Aye. (1998). *An Inventory of Organisations Involved in Cross-border Programming in the Mekong Sub-region*. Bangkok: Save the Children Fund (UK) Southeast, East Asia & Pacific Regional Office.

¹⁴ Shan are referred to as Dai in China and Tai-Yai in Thailand.

¹⁵ Kachin are referred to as Jingpo in China.

¹⁶ Referred to as Kayin in this report, but also known as Karen.

¹⁷ Referred to as Kayah in this report, but also known as Karrenni.

¹⁸ Akha are referred to as the Hani in China.

¹⁹ Lahu are also referred to as the Muser in Myanmar and Thailand.

²⁰ Palaung are referred to as the Bulang or Blang in China.

addition to these ethnic groups, the dominant ethnic population of each country (the Bamar,²¹ Han Chinese²² and Thai²³) also have historically migrated across borders.

The majority of the population along the border areas practice various forms of Buddhism. Buddhism has come to coexist with the original beliefs of the various ethnic minority populations, many of which are animistic in nature. Thus, the actual practice of Buddhism is highly variable. In addition to Buddhism, there are smaller proportions of people along the border practising Christianity. For example, Baptist Christianity is commonly found among the Kachin population. There is also a small, but noticeable presence of Islamic practitioners along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand, most of whom are of Indian descent and have migrated to this area from Myanmar's border areas with India and Bangladesh.

Historically, the border communities comprised minority populations dependent on an agricultural existence and economy, and often crossed the borders on foot for daily tasks such as trading or visiting family or friends scattered about the mountainous area. Lack of infrastructure, transportation and communication technology severely limited their ability to contact those outside their immediate surroundings. During the past two decades barriers preventing movement from the countryside to the towns and cities began to erode rapidly. An emphasis on trade, tourism and the service industries became government priorities, bringing improved roads, transportation, communication and infrastructure to these previously remote and isolated areas. These changes have helped to accommodate an increased floating population of migrants within each country and across all three national borders,²⁴ as trade and migration replace the agrarian society and quickly become one of the dominant characteristics of community and family life.

2.2. Geography

As depicted in the map of the region, Shan State, the largest state in Myanmar, is situated in the northeastern part of Myanmar. Due to its size, Shan State is officially sub-divided into three areas, known as North, South and Eastern Shan States. Northern Shan State borders four prefectures of China's Yunnan Province (Dehong, Lincan, Simao and Xishuangbanna). Thailand borders Eastern Shan State, Kayah State, Kayin State, Mon State and Myanmar's Tennesarim Division. The Thai provinces bordering Myanmar are numerous, including Chiangrai, Chiangmai, Mae Hong Son, Tak, Kanchanaburi and Ranong, all of which are common migrant crossings where large migrant communities exist.

²¹ Bamar refers to ethnic Burmese.

²² Han Chinese refers to ethnic Chinese and will be noted hereafter as Han Chinese.

²³ Thai are the dominant population in Thailand and should not to be confused with the Dai in China, who are referred to as Shan in this report.

²⁴ Porter, D. (1995). *Wheeling and Dealing: HIV and Development on the Shan State Borders of Myanmar*. New York: United Nation Development Programme (UNDP).

The expansion of roads and access to modern transportation has changed life dramatically in the past twenty years across all three borders. A 56 kilometre highway completed in May 1993, linking Myitkyina of Kachin State in Myanmar to Tengchong in Yunnan Province made a significant impact on previously isolated communities along the northwestern border.²⁵ The repair of the Mandalay-Muse road by the Asia World Construction Company in 1998 reduced the travel to less than ten hours between the two cities, accommodating over 300 vehicles per day. Prior to these repairs it would take two to three days or even a week to make the same trip, with few vehicles willing to make the journey. Earlier, in 1992, the Jie Gao bridge was completed connecting the Mandalay-Muse road to China's roadways. The Chinese transportation infrastructure from Jie Gao in Ruili County is one of the best in China and has facilitated large-scale trade between the two countries across the Ruili river. In addition, improved and expanded roads within Thailand to the Myanmar border and new bridges across the border have linked this road network with Myanmar.²⁶ New bridges have been constructed to facilitate transport from Yangon to Hpa-An and from Hpa-An to Mawlamyine (Moulmein) to the Thai border.

2.3. Political Dimensions

In examining the political dynamics within each country, it is possible to observe how they interface and influence each other. These political changes have a direct impact on the patterns and extent of migration.

China's political environment has changed dramatically since the Chinese Communist Party began taking a more flexible approach to its ideology in 1978. This shift, along with the policy to open China and introduce economic reforms, has brought about national economic prosperity, relaxation of political controls, more freedom in social life, as well as more realistic diplomatic relationships with surrounding countries. However, these changes have also brought about negative aspects to individuals, including unemployment, inequality of resource allocation, a widening gap between the poor and the rich (also between rural and urban areas and western and eastern regions of the country), a decline in social service provisions, and increased illegal activities (noticeably corruption, gambling, sex work, drug abuse/traffic and human trafficking).

Since the 1940s, Burma has faced ongoing civil strife and war with ethnic minority populations along its border. This conflict and the government's historical isolationist policy have limited trade opportunities with the outside world. Though the minority populations along the border have had some black market trade opportunities with neighbouring countries, it has been sporadic and uncertain at best. Following the 1988 demonstrations and the decline in foreign exchange rates, the Myanmar government began negotiating trade agreements and official border crossings with China and later Thailand. This coincided with the changing policies in China towards a more open-market economy and an easing of central control, as well as Thailand's desperate need for natural resources. Both China and Thailand entered into trade agreements with

²⁵ Porter, D. 1995.

²⁶ Ibid.

Myanmar largely focused on purchasing natural resources, such as timber, gas, fish and other commodities.²⁷

During the 1990s, major political changes also took place in Thailand, highlighted by the massive demonstrations during May 1992 against the military controlled government. As a result, the government moved towards greater government accountability, enhanced civilian leadership, and constitutional reform, all of which have increased the participation of Thai citizens in the political process. Although the military continues to play a big role in establishing Thai policy, civil government and society holds some influence on Thai border policies and government-to-government relationships. This has resulted in a fluctuating relationship between the Thai and Myanmar governments. However, throughout most of the past decade the Thai government has expanded official border crossings and trade agreements with the government of Myanmar.

Improved relationships and opportunities for trade with Myanmar resulted in both China and Thailand supporting efforts to bring minority opposition groups to the negotiation table to ensure a more secure and accessible border. This was a shift from both China's and Thailand's support to the minority groups and displaced populations along their borders, who previously served as a buffer from any possible incursion from Burmese forces. Cease-fire agreements began in 1989 with the breakaway armies from the Communist Party of Burma (CPB).²⁸ Following the peace agreements with opposition forces along the Myanmar-China border came cease-fire agreements with a majority of the armed opposition groups along Myanmar's border with Thailand. Over the years, seventeen cease-fire agreements have been reached with minority groups along the Myanmar-China border. However, there appears to be confusion among the public as well as private sectors about the actual terms of the cease-fire agreements regarding the authority each group maintains and their accountability to the government. The result has been relatively more secure border areas, increased trade and formalised official border crossings.

By the end of 1997, the Karen National Union (KNU) was the only major armed opposition force that had not entered into an agreement with the Myanmar government. In recent years, a split in KNU occurred, resulting in a Buddhist faction, DKBA (Democratic Kayin Buddhist Association), and a Christian faction, KNU (Karen National Union). The Myanmar government has a cease-fire agreement with the DKBA. At present, the KNU remains outlawed and consequently a military presence remains throughout Kayin State. This military presence also imposes both enforced and unspoken curfews, taxes and constraints.

Civil conflicts, natural disasters, development projects and harassment of those challenging government policies and the political system have displaced hundreds of thousands of people throughout these three countries, particularly Myanmar. The political

²⁷ Article XIX. (1994). *Paradise Lost?* London: Author.

²⁸ Smith, M. (1994). *Ethnic Groups in Burma, Development, Democracy and Human Rights*. London: Anti-Slavery International.

policies of these countries have been largely focused on powerful business interests while ignoring the interests of weaker groups. This has led to the marginalisation and disregard for many people in rural and ethnic minority areas and has become a significant factor for migration.

2.4. Economic Dimensions

The development of roads and transportation has increased movement and extended opportunities for both short-term trade and longer-term employment to areas throughout Myanmar, China and Thailand. The economy of border towns and villages in all three countries has come to depend on trade with the others. In addition, the economy in rural areas of these countries has become increasingly dependent on the supplemental income of migrant workers. The result has been increased cross-border migration between China, Myanmar and Thailand that affects millions of people.

The economic plans and policies of all three countries have clearly emphasised and facilitated cross-border trade. After the government of Myanmar prohibited imported foreign goods in 1962, the border between Myanmar and Thailand became a major black market trading route. The economies of the communities along this border have long since shifted from agriculture to black market trade as their main source of income. After 1988 and the opening of the China-Myanmar border, trade along the Thai-Myanmar border diminished. The loss of trade along the Myanmar-Thai border left a void quickly filled by cross-border migration as new factories and other exporting industries inside Thailand sought cheap and abundant labour from Myanmar. The China-Myanmar border thrived with trade that had previously existed only along the Thai border. The dynamics of the cross-border markets among all three borders were highlighted in 1997 when the government of Myanmar closed access to China, resulting in an increased trade along the Thai border. However, even after the China-Myanmar border was re-opened, trade remained limited due to restrictions the Myanmar government imposed on the import and export of items from China. Consequently, many items previously traded at the Myanmar-China border moved to the black market and increased in price, thus making them cheaper and easier to obtain at the Myanmar-Thai border. This trend along with the improved infrastructure and reduced conflict in Myanmar has helped encourage trade with the Thai border. Today, long-haul ten-wheel trucks have replaced the pick-up trucks of the past plying the Myanmar-Thai border routes (particularly to Myawaddy-Mae Sot crossing). However, the situation along the borders of all three countries remain tenuous and at the time this report was being written, several major border crossings between Myanmar and Thailand were closed due to ethnic conflict in Burma, once again changing the dynamics of trade and migration in the region.

Throughout the past decades, Thailand and Myanmar, along with other countries in Asia, have been encouraging the export of labour as a means of creating employment opportunities and obtaining foreign exchange through remittances and taxation. These policies, though intended to support official migration, have unwittingly blurred the lines between legal and underground channels for migration because no formal system has been provided for monitoring the practices of recruiters, brokers or other intermediaries.

Moreover, little information, protection and few opportunities to seek redress for abuse have been provided by either the Myanmar or Thai government.²⁹ China on the other hand has denied official channels for migration leading to undocumented migration and underground movement in which persons find themselves unaware of the laws, policies and consequences, while totally dependent on the recruiters, brokers and other intermediaries. Consequently, migrants from all three countries find themselves extremely vulnerable to exploitation, arrest, detention and deportation.

In addition, all three countries have heavily promoted tourism that has encouraged migration and brought the influence of outside economic markets and resources to previously remote areas. Tourism has been a relatively new development for both China and Myanmar that began in the 1990s. China focused its national tourism primarily on attracting Han Chinese visitors to Yunnan Province, promoting the border areas as one of the featured places to travel. Though this clearly has had an effect on the entire province, Dehong and Xishuangbanna Prefectures received most of the tourists. The number of tourists to the Ruili area in Dehong Prefecture increased from 30,000 in 1989 to 187,000 in 1995. The increase in tourism throughout Yunnan Province had a notable impact, especially in Xishuangbanna Prefecture given its relative isolation (compared to Dehong Prefecture), with an average of 2,000 tourists visiting the province each day in 1997.³⁰ Myanmar focused primarily on international tourism, holding a promotional “Visit Myanmar Year” in 1996 and extended it for an additional year to emphasise this policy. The tourism effort led to improved infrastructure and accommodated increased mobility and a prosperous service and entertainment industry. Although Thailand has a long history of promoting tourism, the opening of its neighbours to tourism has been incorporated into Thailand’s marketing strategies as a broker for travel to these new places. Tourism has had a significant impact on the national economies of all three countries, including their shared borders.

The Asian economic crisis that began in July 1997 heavily impacted the border areas, leaving undocumented migrants increasingly vulnerable to exploitation, arrest and deportation.³¹ As unemployment began to rise, the Thai government quickly began cracking down on foreign workers and promoting a campaign of “Thai helping Thai,” in hopes of creating more jobs for its nationals. This led to increased discrimination towards undocumented migrants (primarily from Myanmar), in addition to the burdens the crisis had already placed on migrants. As time passed, Thai citizens became increasingly unwilling to take the difficult, dangerous and dirty jobs held by migrant workers, such that employers found an urgent need for migrant labour, who are generally paid half of the national minimum wage. Consequently, though job opportunities were reduced due to the economic upheaval in 1997, the demand for cheap migrant labour remained. Migrants

²⁹ Battistella, G (1999). *Overview of the Current Situation of Irregular or Undocumented Migration in East and Southeast Asian Region: The need for a Policy Response Framework*. Bangkok: International Organisation for Migration.

³⁰ Yearbook Press. (1998). *1998 Yunnan Yearbook*. Kunming: Author.

³¹ Nang Lao Liang Won. (1999). *Mekong Regional Consultation Series: Guidelines on Strategies and Responses to the Needs of Burmese Migrant Women in Thailand*. Chiangmai, Thailand: Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development.

from Myanmar continued to flood into Thailand, facing harsher working conditions and increased harassment as a result of the financial crisis.

2.5. *Social Dimensions*

Undocumented movement has commonly been considered to have a strong impact on the ‘security’ and ‘stability’ of the countries involved, often resulting in policies that further alienate migrants. Large numbers of undocumented migrants are victims of trafficking, or are asylum seekers, refugees or displaced persons. Policies to address migration primarily have focused on managing the flows versus addressing the causes or consequences of the actual movement.³² Networks of brokers and traffickers feed on and profit from a vulnerable population with limited choices and migration policies that are focused on arresting, detaining and deporting the migrant. Social networks tend to facilitate irregular migration and due to the lack of reliable public information, migrants are left to rely on informal contacts among relatives, friends and others known to have migrated previously for guidance.³³ In addition, these informal networks are a major conduit for irregular migration, as those involved actively encourage, facilitate and mediate the travel, admission, stay and employment of migrants.³⁴ Once contacted and engaged, migrants and their families often are left with no option but to rely entirely on these networks for their communication and safety. As a result, the migrant’s (and their family’s) vulnerability is easily exploited and sustained over long periods of time.

Regardless of how and why people have crossed the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand, they have come to be viewed as a national security threat and obstacle to improved border relations and trade. This has resulted in frequent round-ups, arrests, detentions and deportations along all the borders and an unwillingness by governments to address the critical issues faced by this population.

2.6. *Vulnerability of Children and Youth*

Economic transitions and crises, development of infrastructure, rapid increase of border trading, improved transportation, increasing poverty and gaps in wealth distribution, oppressive environments and low-intensity conflicts have left many children, young persons and their communities few or no options but to migrate. Schools are often non-existent or limited in border areas and higher levels of education are not accessible, especially in rural areas. Added to this, the demand for cheap labour and employers’ preference for young persons, particularly females, to work in factories, or as domestic servants or in other service sector jobs (many of which include direct or indirect sex work), leaves migration as one of the most viable options. The practice of recruiting child

³² Archavanitkul, K. & Guest, P. (1999). *Managing the Flow of Migration: Regional Approaches*. Bangkok: Mahidol University and International Organisation for Migration.

³³ Skrobanek, S., Boonpakdi, N. & Jantakeero, C. (1997). *The Trafficking in Women: Human Realities of the International Sex Trade*. London: Zed Books, Ltd.

³⁴ Battistella, G. (1999); and Mahatdhanobol, V. (1998). *Chinese Women in the Thai Sex Trade*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

labourers, including child soldiers, continues along the border areas and leads to further migration. These children and youth are often exposed to a wide-range of abuses in isolated settings where they have little or no outside support or opportunities to seek recourse. Thus, moving across borders was found to increase their vulnerability, as they often lack documentation, have limited or no language and literacy skills, reside and work in isolated areas with few or no services and are largely dependent on their employer for their safety and survival. Consequently, children and young persons encounter exploitative and violent environments, health risks and denial of a wide-range of basic rights as they migrate across borders.

There has been little documentation of the consequences and impact of migration on children and youth to determine possible and appropriate interventions.³⁵ What work has been done to date has focused primarily on issues specifically related to trafficking and HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and child labour. This limited data focuses primarily on identifying the problems.

There are a variety of definitions for trafficking being used and a range of experiences related thereto.³⁶ Regardless of the definitions used, the fact remains that many children and youth find themselves in conditions of extreme abuse tantamount to slavery. Trafficking of children and young people has been a lucrative trade across the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand.³⁷ These children and young people are trafficked into many different situations, but most commonly found in the service industry (involving direct and indirect sex work and domestic labour), factories and begging rackets. In the past, children and young girls were trafficked according to any definition used, however, in recent years more children, young people and parents have varying degrees of knowledge and relationships with the traffickers and the realities have become more nuanced.³⁸ Unfortunately, this knowledge rarely reduces vulnerability to abuse or offers protection. In fact, many cases have shown that this knowledge and relationship to traffickers (agents and/or brokers) can leave young women and girls more vulnerable to abuses and further limits their access to any possible assistance and retribution. The more recent dynamics of trafficking have yet to be explored, especially in the broader context of migration in which it is taking place.

The most alarming rates of HIV/AIDS infection in the Mekong region are found along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand. The highest prevalence of HIV infection in

³⁵ See Hennessy, C. & NweNwe Aye. (1998).

³⁶ Archavanitkul, K. (1998). *Trafficking in Children for Labour Exploitation Including Child Prostitution in the Mekong Sub-region*. Bangkok, Thailand: ILO/IPEC.

³⁷ Pongpaichit, P., Piriyaangsan, S. and Treerat N. (1998). *Guns, Girls, Gambling, Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy*. Chiangmai: Silkworm Books.

Asia Watch. (1993). *A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls into Brothels in Thailand*. New York: Author.

Mahatthanobol, V. (1998). *Chinese Women in the Thai Sex Trade*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, Institute of Asian Studies.

³⁸ Archavanitkul, K. (1998).

China occurs along its borders with Shan and Kachin States in Myanmar. The Chinese Ministry of Health reported in 1995 that 80.4 percent of all HIV infections and 60 percent of all confirmed AIDS cases in China were detected in Yunnan Prefecture³⁹ In the areas of Myanmar where sentinel surveillance for HIV risk has been conducted the highest rates of infection have been found along the border with Thailand and the town of Mandalay in the north.⁴⁰ A more recent assessment of HIV/AIDS infection rates, identified mobility, particularly along the border, as an indirect factor facilitating the spread of AIDS.⁴¹ The same study also notes that the research available points to increasing rates of HIV infection among the ethnic minority populations scattered along the border areas.⁴² This is corroborated with findings in Thailand where some of the highest rates of HIV infection and AIDS occur along its border with Myanmar.⁴³ Though there has been little surveillance of the HIV/AIDS prevalence among undocumented migrants, the little that has been done indicates they are at high-risk. Though UNAIDS and WHO estimate that 14,000 children have been orphaned by AIDS in Myanmar alone,⁴⁴ yet there has been little effort to examine to what extent these children have been impacted by migration in the context of this vulnerability.

Drug abuse is a growing problem among migrants along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand. Already known as the “Golden Triangle” for its large-scale production of opium, the area has been flooded by various types of amphetamines in recent years. Amphetamines are much easier and cheaper to obtain than heroin and can be either synthetically produced or extracted from ephedra -- a plant that grows wild in Yunnan Province and along the China-Myanmar border. The producers of these drugs generate quick returns on relatively small investments compared to the main overseas markets for heroin that require elaborate smuggling networks.

Increased drug use has impacted border communities and migrants along all three borders. Although Yunnan Province has not officially given figures of drug users, it has acknowledged that drugs have brought serious problems to the area with increased prostitution, HIV/AIDS infections and organized crime.⁴⁵ Ruili has among the highest rates of drug addicts and HIV/AIDS infections rates in all of China and the numbers have been consistently increasing every year since data was first collected in 1995. According to a recent survey by the Thai Development Research Institute, Thailand now has at least

³⁹ Zeng Yi, (1995). *The Working Situation of Controlling and Preventing AIDS in China*. Beijing: China.

⁴⁰ Min Thwe, Bo Kywe & D.J. Goodwin. (1995). *HIV Surveillance in Myanmar, 1985-1995*. Paper presented at the Third International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific. Chiangmai, Thailand.

⁴¹ Wrigley, O. (1998). *HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care in Myanmar: A Situation Analysis and Needs Assessment*. United Nations: Myanmar.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Asian Research Centre for Migration. (1997). *The Second Technical Consultation on Transnational Population Movements and HIV/AIDS in Southeast Asian Countries*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.

⁴⁴ Wrigley, O. (1998).

⁴⁵ Lintner, B. (1998). *Drugs and the Asian Crisis*. Published in Asia-Pacific Magazine No. 13. Australia: The Asia Link Center.

257,000 amphetamine users. In Myanmar, the official estimate is 500,000 intravenous drug users and no data is available on amphetamine or other substance addicts in the country. According to the Narcotic Unit in Yangon, the border areas are known for having some of the highest rates of drug addicts throughout the country. Information is also not available on the impact of drug abuse and trafficking on migrant communities, their children or youth, but clearly their proximity and increased exposure to these dynamics leaves them vulnerable.

Child labour is an ongoing problem throughout Asia including China, Myanmar and Thailand. Most research to date has focused on citizens of each country with little or no attention paid to undocumented children among migrant populations. According to one recent study conducted in sixteen provinces in Thailand, a considerable number of small enterprises and employers in the informal sector have shifted to hiring migrant children from neighbouring countries.⁴⁶ However, the child labour movement has largely focused on the enforcement of Child Labour Laws and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Children by governments and has not advocated strongly for the rights of children who reside in a particular country but are not nationals. Even when children are known to be undocumented, such as in trafficking cases, governments routinely deal with the victims as illegal migrants and make little or no effort to apply and document the Child Labour Laws or the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As noted earlier, recruitment of child soldiers remains an ongoing problem, primarily along the border areas. While many children are forcibly conscripted many also voluntarily join for a wide range of reasons, such as safety (especially among orphaned or abandoned children), support for themselves and other family members, inability to go to school, limited economic opportunities, or by choice as a volunteer soldier (with its higher status) as opposed to awaiting conscription.

Given these complexities and the illegal status of children and youth migrants, few have tried to reach out to this community. Little is known about what interventions are possible and how they can be implemented, given the position of children and youth in their families, communities and the network of people involved in (and often profiting from) their migration. Although, many of the efforts and interventions undertaken to address the issues faced by migrant children and youth have been invaluable, there remains an overall lack of understanding regarding their realities, needs and the possibilities for action towards improving their lives. Target interventions focused on migrant children have at times led to their further isolation and vulnerability. This is particularly true for young girls trafficked into the sex-industry, domestic workers, those abusing drugs, beggar children and efforts to provide temporary shelter for young undocumented migrants that have been separated from their family in detention or networks in which they are unable to return home safely. Thus, there is an urgent need to understand what can be done to address these many critical issues and an urgent need to understand the context of migrant children and youths' lives and their perspectives on

⁴⁶ Kanchanachitra, C. (1997). *Thailand Situation Analysis: Child Labour*. Paper submitted to UNICEF, Thailand.

migration, as well as how to best involve these young people and their communities in developing interventions.

3. Research Design

This project was implemented by SC(UK) Southeast Asia and the Pacific Regional office (SEAPRO), SC(UK) country offices in Myanmar, China and Thailand, together with local partners in these countries for an eighteen-month period (April 1999 to September 2000). The project officially began in April 1999 following considerable preliminary work undertaken by each country. A no cost, six-month extension was granted allowing the project to continue until March 2001. This chapter will present the objectives and four-phase strategy used to implement this regional project. It will also provide a description of the research teams, project sites and participants, as well as the data collection process, analysis, report writing and dissemination. Finally, this chapter will discuss the obstacles, and limitations and ethical considerations involved in working with sensitive issues and vulnerable populations, especially as they relate to interpreting the findings of this study.

3.1. Project Objectives

The objectives of the *Participatory Action Research with Migrant Children and Youth in Cross-Border Areas of China, Myanmar and Thailand* were generally stated in the proposal and evolved more concretely as the project unfolded.⁴⁷ Below are the objectives that were developed by the research team (most of whom were migrants themselves) based on the preliminary data collected in the field sites, the capacity of the researchers and opportunities available.

- 1. Gather insight into the lives of migrant children and youth, their realities, challenges and decision-making processes** using qualitative research tools, including direct and participatory observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participatory rapid appraisal. The data collected provided an understanding of the sensitive and compounded issues surrounding migration and their impact on the lives of children and youth. The findings were compiled to identify vulnerable migrant children and youth and their needs, and to develop insight into both the children and youth as individuals and in relation to their environment and other community members.
- 2. Employ a participatory approach to understanding the participants' perspectives and needs and explore appropriate interventions** with migrant children and youth in the cross-border migrant communities. Participatory Action Research (PAR) activities were developed according to the situation and interests of the children and youth and included non-formal education, referral to and/or assistance in obtaining services and/or creative time. The PAR activities and lessons learned from youth and community activities were documented and

⁴⁷ The project objectives did not change in their original focus, but were operationalised with more specific terms and procedures.

compiled together with the data collected from the observations, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participatory rapid appraisal tools.

3. Analyse the data and report the findings. Each country team conducted its own data translation and analysis. The findings were analysed and documented by each country team, translated into English and compiled for regional analysis.

4. Document the findings of the study and experience with the participatory approach and recommend interventions to be undertaken with migrant children and youth. This project offers insight into participatory approaches to research, lessons learned, skills acquired and resources available. This documentation offers a wide range of insights for those undertaking similar participatory projects, working with migrant populations, children and/or youth and attempting to address sensitive issues.

5. Disseminate the findings and establish strategies for advocacy with governments, service providers, international agencies, non-governmental organisations, community based groups and leaders, academics and others working on issues related to migration and children/youth in the three countries (Myanmar, China and Thailand), as well as regionally in the Mekong sub-region. Advocate for awareness of the vulnerabilities and needs of migrant children/youth and their communities and recommend strategies for a multi-level response.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations necessary for conducting research and working on sensitive issues with vulnerable populations were discussed at length among the researchers and appropriate approaches to the project developed for each site. Plans for discussion and revisions of these considerations and others as they emerged were established on an ongoing basis to accommodate the dynamic border situation and unforeseen incidences as they arose.

Security of those involved in this study was one of the most important and difficult aspects of this research. This project focused largely on cross border migrants, those vulnerable to migration living along the border, or those who had recently returned to their country or origin. Given the undocumented status of most of these people and unofficial means, by which they travelled and obtained employment, their vulnerability to arrest and exploitation was a constant consideration. Participation and documentation depended on the extent to which it could be done without risk to the participants. At times, this often resulted in the inability to ask certain questions. Issues of security limited the areas where the team was able to work, as the safety of the team and participants could not be ensured. In some areas, the work was stopped temporarily until the situation calmed and at one project site the work was terminated due to perceived security risks.

From the outset of the project, the **strategy for assuring confidentiality was established**. In general, each team member carefully explained the project and means established for ensuring confidentiality to the respondent before requesting his or her participation. All data was coded using numbers and descriptions, leaving out the names and personal details of the respondent. Each researcher was equipped with a secure place to keep data under lock and key and safe channels were established to transfer the materials between team members.

Addressing highly sensitive issues and vulnerable populations draws attention to the situation that may have adverse affects. HIV/AIDS and trafficking were two foreseen issues requiring a planned strategy for discussion and intervention. **HIV/AIDS** remains a sensitive issue in many of the areas of this project, but is actually one that is slowly being accepted as an issue that needs to be addressed. Therefore, HIV/AIDS was for many researchers an ‘official’ opportunity to enter the community without threatening the local authorities and leaders with abstract plans for research. Although it was an opportunity, it was also a limitation in that it identified many of the researchers with this issue and influenced the interventions. The focus on **trafficked persons and sex workers** was difficult given the stigma associated to both and the extreme vulnerability and mobility of these girls and young women. The research team often had to rely on contacts with the girl or young woman’s family or the co-operation with the brothel bosses and pimps to make contact with them. Only over time was it possible to develop activities with them based on their interests and input. **Drug related issues** emerged as a rampant and complex reality along all the border areas and required more insight than foreseen at the onset of this study.

Although all of the country teams recognised the problem of **child beggars**, only one site was able to find safe channels to reach this group given the tight control over them, high levels of fear and mistrust among them and the unwillingness by the authorities to address their presence. Child beggars are an extremely vulnerable group that will require more creative approaches and extensive advocacy efforts in order to reach them.

The **illegal status** of undocumented migrants has forced many of them to rely on extra-legal means to negotiate their travel, residence and employment. As a result, many migrants end up connected to or involved with other **illegal activities** such as: drugs, trafficking (of persons or narcotics), black market trading and/or other criminal activity. This made gathering information and implementing PAR activities among migrant children and youth particularly difficult and often resulted in an inability to work with the most vulnerable persons.

Due to the vulnerability of participants and sensitivity of the issues involved, the **project sites were closely monitored**, which was an ongoing challenge for the participatory process and even at times interfered with the ability to work at all in a specific area or with certain populations.

The permission and involvement of government officials necessary to conduct this research varied between countries and was a constant consideration. The centralised

nature of governing (particularly in China and Myanmar) with its hierarchical organisation extending from the national level all the way to the sub-village level meant that all fields of activity were under government jurisdiction. Therefore, this project had not only to be cognisant, but also accepting of, the limitations imposed by these realities. Often a great deal of time and resources in preliminary work was needed to establish trust and autonomy among both the government and community. This required the researchers to be flexible and cautious in their approach, so as not to expose or in any way jeopardise their safety or that of the participants and surrounding communities.

Suspicion and uneasiness on the part of community members themselves was necessary to acknowledge and respect. The choice of cross-border migration as an issue and cross-border migrants as a target group gave rise to suspicion and uneasiness within the community. At the very beginning, people tended to distance themselves from the researchers. Consequently, a great deal of care was taken in the choice and training of the researchers to ensure their understanding of the project objectives and approach in working with the community.

Many research sites were areas of on-going political and/or ethnic conflict. Research team members had to foresee possible tensions and discriminations with flexible plans to adapt to possible situations or responses that might occur. This made research in some areas extremely sensitive and dangerous, requiring constant concern for neutrality. It was difficult to maintain neutrality in many areas as the root causes of conflict were very complicated and were determined by ethnicity, religion and/or position in society.

3. Research Implementation Design

Given the sensitivities and numerous ethical considerations, this PAR project was undertaken in four phases, beginning with a preparation phase implemented from April to September 1999. Each of the four phases is summarised below:

Phase One: Project Preparation (April – September 1999)

In preparation for the implementation of this project, country research team meetings were held with the Regional Project Co-ordinator (RPC) to standardise the research tools, provide training in the research process and address potential obstacles, limitations and ethical considerations. The research was conducted in each country, data translated and analysed and the findings presented to all country teams and regional support staff.

Phase Two: Data Collection (October 1999 – June 2000)

The second phase was the actual implementation of the PAR. Although the research tools used during Phase One were incorporated into Phase Two, the emphasis was on developing PAR interventions. The documentation, transcription and translation of the PAR activities were a critical component of this phase. The phase concluded with a participatory review of the entire research process and

strategies were recommended for possible long-term interventions.

Phase Three: Analysis, Reporting and Consultation on Project Findings (July– December 2000)

The third phase began with a regional meeting with all country research team members and regional support staff to present the PAR interventions, preliminary findings and participatory review. The process for analysing data, writing country reports and translation was developed and implemented by each country team. This process aimed to keep the data in national languages to allow for a richer database, more in-depth analysis and to develop research skills among the field and national staff. Two country reports were prepared and translated, and then compiled into two regional reports. From these reports, SC(UK) published one report documenting the findings of the research, which is presented here, and a second report documenting the PAR process, activities and lessons learned. Drafts of these reports were presented for review to each country team to verify the findings, analysis and review the presentation of the data given the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the participants involved.

Phase Four: Dissemination of Research Findings (January –March 2001)

During the final phase of the project, the research team prepared a dissemination strategy with input from other stakeholders and donors for presenting the project findings. Once the final regional reports were completed and translated, SC(UK) disseminated the experiences and findings of the project at the local, national and regional levels to non-government organisations, governments, service providers, non-government and community-based groups and leaders, academics and others working on issues related to migration, children/youth and participatory research.

The dissemination strategies also included creative ways of bringing the findings back to the children, youth and community involved in this project. These initiatives included for example, cartoons, posters, newsletters, theatre and music in minority languages.

3.3. Research Team

This project's research team included a Regional Project Co-ordinator (RPC) and SC(UK) country teams in China, Myanmar and Thailand who worked together to facilitate a cross-border and regional approach. Each country team appointed a SC(UK) senior staff as the National Co-ordinator, one or two National Researchers (NR)⁴⁸ and between six to eight Field Researchers (FR).¹ All the FRs were selected from the communities in the identified project sites and were fluent in both the local and national languages. Full time translators were employed to work with each country team

⁴⁸ In Myanmar, the two NRs were employed as permanent SC(UK) programme staff. In China the two NRs were employed from The Yunnan Institute of Sociology and worked in collaboration with SC(UK) on this project. Thailand employed one NR from the migrant community who had previous experience in research and programme implementation.

throughout the research process to facilitate data collection, documentation and oversee (and undertake) translations.⁴⁹ As the project developed, several field sites also appointed Youth Researchers (YR) who volunteered (or worked for in-kind support) to develop the PAR components. General terms of reference were outlined for each position and adapted by each country. Although the positions and titles of team members appear rather hierarchical, the emphasis was on a team approach with all members involved in all stages of project preparation, implementation and analysis.

3.4. Research Sites and Participants

The participatory action research and pilot interventions of this study were conducted along the borders of China, Myanmar, Thailand, and among communities critically impacted by migration. The research sites were chosen in order to capture the dynamics of cross-border migration. They also are areas where SC(UK) has focused its work. The site locations represent the three distinct points along migrants' routes: (1) the communities in the migrants' country of origin, (2) cross-border towns and (3) the border areas in the country of destination. For this study, SC(UK) chose as sites the following communities in the migrants' countries of origin: Xishuangbanna Prefecture in China and the Northern Shan, Kayin and Mon States of Myanmar. SC(UK) has long established a presence in numerous border towns along the China, Myanmar and Thai borders, including interventions in Ruili and Jie Gao in China, Muse and Myawaddy in Myanmar and four border crossings between Mae Sai and Mae Hong Son, as well as Mae Sot in Thailand. It has also worked in countries of destination, largely Thailand and China. In Thailand its work has focused on migrant children and youth living along the Thai border provinces of Chiangrai, Chiangmai, Mae Hong Son and Tak.

The study's focus was on vulnerable migrant children and youth who had either migrated themselves or been impacted by the migration that surrounds.⁵⁰ No specific ages were used to define the children and youth participating in the project. Most youth groups formed in China, Myanmar and Thailand (in fact all of Southeast Asia) are inclusive of young people as well as those above the age of eighteen. In this study, youth were most often twenty-four years of age or less. An age limit was never strictly enforced, though the aim of this study was to focus on the most vulnerable and encourage the children, youth and community to define for themselves their roles and participation. Married young people were also included as youth used in all communities involved in this project.

This research also relied on key informants from the migrant's community, including not only other migrants, but also community leaders, health providers, government officials, educators and others who were in contact with or influence their lives. A variety of

⁴⁹ Given that each country team was working with several languages and the skills of documentation among team members varied, the role of a team translator overseeing the entire documentation process was invaluable.

⁵⁰ At the onset of this project, the research team assumed that the participants would be Shan, given their predominant presence along the border area. However, as the study unfolded the team learned that the Shan were among numerous ethnic populations, and not necessarily the most vulnerable.

partners were also involved in collaborating or co-ordinating the PAR. Finally, initial data collection and many PAR activities involved the broader community as is the nature of village life and at times necessary for the support and acceptance of the project.

3.5. Data Collection Tools

The qualitative research tools included in this study were: observations, in-depth interviews (IDI), focus group discussions (FGD), participatory rapid assessment (PRA) and participatory action research (PAR).⁵¹ Basic demographic information was taken for all data collected (such as the date, place of interview, characteristics of the participant(s) and research tool used) without noting identifying details (such as name, address or work place). Codes were used to refer to data collection sites and participants to avoid tracing any documentation.

Observations

Direct and participatory observations were emphasised at the beginning of the research to gather insight into the physical and social environments of children and youth in the project sites. General observation guidelines were developed to guide researchers and were adapted as the research unfolded. The guidelines included numerous observation points under the following headings: description of the physical and emotional environment, visual assessment of health situation, children and young people's daily activities and interactions, and migration specific factors. Ongoing observations were conducted throughout the study to document what was not verbalised, an important tool in working with children and young people.

In-Depth Interviews (IDI)

After building rapport with the community, the team conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDI), with children and youth, community members and key-informants. Guidelines were then established for each sub-group. The guideline categories were consistent between each country team. However, the specific breakdown of questions within each category was addressed slightly different by each team and for each sub-group as each team felt was culturally most appropriate. The main categories of the IDI guidelines were: background history, migration experiences, health problems, concerns and care-seeking behaviour, reproductive health and sexuality, HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol use, child related-issues, encounters of violence, as well as future aspirations. Researchers asked permission to record the interviews with pen and paper. Often interviews took place during two or more visits, due to the limited time of many participants and the vast and complex issues addressed.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

⁵¹ PRA and PAR are not the same thing. PRA is a tool for collecting information that is then used in the PAR process.

Focus group discussions (FGD) offered an opportunity to explore the interactions, norms and perspectives of a peer-group. Guidelines for FGD included the same issues as IDI, but focused on a discussion of the norms and values versus individual or personal experiences. FGD were held among those in a similar age group and included both mixed discussions of male and females, as well as separate FGD with each gender. FGD ranged in size from three persons to twenty with the ideal group ranging between six to eight participants.

Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA)

Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) offers a wide range of methods to enable people to express and share information, and to stimulate discussions and analysis. Most of these methods were visually based and provided children and youth with fun and easy ways to explore how they understand and view their lives and environment. Some of the PRA methods used in this project included mapping, diagrams, ranking and scoring often using matrixes or grids, time lines, drawings, games, role playing and a wide-range of other activities that are often adapted and created according to the participants' situation, resources, skills and interests. In addition, PRA offered the opportunity to introduce more active and participatory approaches to research.

*Participatory Action Research (PAR)*⁵²

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an evolving research tool that has taken on a wide spectrum of interpretation and application. In realising the limitations of this study with regards to the vulnerability of the population the team was working with and the sensitivity of the issues being addressed, a conservative approach to PAR was taken. This definition of PAR aims to have people in the community under study participate actively with the researchers throughout the research process from the initial design to the final presentation of the results and discussion of their action implications.⁵³ The underlying value of PAR, calls for people to take action themselves to improve their social and economic status and ensure their right to produce their own knowledge to guide such action.⁵⁴ This definition and underlying value of PAR, as cited above, guided this project.

Based on the information gathered during Phase One of this study, PAR activities were developed in each of the project sites. The activities were discussed, planned, implemented, documented and evaluated by the field researchers, children and/or youth participants involved. A wide-range of activities were implemented and documented in an effort to explore what the children and youth perceived as their needs, how they wanted to respond to them and to document the lessons they learned in the process. It was emphasised that there were no “failures” in this study. The motto “failing forward” was

⁵² Given the research focus of this study, the term Participatory Action Research (PAR) was selected instead of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), another more expansive participatory approach.

⁵³ Whyte, W.F. (1991). *Participatory Action Research*. London: Sage Publications.

⁵⁴ Rahman, A. (1989). *Grassroots Participation and Self-reliance – Experiences from South and Southeast Asia*. Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishers.

used to encourage the learning process and objectives of this project in understanding the concerns, realities and needs from the children and youth impacted by migration and explore with them possible interventions.

A PAR Guideline was used to support the planning, implementation, documentation and evaluation of activities undertaken. A separate report will be published from this study presenting the PAR process and activities in detail.

Participatory Review

A participatory review was conducted towards the end of the second phase. The objectives of the participatory review were to:

- Receive feedback from those involved in this project and assess their understanding of the project's aims and research tools. To solicit their input into what was most beneficial and what could be done differently to improve this type of research.
- Identify the lessons learned and assess the approach and interventions undertaken during the implementation of the current project. To use the findings to improve and recommend areas for implementing similar projects in other countries and regions in the future.
- Evaluate the activities undertaken, prioritise and develop strategies for future interventions by SCF or other organisations, together with migrant children and youth and those in their community

The review aimed to include as many of the project participants and partners as possible, emphasising input from the children and youth directly involved in the activities. The research team used creative ways of gathering input for the review that included critical thinking and problem solving exercises, group discussions and PRA activities.

The review has been documented and analysed together with all the data collected in this research study. In addition, the review was used as a process for exploring ongoing SC(UK) country programs in the project sites.

3.6. Data Analysis Strategy

Analysis of the data was done both by hand and with the computer programme Ethnograph 5, designed for coding and analysing qualitative research data. Phase One data was organised and processed by hand providing all researchers (especially those in the field) insight into organising, analysing and reporting qualitative data. This knowledge gave all team members an understanding of the research process and the necessary respect for detailed documentation. It also provided a mid-project feedback to the research as well as a means for dealing with the data before it became too

cumbersome, and it helped teams identify gaps in the data to be addressed during the second phase of the project.

Each country team was provided with a copy of Ethnograph 5 and given training in this software. The Ethnograph 5 program requires all data to be coded and a list of categories identified based on the objectives of the study, interview guidelines and issues identified during the study. Each interview and observation was documented by the researcher, translated into the national language and typed into a word processing program. The data was then divided into the identified categories and all data was entered into Ethnograph 5, noting the source of the information. This approach to organising the data provided a means for analysing each topic and returning to a particular source for more information; it also helped to prevent overlap between various categories of information.⁵⁵

3.7. Obstacles and Limitations Encountered

All country teams encountered similar obstacles and limitations. These included:

Numerous languages and dialects along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand presented a constant challenge in the implementation of this research. Even though local field researchers could each speak several minority languages, it was not possible to cover all the languages spoken in the various research sites. Therefore, some of the smaller ethnic populations were not included in the study.⁵⁶

Communication problems emerged from the language differences within each country team, as well as across borders. Difficulties in communicating technical terms or international ideas and methodologies were experienced by all researchers. Often many of the national and ethnic languages did not have clear terms for many of the issues and approaches presented in English. There were many instances of mistranslation and misunderstanding that required time and patience to resolve. Due to these language and communication problems team trainings were frequently followed-up with on site visits, activities and visual aids. This naturally slowed the project's progress.

The need to undertake several translations slowed the research documentation process. Each country team included numerous minority languages that were then translated to the national language of the country and then into English. It is inevitable that the accuracy of the data suffered with each translation regardless of how carefully the translations were undertaken. Working in several languages required constant attention to translations, as well as the monitoring of how they were interpreted.

⁵⁵ In the Ethnograph 5 programme, the finding categories are identified, data is entered and the findings are broken down by categories and referenced by interview codes automatically. During Phase One of this study, this process was done by hand and preparations made for using Ethnograph 5 during Phase Two.

⁵⁶ In some instances translators were used in the interviews or discussions, which slowed down the exchanges and limited the ease and flow of the exchange.

Many of the local field researchers from within the migrant communities had limited literacy skills in the national language of the country they were working. This clearly limited their understanding of and input into the research process, though concerted efforts were made to accommodate the many levels of language ability among the research team.

Ethnic and cultural differences were ever present with attention and time needed to accommodate and balance the various perspectives. Some sites faced religious prejudices that had to be acknowledged with attention paid to balancing the various beliefs. Regardless, there was often suspicion and feelings of discrimination that impacted on participation and understandings necessary to conduct this research.

Co-ordination within the team was difficult due to the distances of the field sites and lack of communication channels with little or no assurance of confidentiality. The monthly meeting and site visits were the primary form of communication often causing delays and difficulties in addressing problems as they arose.

The migrants were extremely mobile and often relocated depending on their sense of personal security and job opportunities. Although, once in a given job or location migrants usually did not move around, but were often hidden and isolated from the larger community.

Young people were the hardest to reach as most of them had migrated beyond the border further into the country of destination. They often resided at their place of work, were closely watched by their employer and feared venturing out. There was an absence of youth reported in the border communities in all three countries making it difficult to implement PAR activities.

There was a lack of statistical information regarding migrant populations (especially cross-border) and, though the needs were great and visible along the entire border, quantifying the problems remained a barrier to analysis.

The people in the community had little or no free time for interviews or activities as they usually worked from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m., with no days off unless granted special permission from their employer. The only time the researchers could meet with the community members was from 9-11 p.m. Even in communities of self-employed farmers, most of the youth and adults were very busy, often working in fields far from their residence or engaged in trade that required them to travel for extended periods of time.

Children and youth had a lot of household responsibilities both working within the home and earning an income. Often activities that took children and youth away from their tasks resulted in a loss of income and hardships for the family. Thus, it was difficult (and in some instances impossible) to negotiate the participation of children and youth in this project.

Girls and young women were found with more family responsibilities, especially those who were married, making it increasingly more difficult to involve them in the project. In addition, girls and young women faced more restrictions, such as participating in events in the evening or outside the village.

The country teams found it difficult to make the transition from data collection in Phase One to implementing PAR activities in Phase Two. It generally took each team about three months to prepare their approach, create the opportunities for participation and develop interventions at the project sites.

Limited partners in the field sites made it difficult in many instances to develop trust and collaboration among project participants. It often took months and even years at some of the sites where SC(UK) has been working to develop the community's trust and collaboration. In addition, time was needed to assess potential partners, their relationship with the community and other allegiances.

There were also many delays that were both seasonal and unpredictable. Holidays (such as Shan New Year, Chinese New Year and Water Festivals which are celebrated in all three countries), crackdowns and deportations of undocumented migrants, civil unrest and floods temporarily interrupted the project.

Overall, members of the research team, many of whom were migrants themselves, had limited qualitative research experience. There was a need to follow the documentation and translation processes giving frequent feedback and follow-up training. The teams also had limited exposure to and experience in qualitative data analysis and report writing. The effort to involve the research team in the data analysis and report writing process allowed for more input and improved capacity for engaging all members of the team in the entire research process. However, this required more time and a learning curve that inevitably had some shortcomings and delays in its implementation.

This research was undertaken during 1999-2000 and can only provide a snapshot of the realities at this point in time. It is necessary to understand that ever-fluctuating situations based on political and economic dynamics within and between each country will continue to have a direct impact on these border communities.

4. Research Findings

Based on the findings of this project the following critical issues were identified:

4.1. The Migrants

If you point your finger anywhere in Kayin State, you can find migrants who work in Thailand everywhere. At least one member in a household migrates to Thailand. Before 1988 going to Thailand was not popular. People felt ashamed to

*go up the hill.*⁵⁷ *Now all the people want to go there. We government servants also want to go to Thailand. If I cannot earn enough money here for my family, I am ready to go.*

A 40 year-old male Indian in Kayin State near the Thai border

The majority of the cross-border migrants were young, came from rural areas and had little or no formal education. The majority of the migrants along the Thai-Myanmar border were from minority populations.

Most of the Burmese migrant workers from Burma come from the rural areas. Their lives are dependent on agriculture. The ethnic minority people have hardly had any formal education. Some do not even study in the government schools. Some of them can't even speak Burmese. Men can speak and read the language from the temple or receive non-formal education in the community. So, most of the ethnic people are not literate in any language. And very few of them can communicate in Bamar language. So the services and information hardly ever reach these groups of people.

A 30 year-old Shan female from Eastern Shan State, currently a sex worker along the Thai border

Apart from the Shans, there are people from many different ethnic groups who have moved to Thailand. Most of them are from China and other places in Shan State.

A focus group discussion among male and female youth from Kachin State living along the Thai border

Generally people who are poorly educated and who do not have skills tend to migrate more than the more educated and those with some professional skills. Sometimes younger children also leave their villages to join their older siblings or parents in Thailand.

A village leader from Mon State near the Thai border

It was generally agreed along the entire border that it was easiest for girls and young women to find jobs.

Although both men and women migrate, jobs are easier for women, particularly girls and young women, as they are usually more compliant.

A key informant based in Mon State near the Thai border

When I lived along the border I saw a lot of girls from Shan State coming to work in Thailand. There were lots of people from Thailand who brought vans to pick up the workers from the Myanmar side of the border. There were several vans every day. The drivers explained that these girls were being taken to work in southern Thailand. I saw lots of young girls who were almost all under twenty years old in these vans. There were no old people or males going along.

A 25 year-old Shan male teacher from Shan State living along the Thai border

⁵⁷ As they have to pass Dawna mountain ranges to go to Thailand, local people like to refer to the trip as "going up the hill."

Most children and youth are poorly educated. This puts them at a disadvantage in the Chinese labour market. This problem is even more acute among girls and young women, because they cannot compete with men in performing hard physical labour. Finally, most of the people are from minority populations and do not speak Chinese well. It is easier to cross the border to find work than to migrate to cities and towns in China.

A focus group discussion with youth in Xishuangbanna Prefecture of China

Along all the borders young people began migrating on their own at about the age of thirteen. Though some children under the age of thirteen also migrate on their own, most were accompanied by their parents or relatives. Young people were most likely to cross borders and migrate further into the country of destination in order to support their family from the jobs they were able to find.

Young people here have a low level of education. They go to school, but don't learn anything. There aren't many teachers in schools anymore. The teachers themselves go to Thailand. When the young people come of age, they all leave. When they are about thirteen years of age they 'go up the hill.' When they think they are old enough to work, they go.

A focus group discussion with young people 16-19 years old in Kayin State

Undocumented migrants workers from Myanmar working in factories in Mae Sot were deported following police raids. Thousands of young people, mostly girls and young women as young as thirteen years old, could be observed in the streets, food shops and monasteries in Myawaddy. Interviews with these migrants indicate that they originated not only from Mon and Kayin State, but from all over the country.

A participatory observation made in Kayin State near the Thai border

I am a Shan woman who moved to Thailand from Shan State over four months ago. I have five children who went to work in Bangkok and send money to the family. There is still one child who is very young. So, I can't work. I just have to rent another's house and wait for the money from my children.

A married Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

There are not many teenagers in the village, because most of the youth go to find work in town or in other provinces. Only about thirty elderly are left in the village.

A participatory observation made in a migrant village along the Thai border with Myanmar

I went with my mother to Thailand when I was thirteen, because things were hard at home, there was no money. I couldn't help around the house very much at that age any way, so mother brought me to Thailand to work.

A 17 year-old Palaung female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I stopped going to school after third grade. School was too far, ten kilometres away was too far for a girl to walk, and my parents were talking about building a house. There was no money to build the house, so the only thing to do was have me go and make money in Thailand. A 19 year-old Palaung female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I am a Lahu woman with a baby and recently divorced. Now I am living with my parents. I am 17 years old and can speak Shan and Kachin well. I used to work in a restaurant in Chiangmai for two or three years. My friends who are working there are young boys and girls from fourteen to fifteen years old.

A 17 year-old Lahu farmer along the Thai-Myanmar border

We all come from Burma. We have no house to stay or place to settle. At the border, most of us are young children and teenagers.

A young Kachin farmer along the Thai-Myanmar border

Most of the migrants reported crossing borders without any documentation or on day passes that they overstay. In order to receive a day pass or other temporary permits, migrants must offer their identification documents in exchange, often unable to get their documents back once the permits have expired. The majority of young persons have not yet been eligible for national identification documents and thus are unable to obtain legal travel permits. Consequently, a disproportionate number of children and young persons cross borders without documentation and often times face problems in proving their identity upon return home. Lack of documentation was noted as one of the main factors in determining vulnerability to exploitation, abuse and trafficking.

4.2. Reasons for Migrating

The decision to migrate is complex and many reasons given that overlap and were inter-linked. The participants in this study did not give one reason exclusively, but rather explanations that included economic survival, war, refuge, government policies, personal problems and envisioned opportunities abroad. The following interview excerpts summarise the responses given for why migrants have crossed borders into neighbouring countries.

Some people go across to Thailand because there are too many taxes to pay. Some go because they envy those who have come back. Some have to pay 1,000 kyat⁵⁸ to avoid forced conscription as a porter. They are leaving at the rate of one person per household all around Hpa-An.

A 19 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

⁵⁸ The official exchange rate is US\$1 to 6.7 kyat. However, on the black market approximately 380 kyat equalled US\$1 at the time of this study.

Actually, I didn't want to come to Thailand. In Shan State, I have my own land and it is very good to stay. But the situation forced us to come. I feel I have no freedom.

A Shan male from Shan State
married with two children working on an orange plantation along the Thai border

The majority of migrants would first explain their need to move to find work for their daily survival. As noted earlier, most migrants were farmers, and undocumented migration across borders has become a substantial source of income and a means of dealing with poverty.

The poor households need money for capital investment. They can earn their living only by investing their capital in an income-earning activity. Those who have relatives in other villages borrow money from them and grow flowers as a business activity. Those who don't have relatives work as daily wage labourers in their gardens for 100 or 200 kyat.

A community elder in
a Mon village

In observing a remote Akha village in Xishuangbanna, researchers found no means of generating a monetary income. Although, Xishuangbanna is a grain-producing region, this village is located in a remote area, lacking sufficient transport infrastructure to bring the grain and livestock to the markets to sell.

An observation in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I came to China, even though I didn't want to leave my parents. But, I am poor and people look down on me. People look down on you if you have no money and respect you if you do. So, I left my parents behind and went to China to make money. As soon as I have made some money I will go back to my parents. I miss my mother a lot.

A Bamar sex worker along the China-Myanmar border

The living standard of the people along the borders is poorer and poorer. People are doing more bad things, such as smuggling drugs and prostitution, even though they are very educated, they will work as a prostitute to earn a living.

A focus group discussion with Kachin youth along the Thai border with Myanmar

The water is not sufficient in our village and sometimes we could not have a bath for three or four days. I am not happy here and would like to move to another place or to the city.

A 14 year-old Kachin girl along the Thai border with Myanmar

I came here because there is not enough food in our house for everybody. After my father passed away, all the responsibilities for taking care of my mother and two younger sisters fell on me. Because I could not earn enough money for us all, I came to work in Thailand.

An 18 year-old Kayin vendor along the Thai border with Myanmar

In addition, farmers in many areas face a constant challenge to overcome droughts and floods that are further exacerbated by the lack of irrigation systems and the construction of dams.

The past few years, farmers risk having their land confiscated if they do not cultivate their own crops.

A government officer in Kayin State near the Thai border

Our land used to be very fertile. Water flowed from the river. The ground was always wet – we even had to pull our feet out from the ground. Since the dam was built the land turned so hard even a helicopter could land on the field now. How can we grow anything on this hard land?

A 40 year-old female
from Central Myanmar along the China-Myanmar border with four children

For the past three years, floods have destroyed the paddy fields. Farmers cry and at last they go to work in Thailand. That is the solution.

A 60 year-old government employee in Kayin State near the Thai border

Farmers consistently found themselves unable to survive and/or in debt and turned to odd jobs and migration as a way to repay and earn money to continue farming. It has become increasingly difficult to earn a livelihood through the traditional occupation of farming. Migration, particularly among young people, has become the way of coping for many. Odd jobs at home between planting seasons include weaving, collecting leaves, toddy and other juices and baking charcoal, but these profits do not compare to the opportunities available to migrants.

All the girls come here to make money to support a family. They all have at least three or four people to support. We've all got mouths to feed and families to worry about. We're very concerned about changes in the cost of living in Burma. I mail money back to my mother every year, which, together with the money my mother makes from selling food, is just enough for the family to get by on. [A second young woman commented:] I estimate I mail money back home very month, which is probably enough for my family to buy rice. ...Most girls are careful about how they spend their money. They save some of their earnings each month, but once you deduct the money sent home, there is little left to spend on themselves.

Two Burmese masseurs ages
19 and 24 working in a border town in China

I remember I was a little more than ten years old and my little brother and sister were so small. None of us could help our parents much. In fact, we were a burden to our parents, who had to pay our tuition. The border regions have not seen much development. We lived in a thatch house without even the means to patch our clothes. We didn't have much of an income, just the crops, but when it wasn't harvest season there was no money at all. So, I had to go to find work outside.

A 26 year-old Shan returnee from Thailand living in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Inflation and taxation has burdened many people along the border, particularly in Myanmar. Inflation has soared in all three countries with income, especially earned from farming, unable to keep pace with the increased cost of living.

Before I left the entire family had to live on 600 yuan a month.⁵⁹ This was barely enough to keep us fed. We didn't have any surplus.

A young Shan male returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

When we lived outside of Yangon, we worked the whole day and men got very little pay and women received only half of men. We could not afford to buy rice with our daily income. Therefore, my wife and I moved to the China-Myanmar border.

A 26 year-old Kayin-Bamar male working as a loading dock labourer along the China-Myanmar border

In my hometown in central Myanmar, girls and boys have to work the whole day in the fields. In my wife's village, a boy working on a farm gets so little even if he works the whole day. A girl gets only half of what the boys make. After working the whole day you don't even get enough to buy one pyi [local measurement equivalent to eight cans of rice] of rice. That's why we migrated to the China-Myanmar border.

Three 18 to 26 year-old Kayin and Bamar males working as loading dock labourers at the China-Myanmar border

As government servants, we used to get a very low monthly salary. Before, it was more than enough. Now because of financial difficulties, people have to go and work in Thailand. When people come back, they are decked with gold and silver. Houses turn from thatch to wood, and eventually there's a corrugated iron roof. This inspires others, so they all try to go.

A 40 year-old government employee in Kayin State near the Thai border

My government salary is not enough to support my wife and children. How can I live on so little? I have been a soldier for thirteen years and I am still so poor, so how can you expect me not to cross the border? It is the only way I can survive. I neither know nor care about politics. I just want to survive.

A middle-aged male practising medicine along the China-Myanmar border

Two friends of mine, both graduates, went up the hill [to Thailand]. Now they have good jobs. My friend who is a teacher has also gone. She wrote a letter to me saying, "There's such a big difference between our salary here and yours over there, even a loud shout couldn't be heard across such a big gap! You are not brave enough to come here and that is your loss."

A 30 year-old teacher working in a village in Kayin State near the Thai border

People go to Thailand because they face a lot of troubles here. The government tells us that there must be computers in the high school in our town, so each household has to pay a certain amount. Some cannot pay, as it is difficult enough

⁵⁹ At the time of this study, approximately 8 yuan equalled US\$1.

trying to find money for meals. As this is a compulsory contribution, they've been told that they have to pay, but they can pay in instalments. They are trying to find ways and means of earning money.

A 45 year-old Bamar health care worker in a Mon village near the Thai border

The ongoing civil war along Myanmar's borders and political opposition has been disruptive and life threatening. Many people explained how the conflicts have affected their lives and resulted in their decision to migrate across the border.

It is quite long and difficult to explain all the reasons why I had to move to Thailand. I may never finish. There has been a lot of fighting. The persons who get hurt and die are villagers. Furthermore, I was forced to be a porter for the military and afraid I would not see my family again.

A young Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

In summer, young people return from school where they stay as boarding students in cities. One young person is recruited from every family. When they tried to recruit me, I told them the names of my brothers who are already working in their army. Therefore they did not recruit me.

A 20 year-old Kachin female along the Myanmar-China border

For me, I was a porter for the Burmese military for 28 days. Then I was at great risk and didn't know when they would let me return home. This situation has happened to so many Shan people. As long as the Shan army is still fighting with them, they will look for porters.

A 35 year-old Shan male working along the Thai border with Myanmar

One of my brothers was arrested during the events in 1988 and our family was punished. My mother is selling things on the Thai border town. When she tried to return home our relatives do not want to give her places to stay. All the relatives are afraid of being punished if they give her a place to stay.

A 26 year-old Bamar female factory worker from Kayin State in Thailand

Policies of resettlement and relocation have been implemented in response to the ongoing political conflict in Myanmar and efforts to develop the country. Since 1988, these policies have affected hundreds of thousands of people, with urban populations resettled into outlying areas of the cities and ethnic minorities relocated from rural villages to live along main roads and towns in an effort to cut off any possible support for opposition factions along the border areas. These policies not only resulted in people losing their homes with little or no compensation, but also their inability to farm their land or maintain their jobs.

Our village was relocated in 1992. We left our farm and tea plantations and moved to this place near the road side. We had so many difficulties in this place. They did not allow us to go back to our old village to work on our farm. They did not

give us any land to cultivate. A 25 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State living in China

I can speak and read only a little bit of Shan language. I have no work even though I have been staying in Thailand for four years. The reason why I left Shan State was because I had to leave my home and stay in another township. I was not allowed to work on my farm. After we left, some houses were burned. Everyone in the village did not know what to do and there was no place for them to stay in town, no land to farm except for those who have relatives. So, I decided to come to Thailand. A Shan male youth living along the Thai border with Myanmar

There have been resettlement programmes implemented in Kayin State. Groups of people were relocated from their original homes and their land was nationalised.

A participatory observation in Kayin State near the Thai border

Although, cease-fire agreements have been signed with many opposition groups, there still remains a great deal of tension and insecurity, as the agreements do not address political solutions. In addition, there remains harassment and detention of anyone who challenges the present government of Myanmar resulting in many fleeing across the borders to seek asylum.

I moved to a China border town in 1988. I want to go back to Myanmar but I can't. A 45 year-old Bamar businessman living in China

I have been here in Thailand more than ten years. I decided to come because of the situation in our country. Now, I miss my hometown, however I can't go back. Last year, I visited my mother one time, but couldn't stay there for too long. So, I had to hurry back to Thailand and the way to Thailand was not safe. Now, I can't even think about going back again.

A 46 year-old male driver in Thailand previously a farmer in Kayin State

For several others, migration was a means of dealing with personal or family problems.

I'd been considering it for a long time, because our family's poor and my parents kept trying to force me to marry. I couldn't bear to marry a guy I didn't like, so I decided to leave home.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

My foster mother died and then my foster father completely changed. He treated me worse and worse. I had to go out and make money, find work and do everything at home. I had to give all my money to my foster father and he was never satisfied and telling me to find more and more money for him so he could remarry. Finally, it got so I couldn't stand it anymore and wanted to leave. Then, I met people who tricked me.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

My parents died when I was twelve. I was a maid for two years. By the time I was fifteen I had no means to support myself so I married a farmer. My husband often got drunk and beat me. Later on I went to my uncle for support. My elder sister was in a China border town working in this job and had given birth to a child. She had me come up to take care of it. Eventually, I wound up working in this profession. A 23 year-old Burmese sex worker in a border town in China

My husband drinks and is addicted to opium. The income is not enough to feed our family. I finally decided to come and look for a job along the Thai-Burma border. I suffered a lot to earn some money for my children. I do not know what to do, so I decided to leave my husband and look for a job. I had to leave my eldest child who is eight years old with my husband. I took the other younger children with me and came to the Thai-Myanmar border. Now I found out I am six months pregnant as well. A married Shan female from Shan State with three children living along the Thai border

One woman's father died when she was still very young, so she had to take care of the family at an early age. She went to work in Thailand for five years when she was fifteen in order to earn money for her two younger brothers' education. Another woman, who had gone when she was sixteen, said she had a younger brother and younger sister. There were too many people in the family and not enough income, so she went to work in Thailand in order to reduce her mother's burden. A married woman said that her husband had gone there to earn money but he didn't know how to save money so she went there to work herself. Among all those present, the "choice" of migration was made for the child/youth by family circumstances or sudden events within the family.

A team participatory observation in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Three years ago we sold Thai lottery tickets in Myanmar and took commission. When we couldn't give the money the gamblers won, so we ran to Thailand. Now we have returned and settled all the debts. So we are thinking of going again.

A 24 year-old returnee in Kayin State

When I was fourteen, my stepfather wanted to rape me, so I ran away. I met a Shan from Lashio at the train station who brought me to a China border town and then sold me to someone inside China for more than 10,000 yuan straight away.

A Bamar female just after her return to Myanmar from China

When I was ten my parents fought with each other and my mother left with my younger brother. I stayed with my father, but there was not enough money. So, I left for Thailand.

A 14 year-old Mon female without work along the Thai border with Myanmar

I came to Thailand when I was eleven years old. I came with my aunt and other relatives. I don't want to go back anymore. I just move and move and it is very difficult. A young girl along the Thai border with Myanmar

Finally, migrants also explained that migrating offered opportunities for them or their family that they could not find in their country.

I'm unsatisfied with conditions here in my village, I'd like to go out and see what I can do in the world outside.

A 17 year-old Palaung male living along the border in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

At fourteen and sixteen, my younger brothers were too young to do the heavy work around the house. Since they've nothing to do here but hang around the house, it's just as well that they go out and see the world, as long as they're able to feed themselves and not ask for money from home.

A 25 year-old Palaung male returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

When I pass the tenth standard exam, I will do business. I will buy things in Thailand and sell them back in Myanmar. A 17 year-old student in Kayin State

I feel torn between wanting to go and not wanting to go. If I can't have a good job here, I want to go.

A 27 year-old Kayin male in Kayin State near the Thai border

I came to Thailand to cure my TB. There was no place where I could get help, so I brought my whole family to Thailand to seek treatment. Now, my health is better than before.

A 41 year-old Shan male living along the Thai border with Myanmar.

I left my village in Central Myanmar and moved to the China-Myanmar border with my whole family. I have three children. The eldest one is ten years old. They could not continue their education and so I had to move.

A 50 year-old Bamar male vendor along the China-Myanmar border

If things get difficult here, I'll go to Thailand too. Formal education is of no use. If you can speak Thai, you're considered a master. Once in Thailand, no matter how skilled or educated you are you have to regard the person who arrived earlier as your 'master.'

A focus group discussion with young people 16-19 years old in Kayin State near the Thai border

Those who come back say, if you work for one year here you can't even save enough to build a bamboo hut, whereas, if you work in Thailand for one year, it is possible to build a proper house. Look at that house [he points to a brick house with a zinc roof]. I don't know what job they did in Thailand, but they were able to build a proper house. The owner of that house went to Thailand for five years. Some people come back for good once they have saved enough.

A 45 year-old male health worker in Mon State near the Thai border

Many parents prefer their children to go and work across the border seeing it as an opportunity to improve their situation and get more life experience and training. Those who migrated tried to save the money they earned to support their families. They often sent money through brokers or others who were going back. Though parents worried about the working conditions their children might have to face, they felt the benefits outweighed the risks and hoped the migrant would be lucky to find a good job.

We lived on the money my daughter sent us. Especially after seeing her again, I don't want her to go and work in another country, but the work here doesn't bring enough for even one person's food. That's why people have to go there.

A father of an 18 year-old female returnee from a village Mon State

I think going out all by yourself is the behaviour of a brave woman with powers of endurance. She knows the difficulties her family faces and she is willing to go out there, determined and summoning up all her strength and courage.

A 24 year-old Palaung male returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

4.3. Channels of Migration

Migrants travelled a number of routes that changed frequently according to the political and economic situations. Migrants crossed the borders through official border crossings and others unofficially through jungles, mountain passes or rivers. The vast majority crossed without documentation and even those with travel permits, often overstayed beyond the expiration or did not abide by the restrictions placed on their visit ultimately identifying them as illegal immigrants.

When we went to Thailand, the brokers didn't dare take the main road. It was exhausting. We walked up and down mountains for two days. Along the way, we came upon Burmese local militias fighting each other and had to avoid them, while continuing along our way. It was really dangerous and terrifying. Then we reached Kengtung. It was 4 p.m. by the time we reached the town itself. We couldn't enter until 8 p.m. So, first we hid out in a village nearby, in the house of one of the people who tricked us. We stayed in town one night, then at 4 a.m. we went to Mae Sai by motorcycle. We had to stay in Mae Sai for four or five days before they could find a vehicle to transport us to Bangkok.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Mae Sot route is mostly used to go to Thailand. Three Pagoda Pass is also a popular route. There are many illegal routes. However, as much the authorities try to block us, we can go. The stream (a shallow part of Thaungrin River) is very narrow.

A 29 year-old male returnee in Kayin State near the Thai border

It's easy to get to the Myanmar border from China, but in Myanmar the customs officials are strict. In Kengtung they check all your bags and charge 30 yuan for

100 yuan of goods. They also check to see if you have a Myanmar ID card and a Resident Permit. If you don't have one you have to pay for one. But if you've got a military pass they just wave you through. There are three kinds of soldiers at the borders Wa, Myanmar and Thai. It's really chaotic over there. There is also fighting every year, but I don't understand the problem. I don't want to go back to Thailand. There's too much disease over there and they check your ID card too strictly.

A 41 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

We can't afford passenger buses because we move with our families. So, we spent a few hundred kyat to get a lift on long haul trucks. We did not come straight to the China-Myanmar border. We stopped a few times on the way, working odd jobs like road construction to get enough money for the rest of the trip. It took us a few weeks to get to China.

A 17 year-old migrant worker from Central Myanmar in China

Typically those wanting to migrate, especially across the border, sought out someone who had been there before and could arrange the travel and jobs upon arrival. The majority travelled with a friend, relative or broker who would make all the necessary arrangements that often included a job on the other side.

My cousin was twenty years old when she was living with us. A Bamar girl from a beauty parlour along the China-Myanmar border came to my house and discussed with my cousin and her friend from this village, and the next day they left for China. Last month they came to visit and said that they were working in a massage and beauty parlour. When they went back their girl friends from the village accompanied them to China, even though their parents did not approve.

A 20 year-old Kachin student from the China-Myanmar border township

First, I came to the China side of the Myanmar border together with my daughter. We went there to find work trading when my husband passed away. However, my daughter was sold to a brothel. Therefore I lived with my daughter at the brothel and did domestic work for them. When she got married, I went back to Yangon. Then, I collected some girls who were sex workers there and brought them to the China border town to work. Because of my own feelings, I treated these girls very well.

A 50 year-old Bamar female in a China border town

Normally young people in our village leave at the age of fourteen or fifteen. Those who have elder brothers or sisters there, go when they're nine or ten. Their elder brothers and sisters come back and collect them. This trend has taken place for the past five or six years.

A 34 year-old youth leader in a Kayin village in Myanmar

I am about to leave for Bangkok in a few days. My elder sisters are already working there. My mother will accompany me as far as the border.

A 13 year-old girl selling flowers in Kayin State

We went in a group of twenty women. There was only one man, and he was my husband. The broker⁶⁰ was a woman who brought us to Thailand and introduced us to another group of brokers. They looked for jobs for us. We had to pay two ticals of gold each.⁶¹ A 26 year-old Kayin female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

The broker who took me wasn't Burmese. He was from Bangkok. He found a job for me and didn't charge me anything for food. He received 10,000 baht from the employer. My job was to dig and carry sand. I was paid 3,500 baht.⁶²

A 30 year-old Kayin returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

Some Shan migrant girls from Mae Hong Son usually go to work as housemaids in Bangkok. If they go by themselves they will be cheated. Some go there through contacts of Thai people from here and usually get good jobs. A 38 year-old Chinese-Shan female from Northern Shan State working as a shop owner in a Thai border town

The arrangements with friends, relatives and brokers were often unclear and left many, especially girls and young women, vulnerable to deception, coercion and debt-bondage.

Four years ago, a woman recruited seven girls to work in China, including me. All were from my hometown near Yangon. She brought us directly to the China-Myanmar border from Yangon and she sold us to a brothel in a China border town. We did not know how much she got from that brothel. Now, I do not have an identity card - that woman took it. I am scared to go back without an ID card. A 22 year-old Bamar female drug dealer and sex worker in a China border town.

I came here with my neighbour. She asked me to accompany her and said she would arrange for me to work at a restaurant in China. When we arrived at the China side of the border, she kept all my documents and sold me to a brothel for 12,000 kyat. A 20 year-old Bamar sex worker in a China border town

Some pimps and brothel owners sell Burmese girls to places in inland China for around 200,000 kyat. I don't know why people from inland areas are interested. But, some girls especially in need of money are willing to sell themselves to people inside China, hoping to get a share of the money from the sale. How could they expect a share? It's all a trick on the part of the brothel owner. They can't file a complaint because they are living in someone else's country. Some people don't understand the real situation and get themselves sold that way.

A Bamar female sex worker in a China border town

⁶⁰ The word for broker in the Myanmar language is “carry” and refers to the person who brings one to the border and typically finds them a job on the other side.

⁶¹ One tical of gold is approximately 5,000 baht or US\$130.

⁶² At the time of this study, approximately 40 baht equalled US\$1.

The couple who tricked us into going to another country first brought us to Burma. We only had 100 yuan between the three of us and that was tricked out of us at the bus station by the couple who said we didn't need Chinese money here and that they'd pay for our transportation.

A 21 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

What we had to go through during our journey is beyond what other people can even imagine. It was worse than all the hardship they'll ever experience in their whole lives. We waited at home for a few days while the person arranged everything for us to travel. Then, he came to get us. We didn't have much money on us at the time and no identification. We left quite publicly, collected our things, and told our families we were going to sell rice noodles. Our families had no idea our real situation until we were already there. As we approached the China-Myanmar border the brokers told us the bus fares had gone up and they couldn't get tickets. Then they had us go by foot across mountainous land, telling us to proceed quietly whenever we passed houses. We really believed it was all because they couldn't get bus tickets! Before we knew it, we'd been led past Kengtung all the way to Taichelek and they were trying to trick us into going further. One girl was smart enough to think of resisting, but by then it was too late. They just beat her up and raped her. I saw it with my own eyes, but could only stand there and cry. They spared me because someone said I was married and not worth having. So, they just cussed and beat me. We had to walk barefoot all the way. But the time we reached Mae Sai, the soles of our feet were worn bare. When we got there we were picked up by a boss, led somewhere and forced to do it [sex work].

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Aside from us three girls, there were two Burmese bosses with us. I don't remember how many days it took us to get to Taichilek because we didn't know where we were; we followed the bosses down back lanes, sometimes on foot, sometimes by vehicle. They beat us and cussed us all the way. We arrived at Mae Sai and stayed there for two days, before going on to Chiangrai. Then two days later, we went from there to Bangkok by plane.

21 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

The brokerage fee was a huge amount. In Myanmar currency, it cost about 40,000-50,000 kyat. Those who took us across were Thai police.

A 21 year-old Kayin female domestic worker in Bangkok

Most of the workers have to rely on job brokers after crossing the border and they have no choice for their work. They don't know what they will do or the conditions of their work. The migrants do not have enough information and in addition they are illegal and easily forced to work against their will. For example, some were lured to be sex workers or exploited by the brokers paying more money than they should. Human trafficking happens to many people, men, women, old and young and even refugees. People in Burma can contact a broker in front of his own

home.

A team participatory observation with migrants at the Thai-Myanmar border checkpoint

I came into Thailand from Mae Sai, Chiangrai. When I was staying in Mae Sai, the agent said that he was going to send me to a factory, but when I arrived there, it was not a factory, but a karaoke club. At first I did not know because it was late. At that time I didn't know what to do and I did not have even bus fare. After that I was brought to the prison for some time. Many of us were cheated like this and the ones who persuaded us did not come along because they were the brokers and paid by the owner of the karaoke club. Once they were paid they disappeared. A young Shan female from Shan State working in Thailand

My wife, the bouncer and people working under me will all go down to Burma and bring up girls. They give the girl's family 10,000 or 5,000 kyat, which the girl will work to pay back. Some are bought up here and sold. The going rate used to be 15,000 to 20,000 kyat, now it is 20,000-25,000 kyat.

A middle-aged Burmese brothel owner in a China border town

A few migrants told of migrating across the border on their own, often at great risk and uncertainty.

When I went for the second time, I drifted around in Myawaddy looking for a contact for about two weeks. Finally, I decided to act independently and left for the border. At Mae Sot, I got arrested. I was jailed for one month. After my release, I came back because I had no money left.

A 31 year-old male Bamar villager in Mon State near the Thai border

There were many other obstacles and fears that migrants faced as they traveled and sought work across borders. These included fear of military conflict, harassment, extortion, arrest, false promises and the fear of the travel itself that often involved various forms of smuggling strategies.

I just moved here only one year ago. I came to the Thai border at Mae Sai in Chiangrai Province. It was very difficult to travel because the political situation was bad as well as the transportation.

A 41 year-old Kachin female who travelled from Kachin State to Thailand

An aunty [older female friend] arranged things and took us with her. My family knew the aunty, so they let me go with her. When I first went, I didn't know a word of Thai. Thai police arrested us on the way. They took us to a lock up. We didn't see her anywhere when we got arrested.

A 23 year-old Kayin male returnee to Kayin State near the Thai border

I was contacted by a man who used to come and stay in our house. There were altogether nineteen of us. We used the jungle path. It took fourteen days. From the jungle path, we took a bus all the way to Bangkok. We had to give 6,000 baht. But

only two girls, the broker and I reached Bangkok and the rest were arrested on the way. A 25 year-old male returnee in Kayin State near the Thai border

I went to Bangkok in a car that carried corn. I was covered with corn and only my nose was left uncovered to allow me to breathe. Now, the Thai police know the trick well. The police searched among the corn and cabbage baskets with sharp iron sticks. At this gate there's a man from Myanmar. The Thai police hired him. He wears a Thai police uniform. The Thai police don't know the nature of Myanmar well, but the Bamar man knows us very well. He is an expert at searching for people like us. He takes money from people in cars and he never makes a mistake.

A 28 year-old trishaw male who returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

I went to Mae Sot on my own. When I reached there, I went with my contact. I had to give 4,500 baht (35,000 kyat). We were sent in a patrol car. We all had to sit in the boxed car. There was a hole in front and at the back of the car. We breathed in turns. There were about thirty-seven people in the car. They closed the holes at the checkpoints and opened them after passing them. Some girls fainted. We sat on cardboard and it became wet. At that time, a Kayin man wanted to smoke. He had to control himself because it was dangerous. Some were taken in cars that carry cucumbers and radish. First, people got inside and then had cucumbers and radishes cover them. At the checkpoint, police used sharp sticks to search for contraband and some got injured. Actually police didn't know that people were sitting inside.

A 21year-old male returnee from Thailand in Kayin State

We were sent by Thai police to the house of a Thai woman where we worked sewing. After sleeping there a night, we were sent to a food shop. They owners said that they had to give the Thai police 800 baht for each of us.

A 23 year-old female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

Travel to and across the China-Myanmar and Myanmar-Thai borders is subject to change without notice, impacting the mobility and lives of thousands. Participatory observations at the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border are typical of events reported all along the border over the past ten years (since the borders were first opened).

Within forty minutes, we saw no less than ten pick-up trucks, each carrying about sixty passengers, women in the seats and men on the roof. We saw many young girls in their teens among the passengers. There were also more than ten glass-windowed buses going to Myawaddy. We had seen two pick-up trucks collecting passengers all for Myawaddy. Some passengers explained they were going to live in Thailand and others were going to collect money from their children in Thailand. A participatory observation in Kayin State along the bus route from the Thai border

There is less traffic at present, as they don't allow us to carry any goods or travel across the border. Trading is prohibited right now. Nothing is allowed. I don't know why. No goods, no passengers, the situation isn't very good.

A 23 year-old male living along the Thai-Myanmar border

At times the political and economic changes have also resulted in mass round-ups of migrants without documentation and subsequent arrest, detention and/or deportation. Many of these efforts instead of curtailing cross-border migration seem only to push it further underground and put the migrants in increasingly vulnerable situations of exploitation and abuse.

4.4. Occupations

Generally, migrants left their homes not knowing for certain what kind of job they would actually find abroad. Even when they thought they knew they often found it was not what they expected.

I went to Mae Sot illegally. I had to pay 4,000 kyat to the broker. The prospective bosses came to inspect us. The head broker allowed them to draw lots. Some of the younger girls were taken away by the bosses. Older women like me were not in demand. In the end, I was sent to a house with lots of children. The boss gave me 2,000 baht as salary. I had to do all the housework. It was exhausting.

A 42 year-old Bamar female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

I was the youngest in my family. One of my friends persuaded me to work at a restaurant. She sent me to a guesthouse and said that she would come back. The next day, I asked the Chinese owner of the guesthouse about her. The owner said that she had sold me to this guesthouse for 3,000 yuan. My first customer was a Chinese man. We lived two girls in one room. My roommate and I always cried at the beginning.

An 18 year-old Shan female formerly a sex worker in China

The broker arranged for my daughter to work at a food shop along the China-Myanmar border on April 8th, 1999. On July 31st, 1999, the broker and an old Chinese man came back to our village without my daughter. We informed the police and the police questioned them. On August 1st, 1999, the Chinese man, a friend and I went to a China border town to find my daughter. I talked with my daughter on the telephone. My daughter said 'I don't know where I am. They keep me in a compound. It is always locked up. I cook for a 70 year-old Chinese man. They didn't give me any money. Now, nothing has happened to me yet. Don't let them go! Rescue me as soon as possible.' I could not speak very long because we were crying at that time. According to the broker, my daughter was in a place called "Shang Tongsie." The broker and the Chinese man were in custody at the local police station and I hope we can get her back safely.

A Kachin father whose daughter was sold into China

We were practically sold. A Chinese woman from Bangkok took a group of six girls, four boys, and us in two police cars. We didn't know any Thai language at the time. I had suspicions that we were going to be sold. They fed us free of charge until we got jobs. They took us to a factory and received 10,000 baht for each of us from the employer.

A young Kayin male returnee from Thailand

We often go and look for work outside the refugee camp along the Thai border. We are willing to do any work. The work is often on farms, but some people are taken to work further from the area.

An 18 year-old Kayin female in the refugee camp along the Thai border with Myanmar

There are people who ask me to go to work in the city. I don't know what work they are doing. Some friends say they found good jobs. Some friends have been tricked into being sex workers. Some friends are cheated to work without pay. Some come back home after facing so many problems. Some were even robbed on their return home from the cities. I don't know what do.

A young Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

The actual jobs available to migrants were most often divided by gender. Migrant girls and women sought jobs in factories, shops and restaurants, sex work directly or indirectly in the entertainment industry or as domestic workers (cleaning and care-taking). Male migrants found jobs in the fishing industry, as manual day labourers, or in construction work or agriculture. Although there was some overlap, the gender distinctions dominated with the few exceptions made in the construction and agriculture sectors where families tended to find employment and accommodation together.

Nearly the whole of Kayin State has gone to work in Thailand. Every household has someone who has gone. Girls went to work as housemaids whereas young men do all kinds of jobs - load goods, work in wool factories, the fish industry and construction work. Only those who can't afford the transport fees don't make it. Even then they would try to borrow the money if they could.

A 40 year-old government health provider in Kayin State along the Thai border

To find a job in Thailand depends on the qualification of each person. Some of us work in the construction sites, or as domestic helpers, porters and cleaning staff. And if the person is quite beautiful, they can find work in the traditional massage houses or go into prostitution.

A focus group discussion of Shan female youth living along the Thai border

The following were examples of jobs occupied by female migrants who crossed borders into China or Thailand.

There were over 1,000 workers in the factory. They were all young women from Burma.

A 22 year-old female returnee to Mon State from Thailand.

I migrated here from Lashio five years ago. I came to Thailand with my friend and worked at a store with one Shan girl, another from Taunggyi and a Karenni, from Loikaw.

A 27 year-old Shan female from Northern Shan State working in a Thai border town

Most of the young girls from Myanmar work in small restaurants. They get paid 2,500 – 3,000 baht per month. They never have time to do other activities or go out as they want, because they work every day with no holidays.

A focus group discussion with Shan migrant youth in Chiangmai town

In the China border towns, Shans and Bamars are selling drugs and working as sex workers,⁶³ while most Chinese own grocery shops, cosmetic shops and food shops. The pimps of the sex workers are Bamars and Chinese, and the sex workers are Shan, Bamar and Chinese girls. These Shans came from Lashio, Namtu and Hsipaw, and some from China. Bamars came mostly from the Yangon area. Some of the girls were cheated and sold to brothels and some came to find jobs here. After not finding any jobs, they start to work as sex workers.

A participatory observation with a 21 year-old Shan living in a China border town

The brothel owner sent people to look for beautiful girls from poor families in Myanmar. They told them this was the way of making a lot of money. They said they would bring them to China if they were willing. There was nothing concealed.

A young Bamar sex worker from central Myanmar working along the China border

I was only sixteen when I started going to Thailand. I stayed there for five years, but I did not stay at the same place. My friend and I changed jobs three or four different times. When we first arrived, we packed snack food. Then we worked in a factory that produced tiffin carriers, cups, containers, baskets and stools all made of plastic. Finally we worked at a butcher's shop. We had to wrap meat such as beef and pork and take it to the customer. I got that job because I lived there for five years and could speak Thai quite well. I have also become smarter, I think. But I will see, I might go there again.

A 23 year-old Kayin female returnee to Kayin State from Thailand

Since I came to this border village in Thailand, I've never moved to another place. Here there is a lot of prostitution. Most girls go to work in the big provinces or in Bangkok. Just in Mae Sai district alone there is a great number of sex workers. They work in the restaurants, karaoke bars or in the massage houses. It is so obvious to see this in front of you.

A participatory observation with a young female from Myanmar living along the Thai border

⁶³ Many of the interviews use the derogatory term of “Mae Gai” (female hen) to refer to female sex workers. The text has been changed in this report to minimise the discrimination towards the girls and young women referenced.

When I lived along the border I saw a lot of girls from Shan State in Burma coming to work in Thailand. There were lots of people in Bangkok and Fang district who brought vans to pick up the girls from Shan State at the Thai border. There were several vans every day. The drivers explained that these girls are being taken to work in southern Thailand. I saw lots of young girls who are almost all under twenty years old in these vans. There were no old people or any men present. A 25 year-old Shan male from Shan State living in Thailand

I was married with two children. I divorced my husband and now am alone to raise my four- and six-year-old children. I had to find money to care for them so I came to Thailand and left the children with their grandmother. One day I met a broker who offered me a job of 500 baht a night. I decided to take that job. I finally found out it was sex work. I really don't know what to do. I want to go back, but I can't I have to work for money and the guest's happiness forever.

A 35 year-old Shan female from Shan State working in Thailand

I worked for two years in Bangkok. I worked as a maid scrubbing floors and washing clothes. My employer was a policeman, but he was kind.

A 28 year-old female Kayin returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

After I was divorced from my husband, I got a job along the Thai-Malaysian border. I got the night shift. Some nights I got money and some nights I got nothing. I was really disappointed. After that, I decided to come back to the Thai border with Shan State. Now, I am jobless and no one will help me. Villagers along the border often find work in general day jobs. Men will find jobs as porters, carpenters, or construction workers and mostly it is hard labour. If they are housewives or domestic servants, they find jobs in the shops, sorting things, growing onions, weaving in the factories, or working in restaurants. Sometimes they go and find jobs in other provinces, such as Bangkok. They can find better jobs there and the income is higher. Those who work in Bangkok, especially women and young girls, work as waitresses in the hotels, or in restaurants. Some of them work in the traditional massage houses. There is no job for me. I have no income, and I have no Thai identification card. There is only one choice for women like me, so I will go back to sex work.

A 25 year-old Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

The following were typical jobs undertaken by male migrants in China and Thailand.

I can speak well in Lisu, Thai and Shan and I settled down in Thailand fifteen years ago. Since coming here we can only do day labour jobs and the pay is low. Farming is not very good and we cannot support all of our family.

A 25 year-old Lisu male living in along the Thai border

The second time I came to Thailand, I took up a different job. I worked on a Thai powered boat (fishing vessel). It was hard work. I was at sea, with no land in

sight. They approached land once every eight or ten days. I worked for nearly one year.

A 28 year-old Mon male returnee to Mon State from Thailand

I left school in the fifth standard and went secretly to Mae Sot. I went with friends. There were five of us. We had to pay 2,000 kyat each. At Mae Sot I worked on a boat. I was the helmsman. There were three motors on the boat and twenty workers. Two of them were cooks. We approached land at the beginning of each month.

A 25 year-old Mon male returnee to Mon State from Thailand

I went to Bangkok with a friend and did construction work for 140 baht a day. I have been living in Thailand for more than three years. Like my relatives, I too would like to go back home. We have to change our work often because if one job is not good we have to find another, that is the way we survive in Thailand. Besides our village along the Thai border, we have been to Bangkok and Pattaya. At some places we earned small amounts of money, sometimes we were cheated by the employer and not paid at all. Many friends work as day labourers on loading docks, or doing painting, or construction work or whatever they have the ability to do.

An 18 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

The place I went was very near the Thai-Myanmar border. It was just a small village. I worked on a potato farm. Besides free food and lodging, I was paid 2,000 baht monthly. The pay was very poor. But I stayed nearly a year because I was together with friends. The next job was in Bangkok. I had to work as a construction worker. I did that job for three months. I got 120 baht per day. There were over a hundred workers. There were only a few Kayins and Bamar and the majority were Mons. The Mons could speak Thai very well. I made friends with them and followed them to a coastal town in Thailand to work on a fishing boat.

A 28 year-old Bamar returnee from Thailand to Mon State

At a farm I worked, there were about eighty or ninety workers. It was just outside Bangkok, over an hour's drive from Suphanburi. We planted papayas. Some workers did weeding. The majority were Kayin and Mon, with very few Bamars.

A 27 year-old male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

The demand for young female migrants was higher than for other populations. There are more jobs available for females and younger people, who are considered both harder workers and easier to control.

In Thailand, men have difficulty getting jobs. And when they do get jobs, it's usually gardening and agriculture work. There are plenty of jobs for girls on the other hand, such as housemaids and factory workers.

A 28 year-old male returnee from Thailand to Mon State

My wife works in Mae Sot and she is the supervisor in her factory. At present, factory owners want to give jobs only to the women. It is because men are problem makers and they are not happy to hire men.

A 28 year-old trishaw male returnee from Thailand in Kayin State

I came here from central Myanmar with a broker. I got 2,000 kyat per month and the broker got 2,000 kyat (one month's salary of a housemaid). First, I worked as a babysitter and then as a housemaid. Now, they (owners) have transferred me to a hotel. Because of drought, our village people migrated to Mandalay and China to find jobs. Young people over the age of thirteen migrated to other places. Boys work in teashops, young girls work as babysitters and older girls work as housemaids and wash clothes.

A 20 year-old Bamar female from central Myanmar working as a housemaid along the China border

There are certainly exceptions to the norm and it is possible to find both genders involved in work generally held by the other sex. The cases below highlight this reality.

A friend of mine works in a male sex workers' brothel in Bangkok. I had even been there myself once to visit him. It is a separate place from the girls' brothels. When I asked my friend how he protected himself from STD/HIV, he said, he didn't need to do anything because the women whom he entertained were all 'clean' women – sailors' wives, rich women, single women, students and other women who were away from their husbands.

A 26 year-old Kayin male along the Thai border

I came from Shan State when I was sixteen years old. My first job was carrying ice blocks in carts. Then I became a waiter at a restaurant. My boss here is good if we don't do anything wrong. I get 40 baht a day and customers give some tip money that we can keep. Although we work until 1 a.m. in the morning, we can sleep in the morning. Most of the waiters and workers are from Myanmar. Most of the girls work at restaurants, beer bars and entertainment centres. A 20 year-old Shan male from Shan State working along the Thai border with Myanmar

There are other jobs that are considered illegal such as begging, selling drugs, getting involved in unregulated logging and fishing or working as brokers. Although black market jobs often involve both genders, typically men have the most control and make the greatest profit in this sector.

I am from Central Myanmar and I have been in a China border town for four years. The broker who brought me here tricked me. I was forced to work as a prostitute. Later, I became a No. Four [heroin] addict and stopped working as a prostitute. Now I sell No. Four and try to survive somehow. I keep getting arrested by the police, but they release me later every time. I can only sell small amounts because I don't have enough money. I stay alone in a rented room. I pay seven yuan per day. I get just enough from selling drugs to buy food. I plan to go

back home when I have saved some money. But whenever I manage to save a little, the police arrest me. Neighbours usually collect money and bail me out. Sometimes I make a mistake and try to sell drugs to a policeman (in plain clothes), so I get arrested. Some men come to buy drugs; some men come to have sex. I can speak a little Chinese.

A 22 year-old Bamar female in a China border town

Most of the brothel owners are men. In this China border town each brothel owner has about thirty girls. They get rich with this business. For example, they rent this building to keep sixty girls all of whom are sex workers.

A 60 year-old Bamar female broker along the China-Myanmar border

Now friends from this village persuaded us to make liquor. Despite the fear we have of doing this illegal business, we have no choice and doing other work is not enough income to feed our family. We have to go deep into the jungle and make strong spirit. We have to be careful all the time. If the situation is not good we have to stop for some time. So our life is risky and also we are not Thai citizens and have no right to travel to find work in other places. We must do whatever we have to do for our survival.

A young Lahu male from Shan State living along the border of Thailand

I was a woodcutter and worked in the villages. There was no problem except that this job is against the law. But, I did nothing wrong really.

A young Lahu male from Shan State living along the border of Thailand

I was originally from Ye. I did all kinds of work when I first crossed over from Kawthaung to Ranong, Thailand. I stayed for only about a month the first time. I didn't have a proper job, so I came back. The second time, I worked at a sawmill. It didn't turn out to be so good. I didn't stay very long that time either. The last time, I worked on a fishing boat. It was very hard work, dangerous as well. We had to catch fish in Burmese waters. If we ran into the Burmese navy, we would have been caught. I suffered badly from seasickness. I had to work all day and all night. I even prayed that our boat would break down. Only then would we be able to return. My job was to sort out the different kinds of fish. After that fishing trip, I stopped working and came back.

A young male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

I got married not long after I came to Thailand and have two children. I don't know where my friends went to work once they got to Thailand. My husband is from the Akha tribe and works on a farm. But we cannot make enough for our family. Not very long after we got this job, my husband and his employer did something against the law and now they are in Bangkok prison and sentenced to life imprisonment. Now, the three of us are helpless. I don't know how things are going to be. The children are now old enough to go to school and we have no money and no clothes. When I think about this I worry so much.

A Shan female labourer living on the Thai side of the Myanmar border

4.5. Working and Living Conditions

Though the living and working conditions of cross-border migrants vary according to the place, job and employer, migrants are all vulnerable to exploitation and abuse without protection or redress. The interviews in this study reveal extensive debt-bondage, sexual abuse, illegal confinement, confiscation of documents, arrest and extortion, forced overtime and poor living conditions with few basic resources, overcrowding and insecure, often violent, environments. Undocumented migrants faced more violations and among them, young female migrants were most at risk of abuse and exploitation.

Various forms of debt-bondage were reported by the majority of migrants that varied only in terms of conditions faced and time taken to repay the debt. The realities of debt-bondage held many similarities between sites.

I'm twenty years old. I come from Central Myanmar. A neighbour brought me here. She told me that I would get a job at a restaurant, so I came along. She kept my papers and sold me for 12,000 kyat. I only knew that I'd been sold after this neighbour had taken the money and gone. I was beaten when I first arrived. If we earn 2,000 kyat, the owner only gave us half. They said the other money was to pay for the room and food. We had to work whenever the customers came, day or night. The pimp has told me that I can leave when I've worked enough to settle my debt. I once went back home but my parents wouldn't accept me, so I came back here to work. I was sold a second time in a China border town. The aunt of a friend took me along and sold me. But the work is unpredictable. Our customers are mostly Chinese, Kachin, Bamar and Shan, who work as drivers, crab traders and gem brokers. There are many from Myanmar. There are about thirty or forty customers each night and each of us serves about five or six. After negotiating the price, the customer has to pay Auntie Gyi. She exploits us in many ways. She's dishonest with the accounts. Some girls ran away. Some got married. There were also many who left their savings with the pimp and ran away. I haven't kept account of my savings. I am afraid to ask about my money, in case they beat me. They beat us around the head. If we ask about money, or if we say we're going home, they beat us. They cut our earnings for this or that reason. If we get about four customers, they give us only 3,000 kyat. If I get only 1,500 or 1,600 kyat, the pimp takes it all. If there is only one customer, we run into debt. There are days when there are no customers and then I have even more debt.

A 20 year-old Bamar female sex worker in a China border town

The first job was working on a plantation. My friend and I had to work without pay for two years. The broker arranged everything with the employer in Thai language. Later the boss told us we had been sold, and wouldn't let us go. After we settled our debt we worked for six more months. When we said we wanted to leave, the boss wouldn't let us go. He didn't pay us for the last month. Finally, he let us go, but informed the Thai police so that we would get arrested. We were very naïve and agreed to go back and work for another two months, as we were

told to. The boss eventually let us go, after we told him that we would give up one month's pay, and that we would come back to work for him. He took us to the border, where he handed us over to another employer. My friend and I had to accept the job offered by this employer because as he pointed out, we had no papers and could easily be arrested. We had to look after thirty cows. We had to work according to a fixed schedule. We got up at 2:00 a.m. We had to fill up the cow feed and clean up the cow dung. We started to milk the cows at 5:00 a.m. and at 8:00 a.m. we collected the milk. We continued with the work (looking after the cows) until dark. It was hard work. We were passed on from one broker to another. I spent six years like this in Thailand.

A 24 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

We went on a powered fishing boat. The pay was 2,500 baht. Later it became 3,000 baht. The maximum was 3,500 baht. There were thirteen in the crew. The two Thais were the helmsmen and the oarsman and the rest were from Myanmar. Most of them were Mon. They cast the net three times a day. After a catch, we had to sort out the fish. We had to work in rain or sunshine. After work, we could rest. We were told that we would be returning to land in one or two months. But from the day we set off, we never once set foot on land for a whole year. The fish were loaded on to other powered boats that came to collect the fish. They came whenever we had a good catch. When we finally returned after one year, the boss himself took us to the border to return home. I didn't save anything much then.

A 28 year-old Bamar male returnee from Thailand to Mon State

Sexual abuse was commonly reported among girls and young women. The abuse was not only encountered by sex workers, but was also largely reported by domestic workers and other migrant females, as shown below.

When I worked as a housemaid my boss told me he loved me, and asked me 'Do you have a boyfriend?' in Burmese. He would come round and watch me as I ate my meals. Four of us maids shared one room, which we kept locked, but he came into the room somehow. I don't know whether there was another door. I became scared, so I left eight sets of clothes and ran away. I had heard others say, 'If a Thai likes a girl, her life is ruined'. Just before I arrived at that place, a girl – I don't know whether she was from Myanmar – had hung herself using the straps of a brassiere. I became scared when I thought about it, so I came back home.

A 22 year-old Kayin female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

The Thai wives themselves find Myanmar girls to work as maids and allow their husbands to do what they want so they don't go to sex workers and get sick. They just use the term 'maid', but the girls have to endure all kinds of abuse.

A 28 year-old female Bamar returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

An eighteen year-old Pa-O girl who worked in Thailand as a housemaid was sent back home from Thailand because she had developed some mental problems. She

refuses to talk about what happened to her in Thailand, but the family suspects some sexual abuse. A government officer in Kayin State near the Thai border

Two female migrants working as housemaids try to escape the sexual abuse they encountered by their boss and jumped out the window. They called me to translate for them at the hospital. In another incident a girl from Myanmar was reported killed and brought to the hospital. They said she had hung herself, but there were no marks on her neck. We will never know what actually happened or who she was. A translator for migrants from Myanmar in Thailand working in Bangkok

Illegal confinement was another reality faced by many migrants. The following are examples of the types of confinement reported.

The pimps gave me cigarettes and Number Four [heroin]⁶⁴, and made me do sex work to earn money. They don't use you anymore if you become too thin and weak. The pimps are usually Bamar. If a pimp left, he would hand over the girls to another pimp. The pimp kept us inside the room all the time. Sometimes when there was an "order" for a girl, he would only allow her to go with someone he trusted. Most of my clients were Chinese.

A 22 year-old Bamar female sex worker and drug dealer in a China border town

I've never stayed in any other place in Thailand, only on this orange farm. I don't know anything about STD; I know nothing about society. I've no education. Since I came to work here, our boss never allowed me to go outside. I can only stay on the farm, even when I am sick.

A young Shan female from Shan State married with one child living along the Thai border

In the factory, we were not allowed to go out except on holidays when we went out shopping. We enjoyed those days. The whole town was full of people from Myanmar and there were hardly any Thai. Once, the police raided at night and rounded us up. They dumped us at the border. We ran back into Thailand. Sometimes as soon as they had dumped us, our boss himself would come in his car to collect us. He said he was afraid of losing his workers. In some factories, the employers themselves are the police. They have their own arrangements.

A 22 year-old female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

At the construction site, they wouldn't let us carry the cement in pans balanced on our heads, like in Myanmar. They were worried that the authorities would find out we were Burmese. We had to carry the cement in two buckets, each hand carrying one bucket. I got 100 baht per day. It was equivalent to 700 kyat in Burmese currency. That was in 1996/97. We were not allowed to go out. We didn't know what was happening outside. As soon as we finished our work, we would go and hide, for fear of being arrested by the Thai police.

A 24 year-old female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

⁶⁴ Heroin is referred to as 'Number Four' in Myanmar.

Confiscation of identity cards and travel documents was commonly reported among migrants in China. Many of the migrants from Myanmar and China inside Thailand claimed they did not use documents to enter the country as was necessary to cross into China.

A Bamar driver helped me to escape from the brothel and sent me to the China-Myanmar border. The pimp kept my identity card and I did not give it back to me. Therefore, I cannot go back. If I go I will have to show my identity card at checkpoints. So, I got married to this man to get protection here. He has a wife and cannot come to me regularly. An 18 year-old Shan female from central Myanmar living along the China-Myanmar border

I came to China with a Bamar broker woman when I was seventeen. When we arrived at the checkpoint, the broker asked me to give my ID card, necklace, earrings and watch. She said that the police would check everything. I did not know why she took all my things. She sold me at a brothel for 3,000 yuan. One Bamar customer helped me to escape from this brothel. But I cannot go back to my home because if I try to pass the checkpoint the immigration or police will arrest me because I have no ID card. Therefore, I got married to a family man and he arranged for me to live on this farm along the China border.

A 29 year-old Shan female living along the China border

I don't have a national registration card anymore. The brothel owner took it away from me when I first arrived.

A 22 year-old Bamar female sex worker and drug dealer in a China border town

The fear of arrest and extortion by government officials was based on a reality encountered by migrants at all the study sites.

If the drivers are not polite, they might face some problems at the Burmese checkpoints. The military at the checkpoints will ask for money if the drivers don't obey them or are not police; they may get into trouble. At one checkpoint the driver was asked to pay 500 kyat for the car and 300 kyat for each passenger. The driver did not agree to pay and drove away. The official shot the car and its tire exploded. The driver broke his legs and the car was stuck in the middle of the road. It is a very difficult time.

A 32 year-old Kayin female working along the Thai-Myanmar border

It is very difficult to help Myanmar people especially the sex workers and drug dealers in China. When the police arrest a girl or a drug dealer she/he is released after paying a 200-300 yuan fine. They are arrested again two-three days later. Police are making money with these people. Therefore, their debts increase gradually and they cannot afford to pay rent for their room.

A 40 year-old Bamar male from Yangon doing business in a China border town

Once I started having customers, the money was pretty good. But I had to leave it all with the brothel. By and by I decided to go home and asked for my money but they wouldn't give it to me. Even subtracting expenses, I had 4,000-5,000 yuan coming to me. I really hated them. I worked hard for that money and they wouldn't give it to me. So I brought my complaint to the police station. They took both the brothel owner and myself into custody. The brothel owner spent 4,000-5,000 yuan to get us out. I didn't get a thing – it all went to the police.

A Bamar sex worker in a China border town.

When I first migrated five years ago, I was immediately detained by the police and was made to do menial jobs in the station. They gave us pocket money. They also fed us properly. But they gave less food to the people inside the jail [detention centre]. There were also beatings. We were the youngest among detainees. After one month, the police took us three boys and some other detainees to (the border) riverbank at Mae Sot. They kept detainees for only one month. Of course we went back inside Thailand the next day. This time we went up to Bangkok.

A 21 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand

When I migrated for the second time, I was arrested. Before they handcuffed me I managed to escape. They were about to send me to IDC [Immigration Detention Centre]. If I were sent to IDC, they would definitely have left me at Three Pagodas Pass. Some of my friends were arrested and sent to IDC. They could not bribe the guys from IDC and were taken to Three Pagodas pass and left there. They did not know where to go from there so they went back to Bangkok. There they gave some money to the police. The guys at IDC were not easy to bribe, if they did accept the bribe, the amount would be far greater than that given to the police.

A 23 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand

There were approximately 700 detainees in the Bangkok immigration detention centre (IDC) of various nationalities. The majority were from Myanmar. Males and females are separated and children are placed with their mothers or else also separated by sex. Fifty girls from Myanmar had just been sent back to the border yesterday. How quickly detainees are deported depends on whether a migrant has a labour card or not. ... There were about thirty Myanmar girls in a room of seventy-four female detainees. The room was about 25 feet square with a bathroom and toilet in one corner. Eleven of them were arrested during a raid in a broker's house in Bangkok. Five other girls were to be sent back to the border today because their employer paid the fine. One young woman aged twenty-two from Myitkyina (Kachin State) was arrested two months ago at the Bangkok Airport for possessing a fake Nepalese passport. She was at the airport trying to go to Singapore. A sixteen year-old Kayin girl started working as a housemaid when she was thirteen. She speaks fluent Thai, as this is her second time in Thailand. ... Detainees from other countries reported visits by their embassies, but not the detainees from Myanmar. They have no outside contact except IDC staff and general visitors like us. When we asked them how we could assist, a few

asked us to mail letters. Participatory observations at the
Immigration Detention Centre in Bangkok

I was arrested by the police once. They did not send me to the prison, but completely searched me and my bag. They took all my money, only leaving bus fare to my village. A Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

The vast majority of migrants were forced to work long hours with no acknowledgement of the national labour laws or recourse for the abuses encountered.

We started our duties at 5:00 a.m. in the morning and finished our work at 9:30 p.m. But, we couldn't go to our rooms until the generator was switched off at twelve midnight. They had promised to pay me 4,000 baht but when I asked for my pay before leaving the job, they gave me only 3,500 baht. I wanted to protest, but I didn't. If I protested they might call the hit man (goon) and tell him to kill me. If you argue with them, you can expect the Lord of Death to summon you the next day.

A 22 year-old male Bamar returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

I went to visit my sister in a knitting factory, and got a job there. I was paid sixty baht per day and with overtime money, I got a total of about 2,000 baht per month. There were twenty-six sets of bunk beds in one room, which was about twenty by forty square feet. About eighty workers slept in each room. There were separate dormitories for single men, single women and for married couples. Altogether there were about 3,000 workers. The majority of workers were girls. Boys made up about one fourth of the total. We were given boiled rice. We had to buy the curries (meat or vegetable dishes) from outside ourselves. One dish cost about five baht. We could save about 1,000 baht each month. We had to work from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. If there was overtime, we had to continue working from 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. We were paid 25 baht extra for each day of overtime work.

A 20 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

Most of the young Shan girls who work in small restaurants get 2,500 -3,000 baht per month. They never have time to do other activities or go out as they want because there are no holidays for these girls.

A participatory observation with Shan youth in Chiangmai town

In the first garment factory, I got 40 baht a day. After that I went to work in a woollen garment factory. There I got 60 baht a day. If there were many orders from customers, we had to work overtime.

A 19 year-old Bamar female returnee from Thailand

There was a problem in my factory. The owner was so complicated and always forced workers to work long hours. So, there was a demonstration. My friend and

I were asked to get out from the factory as a result. Now it is hard to find a job and some days we don't have anything to eat. It is very difficult.

A 20 year-old male working along the Thai border with Myanmar

Exploitation by employers without recourse was frequently reported. In most instances, employers refused partial, and in some cases, full pay of salaries earned and agreed upon. Other types of exploitation included forced overtime, unrealistic demands, inadequate provisions and lack of work safety precautions.

My friend had given her gold jewellery and 90,000 kyat to the 'mamasan'⁶⁵ of the brothel for safe keeping, in case her customers drugged her with sleeping pills and robbed her. But the 'mamasan' wouldn't give her back her jewellery or her money when she left. My friend is now seven months pregnant. As she is unable to work, the 'mamasan' does not feed her anymore.

A participatory observation of a 21 year-old Shan woman living in a China border town

I worked on a lychee farm picking the fruit. There were around thirty workers. None of us had worked so hard before. We had just come from Burma. The boss was rushing us to pick the lychee, but no one wanted listen to him. The boss got very angry. At lunchtime, the workers and boss were really fighting with each other in order to get food. The workers were afraid they would not get enough food.

A Shan male youth living along the Thai border with Myanmar

I worked on a construction site in Chiangmai near the International Airport. I work overtime and could only rest about four to five hours per day. Because our employer was rushing us to be finished before the 18th SEA game that would start soon. I was really working hard for one year, but in the end they only paid me for six months. Because of this, I changed my job again. I worked for two years and sometimes we did not get our payment. These jobs are very hard work and the Thai people don't want to do them. But, the Thai people are paid 160 baht per day while the migrant workers from Burma get only half of that.

A 36 year-old Kachin male working in living along the Thai border

That brothel owner insists his girls make at least 120 yuan a night. His wife beats girls and won't let them sleep. Sometimes they make girls stay out on the street at two or three in the morning. The brothel owner keeps all the money and says he has records of what the girls have earned. But, he won't let the girls see the accounts and they don't even know themselves how many clients they have had. He even keeps any tips the customers give to the girls. A few days ago, a girl who had made 11,000 yuan went to get the money due her and return to Burma. He only gave her 2,400 kyat plus 130 yuan.

A key informant working in the migrant community along the China-Myanmar border

⁶⁵ "Mamasan" is a term used for the female who oversees the girls working in the sex work venue.

I'd like to treat these girls [sex workers] like members of my family, feeding and housing them just the same as us. But, that's difficult. For example, if a girl takes heroin I've got to beat her. I run a tight ship, not letting them smoke, take drugs or sing whenever they feel like it. They are fined 10 kyat a song if they sing. Some brothel owners are very relaxed and don't have the interest of their girls in mind. That brothel owner has new girls first sleep with him before they take their first customer. But, at my place the girls have to be ready any time of day or night as most of the customers are truck drivers. If a customer gives the girl gifts or tips, she can keep them. Most of the customers however don't show a bit of sympathy for the girls. They all feel that since they paid for the girl they have the right to do whatever they want. They often just treat them like objects of their passions.

A Bamar brothel owner in a China border town

I was arrested while I was working along the border and was in jail for nineteen days. Afterwards, I worked for the Forest Department of Thailand. We were not paid so we quit and went to work on a construction site in Chiangmai. Again we were not paid. We didn't know where to go and are just waiting at the construction sites where we worked, until we get paid. When we get our money, we will look for work in other places.

A 24 year-old Shan male from Shan State working in Chiangmai town

I worked at a wire factory in Fang district. I got 50 baht per day. I worked there for six months, after that I pumped gas for an oil company in Fang district. My salary was 2,500 baht per month, working eight hours per day. There were no holidays.

A 25 year-old Shan male
married with two children living along the Thai border

I heard there were some places where I could make lots of money. You didn't need an ID card either. The job was fishing and paid 2,000 baht a month. It sounded like a lot of money. So, my friend and I went. We got onboard a boat. It was much harder work than I had ever done and the conditions were terrible. We suffered hardship and lived in fear. My friend couldn't bear it and drowned himself.

A young male from Myanmar along the Thai border

Not only were there no opportunities to seek redress for these abuses, in addition many migrants reported abuses incurred by government officials as well.

Some girls were tricked and brought to brothels and sold. Some girls came looking for work, and when they couldn't find a job, they ended up working in brothels. There is no security in this China border town. If the police caught them they'll go to jail. The pimps usually bail them out. But the money is cut from their earnings later. Sometimes when they have saved some money, the men who sleep with them rob them of their money. When something like that happens, they can't report it to anyone. The pimps kick out some sex workers who got pregnant. After giving birth, they gave the child away. Then they go to another brothel and work again.

A 21 year-old Shan female moneychanger in a China border town

Once my customer turned out to be a policeman. He didn't listen to any of my requests and locked me up in jail the next day. I was there for a month before my boss bailed me out. He came to get me because a lot of customers were asking for my services. He then said he'd saved my life and told me to work harder.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I had been doing many kinds of work, construction, painting, raising shrimp, working as an iceman, porter, etc. Once, I was arrested by the police, but they did not send me to prison. The police searched me and my bag, taking all my money, leaving only enough for bus fare to my village.

A Shan male youth living along the Thai border with Myanmar

Nearly one hundred Shan were repatriated and while Thai border patrol were performing their duty, they chose eleven young girls and another seven men to do cleaning work. But when we had arrived at the house to work, they put us in a room and closed the door. Then they made us stand in a row and undress. Then they touched all the girls, holding our breast and our private parts. Then they chose us one at a time and raped us.

A focus group discussion with Shan males and females detained at the police station along the Thai border at the time of the reported incidence

I tried to speak out after I was raped by Thai authorities and was offered some money to settle the problem. I was so angry. It is though I am like a cow or buffalo you can just buy. I don't want their money. I would like some justice, but the thing I am really concerned most about is my health. I do not know whether I will get HIV/AIDS or not. I am not sure and worry about this a lot. I think about it over and over and I want to kill myself. I wish others would see us with human eyes.

A 17 year-old Shan female from Shan State raped by Thai soldiers along the Thai border

The living and working conditions reported in this study were deplorable with very basic resources, occupational hazards, overcrowding, and insecure, often violent, environments.

Altogether twelve of us had to sleep in a room that was about sixteen feet. The few toilets we had near our dormitory were so filthy and were blocked all the time. So all the girls restrained ourselves every morning and waited until we arrived at the factory. In the long run, we suffered from bowel and urine problems.

An 18 year-old Kayin female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

Today, people were counting water buckets. Soon, the truck will come to deliver water. After the people pay for the water the truck will leave the village immediately. We have only four public wells in our village with no water. The government does not pay attention to our hard life because most people here are not Thai. So, we have many problems.

A 42 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State living along the Thai border

I got forty baht per day when I started to work. With overtime I usually get about 1,500 baht a month. When I was with my parents I had no money at all. I am so lucky to get this amount of money. However, the salary is not enough. As for the food we always have fish paste and one fried egg each. Since the work is so hard, sometimes we want to eat some good food such as meat or vegetables. We need more health education and services. This factory is very new. There are only about one hundred workers. Our main problem is we don't have enough water here.

A 20 year-old Mon-Bamar male from Yangon living along the Thai border

Most workers from Burma have limited knowledge of basic health care. Their living conditions are not good. Their work is dangerous causing injuries and many health problems. They do not have the opportunity to get proper health care and you can see many health problems among them.

Participatory observation with Shan youth in Chiangmai town

Most workers here are not healthy. We have difficult breathing from the pesticide and without medical treatment we get weaker and weaker and then they fire us.

A Shan male youth from Shan State working on an orange plantation along the Thai border

There are three youth gangs here -the Dragon, the Fox and the Cobra. Most of their members are eighteen to nineteen year olds. They drink alcohol and also use drugs. They commit crimes and fight with other people. It is a growing problem here.

An 18 year-old Bamar male working as a loading dock labourer along the China-Myanmar border

We are prepared to do anything, even selling drugs, to escape from this life as sex workers. When we get enough money, we'll go back home and set up a little shop. We used to sell goods in the market in the past. Now we earn between 3,000 and 5,500 kyat a day. The girl upstairs earns over 100,000 kyat in one month. She gets more because she is pretty. But it is hard to escape and save any money to go anywhere even if there was the chance to leave. Once, some customers took two of us out on an 'order' and gave us a drink laced with drugs. We lost our gold chains. They invested about 10,000 kyat on the two of us, and took away about 60,000 kyat worth of jewellery. There was a girl who lost more than us – she lost 300,000 kyat worth of gold

Two Bamar women,

20 and 27 years old, both sex workers in a China border town

I have been to Thailand once. I spent all I earned on living expenses -there was nothing left. The employer cheated me and didn't pay me. I'll go back later, when I'm a little older.

A 13 year-old male returnee now living in Kayin State

We, Lahu, go to towns to work in restaurants, karaoke bars, and massage houses. Some come back very sick and die. Some disappear. We do not know what causes their deaths. We lack education. It is terrible. A young Lahu male from Shan State working on a corn farm along the Thai border

If possible, I would like to stop working on this orange farm. The job is a risk to my health because I have to spray chemicals on the trees regularly. In the long term, I will have health problems, but since I do not have anywhere to go, I have to try to bear this situation. A Shan female youth from Shan State working on an orange farm along the Thai border

Although the woman's story below is an extreme example of the exploitation that occurs among migrants, it is a brutal reminder that undocumented migrants are open to all forms of abuse without recourse.

While I was selling food in a China border town, a Kachin couple persuaded me to go with them and trade gold in China. After eating the sticky rice that they gave me, I wanted to do whatever they told me to do because it contained some sort of drug. First, we went to Kunming and then to Guangdong by train. After seven days we arrived at a China town whose name I don't know. Another four Shan girls were also sold in that place. There were about 50 girls in this place and there were also some older women who were placed separately. We were detained in rooms that were under the ground. They never let us stay together. We stayed in single rooms, one for each person. Some became drug addicts and some went completely mad.

When they were about use leeches on us to extract our blood, they shot us with golden stars, which are star-shaped metal darts that contain medicine that knocks us out. When these men came, everyone cried because they were scared to be sucked by leeches. When we were unconscious, they removed all our clothes. And then they covered every hole on the body with adhesive tape to prevent the leeches from entering the body. I was sucked twice by leeches before I ran away from there. When we became conscious our bodies were covered with blood and our skin looked pale. Our food was potato and wheat soup. After four or five days of our blood being sucked this way, they injected us with some medicine to replace the energy we lost. The leeches were marine leeches with fins on the back. We learned these leeches are edible and that old men are ready to pay good price because they believed eating this will make them feel younger. One package of dried leeches fetches 5,000-6,000 yuan.

A 31 year-old Kachin-Kayin female living along the Myanmar-China border

This woman's story is one of three similar reports gathered in this study with women from Northern Shan State.

4.6. Health

Migrant children, youth, and their extended families and communities identified a wide range of health issues. These findings are presented here in the following four sections: 1) general health problems; 2) reproductive health concerns; 3) HIV/AIDS; and 4) health care options and choices. The data in each of these areas is very rich and filled with detailed complexities that impact migrants' health. A general overview will be given of the trends and concerns across the borders and, where relevant, a presentation of site specific realities.

General Health

Malaria, diarrhoea, tuberculosis (TB), dengue fever, respiratory infections and malnutrition were reported as general health problems at all the sites.

In the past year, altogether about twenty people have died of malaria in the two villages. Only about six of them were adults. Most of the victims were children. There are no health staff or practitioners in the village. The medical soldiers from the 44 Division come around everyday to give injections. If the malaria or influenza becomes serious, villagers go to a hospital for treatment.

A 60 year-old pastor from a village in Mon State near the Thai border

After we got here, my friend who had had malaria before was ill with fever for more than one day. We couldn't take him to the clinic because we had no money. We didn't give him an injection. We had to give him paracetamol [aspirin]. In this area, there is often malaria in the rainy season. Some people go to clinics, or use local methods.

A 20 year-old Shan male migrant worker along the China-Myanmar border

When I was sick with TB four years ago I nearly died. TB is very dangerous. It spreads very quickly in the community.

A focus group discussion with Kachin youth, male and female, from Kachin State living along the Thai border

My family and I get malaria and dengue fever more than other diseases. One of my family members has died and now another one is sick again. Whenever a member of our family gets sick we go to the health centre. It is so terrible to always get sick.

A 14 year-old Kachin girl from Myanmar living along the Thai border

Looking at the figures of the patients in the community, the number who get dengue fever is higher than the other diseases. For this reason, prevention information about dengue fever must be given to the people.

A focus group discussion with Kachin youth from Kachin State living along the Thai border

For me, as a teacher, I am fine. But these students are mostly sick with malnutrition, flu, or some get dengue fever.

A 23 year-old female pre-school teacher working along the Thai border

The problem we have in our community is malnutrition because the villagers are not well educated. Besides, they lack money for medical treatment and, therefore, are not well treated. Most people don't know about family planning and I think the problems of communicable diseases still remain.

A Lahu Monk from Shan State living along the Thai border

Living in this area is dirty, unhealthy and there is no sewage system, which breeds a lot of mosquitoes. There hasn't been any advice from anyone about how to take care of our health. When we get sick we go to the public health station elsewhere. It would be very difficult in case of an emergency.

A 25 year-old Lisu male farmer from Myanmar living along the Thai border

Reproductive Health

Reproductive health concerns were a major concern among youth and adults at all the project sites. Participants in all the communities reported a lack of reproductive health information and services, especially for unmarried young people.

There was a twenty-two year-old young woman whose husband was murdered after the couple came back from Thailand. The young woman requested the midwife to give her an injection which she explained as a vitamin injection. When she showed her the vial, the midwife 'discovered' that it was a 'depo-provera' injection (a contraceptive). I explained to her that she didn't need contraceptives if she didn't have a husband. I have seen a lot of single girls coming back from Thailand with contraceptive implants applied in the arm. They tend to implant one for one year of contraception, whereas two for two years. Health workers in Myanmar knew about this method only from the returnees who came to ask for them to be taken out. At first the doctors and nurses did not dare to take them out as they didn't have any experience.

A female village health worker in Kayin State near the Thai border

There are condoms given by the health department. But I don't give them out to everyone – only to married couples. If I give them to single people, it will be like encouraging them (to be promiscuous). If condoms are easily available, young men will start womanising. That's why we don't allow condoms to be sold in the village.

A 32 year-old Kayin female health staff from a Kayin village in Mon State near the Thai border

There was reported a lack of contraceptive information and services even for those who were married.

My wife gave birth at home with help from the mid-wife. We have a daughter. When she was pregnant, I never took her to the hospital because we had no

money. We had a hard time earning a living. After two years, she was pregnant again so we started to discuss about sterilisation. But, we did not have enough money so we had to borrow some from our friends. A Shan male from Shan State working in an orange plantation along the Thai border

The villagers do not know about family planning and so they have a lot of kids. Moreover, we don't have enough income. We all want to protect against pregnancy, but we don't know how. A 25 year-old Lisu male from Shan State married with two children working as a farmer along the Thai border

I got married when I was 14 years old. Now I have seven children. I have never heard about the family planning or birth control pills. I am not on any pills now, but I don't want any more kids. A Palaung female married with seven children from Myanmar working as a farmer along the Thai border

My neighbour used to give contraceptive injections at a clinic. Sometimes she cut the nerve or vein on the arm that is near the joint of the shoulder. I've heard that this operation could easily be done in Ruili. A 19 year-old Kachin female along the Myanmar-China border

One friend gets an injection and another makes a cut near her arm-joint so that they will not conceive. They say you can have it done in China. My mother says she has something inserted inside her. An 18 year-old Shan female along the China-Myanmar border

We are Lahu and do not understand about family planning because we are not educated. My wife is over thirty years old and we have four children. She hasn't been using any kind of birth control, but we just don't want to have any more kids. A Lahu male farmer living along the Thai border with Myanmar

Abortions were frequently reported along all the borders, especially along the China border where it is legal and easier to discuss.

There are many abortion cases here. Abortion can be made in a China border town hospital, but it is expensive. The abortion charge is 600 yuan for a six-month pregnancy. I think the charge depends on how advanced the pregnancy is. My mother once had an abortion in a China border town. However, here, seventeen and eighteen year old girls have more abortions than women of any other age. I didn't have enough money to pay for the abortion so I tried to take Kachin medicine called 'Five Tigers,' but it didn't work. So, I will deliver my child.

An 18 year-old Kachin woman whose boyfriend (a Bamar migrant) left her in Northern Shan State along the China border. She subsequently gave birth and sold the child to Han Chinese along the border soon after the delivery.

Women of this village have abortions very often. They don't use contraceptives. Some go for abortion because they have already seven or nine children.

A 24 year-old health worker in a Kayin village in Mon State

I was pregnant for seven months and didn't want an abortion. However, the owner wanted me to have one because if I gave birth it would affect my work. I had the abortion and three days later had to return to work and take a client. I don't have any contraceptives, so I don't know when this will happen again.

A 20 year-old Bamar sex worker in a China border town

A fourteen year-old girl eloped with her boyfriend. She was already pregnant. Soon after the girl died. There are a lot of abortions. Some do it at home by themselves. Some pay to have an abortion. A friend told me it costs 2,000 kyat if the girl is one month pregnant. If she's two months pregnant, it costs 3,000 kyat. It depends on how many months she's pregnant. My friend paid 4,000 kyat for an abortion. After that the couple behaved as if nothing had happened.

A focus group discussion with Bamar, Kayin and Indian migrant male youth working as loading dock labourers along the China-Myanmar border

I was pregnant for three months. When I went to be checked at the hospital, the doctor told me that I am infected with HIV/AIDS. I asked the doctor whether my child is infected or not and he said there was an eighty percent chance it would be. I decided to have an abortion.

A young Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

Even those along the China border able to access legal abortion services reported dangerous and even life threatening encounters.

Once my menstruation stopped and they thought I was pregnant, the brothel owner's wife tied me up, made me drink some medicinal alcohol then kicked me in the stomach, hurting me so much I cried out. Her man just sat there and watched. She scolded me, said some really nasty things. When I peed because she kicked me so hard she said I was shameless. The next day, all the other girls all ran away.

A Bamar sex worker in a China border town found HIV positive

Our friend got pregnant, but the boy's father disapproved of the match. She had an abortion in China. They injected her womb with a drug. She was writhing in pain on the floor when the drug was working on her body. She was already six months pregnant. They spent a lot of Chinese money. She had to be hospitalised for two days. The girl went (for the abortion) with her friends. In the end, the boy didn't marry her.

A focus group discussion with Shan 16-22 year olds boys and girls living along the Myanmar-China border

My friend went to a China border town for an abortion. I accompanied her. The place was near the market where a Kachin woman from China did it. She put

some medicine into her womb and pressed it to perform the abortion. We paid her 75 yuan. After that my friend could walk. We went to the market and ate food. It was easy to abort in China and my friend was lucky.

A 20 year-old Kachin female working along the China border

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS was seen as a critical concern noted by sex workers with most others not seeing themselves at risk to exposure.

The risk of contracting it (AIDS) in this profession is greater than in others. What can I do? I can't escape. The only thing to do is to be very careful to use condoms and to use them carefully. The worse thing is men who are drunk and aren't satisfied unless they remove the condom.

A young Bamar sex worker in a China border town

All my customers in Rangoon used condoms. Only one or two didn't. Here in this China border town, most customers don't.

A young Bamar sex worker in a China border town

My friend's girlfriend used to work as a prostitute. She got infected. My friend went to see her everyday, and we couldn't stop him. The girl has HIV, and now my friend has also been infected with HIV. He is only about nineteen or twenty years old. He is Shan. The girl is Chinese-Shan. She is very thin and there are bumps on her face. When we took our friend to the hospital, the doctor told us quite bluntly that he had the disease. After he had taken the test at the hospital, the rest of us (three friends) went to take blood tests too. We did it at the hospital. We found that another friend also had the HIV virus. We didn't have to pay for the tests. The doctor talked to the person who had the disease, and gave him some counselling. He warned him not to indulge in "bad" (sexual) activities.

An 18 year-old Bamar policeman along the Myanmar-China border

Family, friends and community members are increasingly dying of AIDS and many of those dying are young people.

I don't know what is wrong with young people nowadays. They are not healthy. Many of them in our village are ill and some of them are dying. When we were young, we visited old people to ask about their health. Now, the old people visit the young people to ask about their health.

A 60 year-old female in Mon State near the Thai border

There are many people suffering from AIDS along the China-Myanmar border. One woman got AIDS from her husband. He was a drug addict. The wife died four months ago in a local Myanmar hospital along the China border. One of my friends also died of AIDS at the age of twenty. He used to frequent brothels a lot. He got thinner and thinner gradually. The hospital said he died of tuberculosis.

A 23 year-old Shan female from Northern Shan State near the China border

When I was working in the Pharkant Mine, many people died of AIDS. Doctors could not give treatment to these people. Some doctors gave the AIDS patients some medicine and instructed them not to come again. My friend died of AIDS after six months. One of the women from our town, Lashio, got HIV/AIDS in Pharkant and died in Lashio. She used to be a teacher in Lashio high school, and came to work at Pharkant.

A 30 year-old Indian-Shan male living along the Myanmar-China border

I know a little bit about AIDS. My brother had the AIDS virus. The symptoms were that he got thinner day-by-day. Not so longer afterwards, he died. Before he died, he wanted me to go to the hospital and check if I had it. At the beginning I didn't want to go. He said again if something happens who will come to help? Who will pay for the cure? My brother talked to me like this always. So I decided to go to the hospital. I went to see the doctor at the hospital and was told I am HIV positive. The doctor gave me an appointment for an injection, but I didn't go. The fee was 200 baht. My brother paid for that before he died. In the meantime, my symptoms are normal. It is nothing. After that, I let my father and mother know. They accept me even though I have AIDS. They don't loathe me. They encourage me also.

A participatory observation with a Shan male youth from Shan State living along the Thai border

Three people died of AIDS last month in my village. There are still some other people with AIDS. Among my friends who went abroad to work like me, there aren't many left. Many have died of AIDS.

A 25 year-old male returnee from Thailand in Kayin State

Many of us Lahu go to work in restaurants, karaoke bars and massage parlours. Some of us come back very sick and die. Some disappear. We do not know what causes their deaths. We lack education and the situation is terrible. A young Lahu male from Myanmar who works making charcoal along the Thai border

One of our friends was infected with AIDS and through him his wife and whole family were infected and have died from this disease. The children were all under five years old. They all died within the past five months. Another friend just found out he is infected with AIDS. He is not even twenty years old.

A focus group discussion with male and female Shan youth 16-22 years old along the China-Myanmar border

I do not have any knowledge about health and I don't know about sexually transmitted diseases. I do know a little about AIDS because there are currently four AIDS patients in our community.

A 17 year-old Akha female from Myanmar living along the Thai border

There were many participants in this study who had heard of HIV/AIDS, but did not understand its transmission and progression. In fact, there was limited or no knowledge regarding sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) with extensive misinformation about these infections among young persons as well as their family and community members.

I have heard about sexual diseases but I don't know anything about it because it is not discussed in our village and no one comes and explains it to us. I have only heard its name, venereal disease and AIDS. I do not know what it is. I don't know its symptoms and don't understand how to protect against it. I don't know about gonorrhoea also, and how one gets infected. Some people die from unknown causes. They believe that a bad spirit went into their body and killed them.

A young Shan male from Myanmar unemployed along the Thai border

I've heard of it. Many people fear AIDS more than anything because it's fatal and we don't know how to prevent it.

A 47 year-old Shan male merchant in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I only heard the name of AIDS. We are villagers doing farming. We have no television or radio. How can we get information?

A married Lahu male with five children from Myanmar living along the Thai border

I don't know anything about venereal disease and AIDS, I only heard a little from other people. I don't even know what the disease really is. Why people are so interested to talk about it? I also would like to know more about it and how to get a chance to learn more about it.

A married Shan male with two children from Shan State living along the Thai border

I have heard about venereal disease but I have never been infected. I have seen other people who have been infected with AIDS and died. But, I still don't know how to protect myself to avoid these diseases.

A married Shan female with two children from Shan State living along the Thai border

I have no idea about venereal diseases or AIDS. I don't know the symptoms or how it happens because I don't read Thai. There should be a way to protect ourselves from the disease. But, no one comes to teach or explain it to us.

A 23 year-old Pa-O female from Shan State living along the Thai border

People with the same body temperature can transmit it to each other, but people with different body temperatures can't.

A 20 year-old Akha male in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

It can be transmitted from the toilet, cups/glasses that an infected person has used. Don't touch his chopsticks either. It can be transmitted through the atmosphere and a person's scent too. Women can live for ten years after contracting it, men for only five.

A 20 year-old Shan male merchant in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I don't know much about HIV/AIDS because I only have relationships with 'genuine' girlfriends. I don't need to worry about the disease. I know exactly what kind of girls I should choose. A 20 year-old Kayin male in Kayin State living along the Thai border

The whole village says my daughter has AIDS but that is not true. You have to be a prostitute to have AIDS. My daughter wasn't working as a prostitute.

The mother of a 22 year-old married female who returned from Thailand and tested HIV positive in Mon State

Friends have skin diseases and lots of itching around the male sexual organ. None of us knows the cause of this problem. A focus group discussion among Shan males ages 19-23 years old along the China-Myanmar border

The doctor has come to talk and explain about AIDS. Now, I understand a little. For sexually transmitted diseases, I don't understand yet. A 28 year-old female Han Chinese migrant from Xishuangbanna living along the Thai border

I know a little about HIV/AIDS because Thailand has good publications that give a lot of information and we can also get it from the television. In Shan State, it is hard to get any information. Even here in Thailand only those who have high levels of education can know about it. The Shan people generally do not know about HIV/AIDS.

A 25 year-old Shan male mechanic from Shan State in Chiangmai town

In all areas, misconceptions on the transmission of HIV and how to deal with those already found HIV positive or with full-blown AIDS was common. Often this leads to discriminatory attitudes and responses towards those infected and their families.

I knew about AIDS because my close friend died of AIDS. He was a Bamar migrant worker. When his wife had health problems, nurses from Mandalay hospital warned her not to have a sexual relationship with her husband. But they did not listen. First, the wife died of AIDS in Mandalay, and then the husband died along the China-Myanmar border. When he became ill his relatives took care of him. But friends did not come to visit because they were scared of HIV transmission. Their daughter is five years old now and living with us as part of our family. Our family worries about her health.

An 18 year-old Palaung male student living along the Myanmar-China border

In my family, one person has died from AIDS. He could not eat and work. He had a thin body and one week later he passed away. When we knew, he had the AIDS virus, we moved him to stay in the garden because we were afraid. So, we built a small hut for him to stay until he passed away. A participatory observation with a Shan youth from Shan State living along the Thai border

Since being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and having an abortion, I have lost a lot of blood and weight. I am weak. I bought some medicine and follow the doctor's advice, but I am not feeling better. I feel like I am dead though alive. A lot of people hate me.

A young Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

The community has rejected us. I sell a-thoke sone (rice salad) at the school, but now nobody buys and eats it anymore. They're afraid of getting infected. A twenty-two year-old female who tested HIV positive living in Mon State near the Thai border

In our village a doctor gave a blood transfusion to a female patient from a well-to-do family. He took this blood from prison. When this woman did not recover, they tested her and found the AIDS virus. Her husband blamed her and divorced her. The doctor moved his clinic because of this problem. A 26 year-old Shan-Kachin female from Northern Shan State near the China border

Since I got better we have had relations again. We are husband and wife. We do it without condoms. We have never used condoms in the past and we don't use them now. Why should we? A 22 year-old married female returnee to Mon State who has tested positive for HIV

I am not strong and always sick because of HIV/AIDS. I am getting thin. My daughter also has HIV/AIDS and found out when she was five months pregnant. Both her and her husband are infected. My daughter had an abortion, but now they are worried about their five year-old daughter who is starting kindergarten. None of us can work. So, my husband decided to smuggle amphetamines to Bangkok last month. We are that desperate. I am so afraid that people will find out that I am infected by HIV/AIDS. I don't know who to tell. I am afraid of the gossip. I just worry and stay like this.

A married Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

There are two orphans in our ward. Their father and mother were my friends. They died of AIDS this month (September 1999). The two daughters are six and eight years old. Their relatives do not live with these girls because they are scared of the disease. So, they (the relatives) hired a housemaid to care for these children.

An 18 year-old Bamar male migrant worker at furniture shop along the Myanmar-China border

I had a boyfriend after I got back. It turned out that he was after my money, though, so I broke up with him. Then I thought about all the money he'd already tricked out of me and decided that with no land of my own, I'd better try to get some of it back. When I asked for my money, he said I'd infected him with some disease and he had used the money to seek treatment. The truth is, he didn't want to return my money. When I got back, villagers said that I'd got everything, said

I'd sold my body while abroad, said I should take responsibility for bringing the disease to the village.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

In that family, the father died from TB, but the other villagers said that he died from HIV/AIDS. Actually, the father died because he is a farmer and he used chemicals to kill the bugs on the farm. In that period, the doctor always suggested not to use the chemicals again. He suffered from the constant use of the chemicals without any protection and it was dangerous to his health. He did not care what the doctor said, and he finally died. His boy does not go to school. He has to help his mother to work everyday. He has no friends. No one wants to talk to him because the other villagers believe that everyone in his family is infected with HIV/AIDS.

A 20 year-old Shan male from Shan State working on an orange plantation along the Thai border

Often times the response to HIV/AIDS by health providers, community members and peers support these misconceptions and responses.

Many men used heroin in our town. I also used it once. But I gave it up and came to work along the China border. There were many drug users who died of AIDS in our town. But when a man dies nobody mentions that he died of AIDS. They usually say he died of TB or malaria. They feel ashamed to say their family member died of AIDS.

A 24 year-old Kachin male living in Northern Shan State along the China border

Some customers use condoms and some don't. Chinese doctors usually come to this China border town and give blood tests. The boss is also given a test. Blood tests are given at the police station here in the China border town. If we have AIDS, they send us back to Myanmar. We always hide somewhere to avoid this test.

A 27 year-old Bamar female sex worker in a China border town

Of course I know about AIDS. My friends know, too. But they don't care very much. Sometimes they use condoms. Sometimes they don't. I've only heard about people with AIDS. I've never seen anyone.

An 18 year-old urban youth in Kayin State

I don't exactly know how it spreads. I've heard of HIV. I think it happens to people who have relations with "bad women". It can also happen when you take drugs. Also blood transfusions. I have heard of condoms. I saw them once when some people distributed them at a football match.

A 26 year-old male in Kayin State near the Thai border

When migrants return they have to go for blood tests. There was one who tested positive, but as soon as he was told, he ran away. We had to try and bring him back. When asked why he ran away, he said he had heard that those with HIV infection were killed after receiving fatal injections.

A health worker in Kayin State near the Thai border

The quacks [untrained local doctors] don't use disposable needles. They use only one needle/syringe and immerse it in hot water before an injection.

A 30 year-old Mon in Mon State near the Thai border

A couple became infected with HIV/AIDS and developed bumps and sores all over their bodies. People started to avoid them. They became outcasts. Personally I think a complete eradication to wipe out the disease would be a good idea.

A male health worker in Kayin State near the Thai border

Some young people knew HIV/AIDS as a type of sexually transmitted infection, but believed there were cures for it. Many people have made big profits from this belief.

My mother has approached a traditional healer. For a complete cure, it will cost 130,000 kyat. We are thinking it over.

A 28 year-old Mon male returnee from Thailand whose 19 year-old brother is HIV positive

I heard that you have to pay 30,000 kyat for a portion of the preparation. Recently, I've heard that a preparation called 'lingzee' can cure AIDS and some are taking the treatment.

A 32 year-old Kayin female health worker in a Kayin village near the Thai border

About two weeks ago, the Diamond Company came to our village and advertised their medicine made from the pollen of flowers. They claimed that it could cure all diseases. It could even cure AIDS if it is still in the early stages. One packet of medicine costs 87,000 kyat. One packet lasts for one month.

A 36 year-old Bamar female from Mon State near the Thai border

There are many people trying to fight the spread of HIV and counsel those with the infection, but there are limited resources and channels for communication.

Condoms are available free of charge at our centre. But, nobody wants to take them.

A staff at the Maternal and Child Health Centre in Kayin State near the Thai border

When people come to me for tests, I tell them about AIDS to scare them. Only those who are well off come for HIV/AIDS tests. Most of them are pregnant women. Some men come for tests because their girlfriends insist. If someone is tested positive, I give him advice and tell him to be careful not to pass it on to others, and to take supplementary vitamins. Within the past two years I have seen an increasing number of HIV cases. Some don't even dare to take blood tests. I've tested about one hundred people who had come back from Thailand. About forty were tested positive. They contracted it over there and spread the disease here. It mostly happens to people in their twenties or thirties.

A health worker in Kayin State near the Thai border

There were those few who did understand about HIV/AIDS and STDs but were unable to take the precautions necessary to avoid infection.

My brothel owner tells us to use them (condoms), but he also says we've got to keep the customer satisfied. We're given condoms, but whether the customer uses them or not depends on him. The cost of condoms is subtracted from our earnings. I'm afraid of getting pregnant and use them most of the time. Needless to say, I always trick them, saying I'm sick. Most people are afraid (of contracting STD). However, there are still many who won't use condoms. Maybe they're not afraid of getting sick. A young Bamar sex worker in a China border town

My husband went to Bangkok to work and somebody said he liked to visit prostitutes. He said he went for a blood test and found that he was HIV positive. But, without any symptoms I didn't know. He still was strong. When he finally had AIDS then I knew. I am now positive and living like this because I have no education. I can only write my name. A conversation during participatory observation with a female from Shan State living in a Thai border town

The following are examples of the health care options and choices those in this study identified. The responses below highlight the perspectives, limitations and opportunities available to migrant children and youth, their families and the wider community.

There is no public health service in any of the four villages around here. There are no rural health centres or health workers either. For minor illnesses, the villagers use traditional cures and for serious health problems they go to the China-Myanmar border or China for treatment. A focus group discussion with youth from four Shan villages in Northern Shan State near the China border

I was sick when I was working on the farm gathering the paddy. I bought a pack of medicine and the pills were green. After I took the pills for three days, I felt worse and I couldn't work. The symptoms still are present and I feel drunk all the time. A 25 year-old Shan female from Shan State working along the Thai border

Almost every village has a 'pa-yaw-ga saya' (spiritual healer). There are also ex-military quacks. Nine out of ten houses first go to 'pa-yaw-ga saya' for treatment when they get ill. They are afraid of being given medicine and injections at the clinic. Only when the 'pa-yaw-ga saya' fails to give relief do they go to the health centre. They want to take large doses at once for an instant cure, and they want 'the big bottle' [an intravenous injection or drip] to be hung up for quick relief. I've been working here for just over a year. The previous health worker didn't stay in the village. She only visited it once a week. Instead of giving injections for three days in succession, she would give one strong dose in just one injection. Now I have to suffer because of the habits and understandings she created among the villagers. There is only one health centre for a population of over 8,000. I am

the only health worker, so how can I manage?

A 39 year-old

Shan female health worker in Northern Shan State near the China border

If they (villagers) feel sick, they will practise traditional cures. For example, when they suffer from malaria, they apply coconut oil on their neck, back and arms and then rub hard with coins or empty beer tins. There is at least one quack in every village. Most of them are former soldiers from the army. Some come to me for contraceptive injections. Some go to China to get Norplant, abortions or other medical treatment.

A 37 year-old Shan female health worker in Northern Shan State near the China border

Some villagers have the patient's spirit called back if they are sick or even after he gets out of the hospital. The ritual involves a sickle, egg, rice, salt, string and a bowl. An old person dances around with the sickle while another counts the rice in the bowl. If the number of rice grains is even then the spirit can be called back, if odd then it can't. When the spirit is called back, the patient's hands are tied with the string, the doors of his house shut tight and traditional scriptures are read.

A Shan male village leader in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

They asked me to be a veterinarian in 1981 and to inoculate people in 1983. In 1993 the township clinic trained me for about a week. In 1996 I received three months of training at the provincial hospital. Therefore, I cure what I can and if I cannot cure a disease, I will send the patient to the township clinic via motorcycle.

A Xishuangbanna village health provider near the Myanmar border

I am sick from malaria. I am afraid to go to the hospital because I can't speak Thai. Nobody will accompany me there. I am also afraid of being arrested by the police. I have no identification card and I also have no money. I just stay like this. One day, I was told to go the small Shan clinic in Fang district that is free and I don't have to pay for the medicine either. So, I went there and got some medicine. I hope I will get well soon. The Shan doctor there is very kind and takes care of the patients very well. There are many Shan who are sick with malaria and some die from it.

A 28 year-old Shan male from Shan State working on a farm on the Thai border

People here want to get instant relief when they're sick. They don't like treatment in stages. I usually give a milder medication at the beginning. But the people want an immediate cure. The quacks usually promise them instant relief and give treatment. There are many quacks in the village.

A 24 year-old Kayin health worker in Mon State near the Thai border

Once while I was working abroad a friend of mine got sick. I thought it was a minor illness and just bought some medicine for it, but his condition got worse and worse. Finally I took him to the hospital, but they asked for household registration and other documentation that I didn't have. The doctor asked for a down payment, but I couldn't afford it. I asked my boss for money but he said he

didn't have any. I was totally discouraged. I could do nothing but wait for my friend to die of this illness.

A 24 year-old Palaung male returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

The majority of participants explained that lack of money was the major obstacle to accessing available health services.

Every Sunday at the market, there will be some soldiers and police to guard doctors who volunteer to treat poor villagers. There are so many people from the other side of the border, especially Shan who come to buy some goods from Thailand. None of them can speak Thai and they can't communicate with the doctors. I saw children with many strange diseases. Some have big heads but small figures, other with elephantiasis, malaria and dengue fever. Some of them have yellow eyes, skin and very skinny, weak legs and arms. It is such chaos on these market days because doctors cannot handle them all. I think there are more people who come for treatment than to buy goods.

A 41 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

For me, I haven't got any health problems. When I didn't feel well I bought myself some medicine. The problem is my youngest child. He has TB and I took him to the hospital. The doctor wanted 3,000 baht and I had no money so I just took him home. I don't know if he will feel better.

A Palaung male from Shan State with seven children working as a farmer along the Thai border

We are all healthy except my mother who needs an operation because she has a tumour. We have no relatives to help and so we had to take a loan of 10,000 baht from other people. Later on, she got sick again and I took her to the hospital. It cost quite a lot of money and we couldn't pay. So, we had to sneak her out of the hospital because we couldn't afford the bill. The staff there doesn't take care of us because we are not Thai and they know we do not have health care coverage.

A 25 year-old Shan male farmer from Shan State working along the Thai border

People are not healthy this year. Some of them got sick from dengue fever, malaria and diarrhoea. Most villagers' problem is money. The government has tried to help but it didn't work as they only sent some doctors to give us vaccinations and health check-ups. When we get sick we go to the public health station about seven kilometres away or to the provincial hospital forty-three kilometres away.

A 41 year-old Lisu male farmer from Myanmar living along the Thai border

My wife gave birth at home with help from the mid-wife. We have a daughter. When she was pregnant, I never took her to the hospital because we had no money. We had a hard time earning a living. After two years, she was pregnant again so we started to discuss about sterilisation. But, we did not have enough money so we had to borrow some from our friends.

A married Shan male from Shan State with two children living along the Thai border

If a person doesn't have money and can't afford the treatment, he dies. Only if he has money will the doctors treat him, even the quack doctors. A focus group discussion at a rural health centre in Kayin State near the Thai border

In addition, lack of documentation was also a determinant factor in accessing health services.

The permanent residents with house registration papers usually have no problems, but those without these papers live in poor housing with no sanitation. Therefore, there are a lot of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever that spread easily. It is very difficult for people to protect themselves, even against polio, which has long disappeared from Thailand. It is still present here among these people. It will take a lot of government money to provide health prevention. A Thai male doctor working along the Thai border with migrant communities

There is no problem for people who have cards in the community. But, for migrants without documents, there are a lot of struggles. When they get sick, they usually consult the head of the family or friends. Most of them got sick from malaria or dengue fever, elephantiasis, skin diseases, as well as AIDS. We go to the health station about eleven kilometres away or to the provincial hospital about eighteen kilometres away. Thai people are quite welcomed there but those without documents are not.

A village headman living with migrants from Myanmar along the Thai border

The people who are poor or those who have no identity card face terrible problems when they are sick. Some villagers are afraid to go to the hospital or the health centre, because they have no identity card, no money and don't know how to communicate in the Thai language, if there is no one to accompany them. The immigrants are afraid to go out. They never go anywhere to avoid arrest.

A 65 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

There are about five hundred patients monthly. Most of them were sick from bronchitis because they work as labourers. They are poor, homeless and without any documentation. Sometimes they have no money to pay for the treatment and so I don't know what to do. Sometimes, the employer dropped them right in front of the station and they were dying so I had to cure them. Sometimes, we couldn't get in touch with their relatives or parents. Doctors have to deal with all these things, which makes them get so frustrated.

A Thai female health provider along the Thai border with Myanmar

There were two sites along the Thai border with Myanmar where migrants were able to access health services regardless of documentation. Consequently, health among the migrants in these areas had markedly improved, according to participants.

In the rainy season, people face many health problems such as colds and fever. In the summer, malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid are common. Most villagers are healthy now because they can go to the health centre or hospital about six kilometres away. The service there is better than before and everybody can get treatment.

An 18 year-old Shan male from Shan State married with one child living along the Thai border

In the past, we had a male doctor at the nearby public health station. He was never in and he was very rude to us. Some children said the doctor said they were stupid like buffalo. When people got sick they did not want to go there. Now we have a new beautiful and kind doctor. Most of the patients are Shan, Chinese, Lisu, Pa-O, Palaung and some local Thai people. If the sickness is not too serious, we don't have to go to the hospital. The doctor is very kind. We are happy and seem to get well very soon too.

A focus group discussion among community members from Shan State living along the Thai border

4.7. Education

Along all the borders, most of the migrant children did not attend school and among those who did only a very few finished primary school. For example, in Northern Shan State one study found that only a third of rural children and a half of urban children who had enrolled actually completed the primary level of schooling.⁶⁶ Similarly, another study found high illiteracy rates in Thailand among migrants from Myanmar. According to this study, in Chiangmai Province 38 percent of the female migrants from Myanmar had never received any schooling whatsoever, and the equivalent rate among male migrants from Myanmar was 12 percent.⁶⁷

On this orange farm, children can't go to school or study. Like them, my child also has no school to attend. There are more than 20 children on this farm who are very interested to study. They are waiting for somebody who can teach them. When they were in Shan State, I used to be the volunteer teacher for a period of time. At the time, most Shan children couldn't study. The only ones who could study were those who were rich and stayed in town. Those who stayed in the country or border areas, especially those, who were orphaned, had no chance to study.

A Shan male from Shan State working on an orange plantation along the Thai border

In a village along the Northern Shan State border with China, there are a total of sixty-five students in the first year, but by the eighth standard there are only fifteen students remaining.

⁶⁶ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. Department of Planning and Statistics. MoH and UNICEF. 1997

⁶⁷ Caouette, T., Archavanitkul, K. & Pyne, H.H. (2000). *Sexuality, Reproductive Health and Violence: Experiences of Migrants from Burma in Thailand*. Bangkok: Institute for Population and Social Research, of Mahidol University.

Team participatory observation with key informant in Northern Shan State

While visiting a school for migrant children along the Thai border with Myanmar, the classrooms for the first grade were very large with nearly 60 students. The number of students slowly decreased with each year, as students left to find work. By fifth standard, only five students were left and of them three were planning to leave for jobs that week. The headmaster explained that the school does not teach the sixth grade because there are no students.

Team participatory observation along the Thai border with Myanmar

We do not go to school. When our parents go to work, we just have to play at the workers' dormitory till they come back. A conversation during participatory observation with young migrant children from Myanmar in a factory along the Thai border

I have no friends at all. There is no one who wants to play with me. Everybody hates me. As for education, I am already grown up now. I used to be jealous of other children who went to school. But now I don't care. I do feel shy though when other people make fun of me.

A 12 year-old Shan boy from Shan State living along the Thai border

Even though Thailand recently announced a policy to allow undocumented children to attend Thai schools, the policy is not consistently implemented. This study found few migrant children along the border in school. Those who did attend school were unable to receive certification of their studies due to their lack of documentation, which consequently limits their opportunities for further education.

Nowadays, I use the family document to attend school. The teacher has agreed to admit me with this kind of ID card into school until I finish high school. If I want to study further or to attend university, I have to be a Thai citizen. For me, I really would like to study beyond high school, but I don't know how to deal with this problem. So, whenever I talk about this problem, I feel so sad because I do not have the same rights as other people.

A 14 year-old Kachin female from Kachin State living along the Thai border

Displacement and frequent relocations, as well as lack of documentation were major reasons given for the inability to send children to school.

The people from our village were relocated from the hills and are especially poor – they struggle for basic needs. So they can't afford to send their children to school. They don't have any land for farming so they have to work for others.

A 20 year-old Shan female in Northern Shan State living along the China border

For those who just fled to Thailand they have no opportunity to study because they are poor and have no identification card. When they have free time, the

children help their parents or relatives work. These children who come from Burma are not free to play like Thai children. A participatory observation with Shan children from Myanmar along the Thai border

Economic hardship was another major determinant factor for whether children were able to attend school, the level of their attendance rates while in school and how many years they were able to study.

I have three children. I sent them to school along the China-Myanmar border but now I cannot afford their education costs. There were many expenses at school along the China-Myanmar border, such as monthly fees and other fees. In the China border town, children can attend tuition in Chinese language, Myanmar language, English, mathematics and the tuition fee is only 50 yuan per subject. A 30 year-old Bamar male working as a gem broker in a China border town.

I come from a poor family. I started school at nine. Unfortunately, I didn't get beyond third grade. I was a bad student and the teacher wasn't so good either. I often had to learn by myself, without any guidance from the teacher, so I wasn't able to keep up.

A 26 year-old Palaung returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

As long as I can remember, my parents and I lived in the fields. When I was eleven, my father sent me to the village to go to school. My parents didn't often go to the village while I was at school. My father brought me to stay at my aunt's house and he sent grain to feed me plus fifteen yuan a month. I had to quit school before fourth grade. Actually, I really didn't want to drop out, I just didn't have a choice. My parents were in poor health, so I had to quit school. A 24 year-old Palaung female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I left school because of my family's financial problems. I was a good student. But the school kept collecting money for this or that all the time, so I got fed up. My mother couldn't pay these fees. My father worked on a transport vehicle. The family income was barely enough. When I got to the tenth standard, I couldn't afford private tutors, so I failed the exam. The next day, I left school and went to stay with my grandfather. I helped him to sell groceries.

A 22 year-old male Muslim returnee from China to Mon State

I'm a community health worker. My husband is a fisherman. We have six children. The oldest boy doesn't go to school. The second boy left school in the third standard. The third child, a daughter, left school when she was in the second standard. The fourth child, a boy, doesn't go to school. Neither does the girl below him. The youngest boy has started attending school this year. He is six years old. The older children dropped out because of financial difficulties.

A 40 year-old female community health worker in Mon State near the Thai border

Since I came to Thailand, I don't have many problems, but the children do. Apart from not attending school, they don't even have clothes to wear like the other children and I really worry about their future.

A focus group discussion with Shan youth from Myanmar living along the Thai border

Among three children, only one can go to school because we are poor and do not have enough income, so the other two stay at home with their parents. The children have to work every day except when they are too sick. Then, the children have no money to spend and sometimes they are very hungry. To do construction work and support four or five persons is not easy.

A 71 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

Hopes for my children's education seem to be just a dream for parents such as me because our poverty kills the blooming flower. We, the parents, are well aware of this. But we have no idea what to do. There is no vocational training for the young people either and this makes me worry for the future of my children. In addition, many children are being lured by drugs.

A 36 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State living along the Thai border

In many communities along the border there are no schools, or those available are impossible to reach for children and their families.

There has never been a school in this village. Students would have to go very far and the road is usually muddy or flooded and not very accessible. Nobody in our village has even passed the fourth standard.

A focus group discussion with Shan male and female youth from Northern Shan State near the China border

When I was ten years old, because our family lived in the field, I went to the village to go to the school and lived with my grandma there. I really missed my mamma and papa, and I didn't concentrate on my studies or listen to what the teacher was saying. I really didn't want to go to school; after third grade I stopped going to school and returned home.

A 20 year-old Palaung female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

People here are not highly educated and have very little knowledge. They don't have much health education either. It's because they leave school as soon as they're old enough to work. It's a waste of time going to school and there are no teachers. That's why they try to find enough money to pay for their trip to the other side. If they don't have the amount for transportation, they borrow it and go.

A focus group discussion among leaders of a Kayin village in Kayin State near the Thai border

There is no school in our village. Children have to go to the nearby village fifteen minutes' away to attend school. There is a primary school there. In the rainy season, however, some parents are worried because the children have to cross the stream to attend school, so they don't send them to school.

A 60 year-old male Kayin pastor in Mon State

Before working here, I studied until fourth standard. I was able to read and write Burmese. I speak Kayin but cannot write it. In my village, there is no school to teach Kayin. After I finished the fourth standard, my father died and my elder brother, elder sister and myself had to drop out of school.

An 18 year-old Kayin female from Kayin State living along the Thai border

Language is another barrier to education for migrant children. The majority of the migrants are from ethnic minority populations and are not fluent in their national language. In addition, few migrants ever become competent in the national language across borders.

I started school at nine. I didn't feel like continuing because I couldn't speak Chinese and couldn't learn how to read and write it. I just couldn't concentrate, so I returned home to take care of my little brother.

A 23 year-old Palaung female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Many school children drop out when they're in the second or third standard. They can only read the spelling of Myanmar language, but they don't understand the meaning. There are two teachers. One teacher is Bamar and the other is Palaung. The Myanmar teacher was transferred from Central Myanmar. Some children don't understand their lessons. They can be heard reading aloud in the language they don't understand. In addition, they have to cross the river by boat everyday to go to school.

Focus group discussion with Shan female youth from Northern Shan State near the China border

I saw the place where the adult non-formal education is held. The school was so old and almost destroyed. No one cleaned the school and the grass was overgrown all around the school area. There were only two to three chairs, one blackboard in front of the room. The teacher explained that non-formal education is voluntary and depends on the interest of each person. Now, there are ninety students of which sixty students are in the elementary level. Most of them are Shan, Kachin and Lahu. These students know how useful education is. They try to study and learn by themselves. But there is a communication problem between the teacher and students. The students can't understand what the teacher has explained. The teacher always speaks in the local Thai language. This is an ongoing difficulty for them.

A Thai female teacher working with migrant children along the Thai border

If we look at ourselves it seems that our communities easily believe whatever others say. We look like tall grass or bamboo and whatever direction the wind blows, we follow that way. Sometimes we are even forced to work for others because we have no education.

A Shan male from Shan State married with four children living along the Thai border

Other obstacles to education noted by participants in this study were taxation and lack of early childhood care.

Sometimes when the authorities ask me to collect funds for this and that, the students don't bring the money. They stay away from school. Then I have to pay for them out of my own pocket. We can't collect more than 50 kyat from each student. When we have to collect fees for this and that, I get fed up. Either I have to pay for them or they are absent for three days. After three days of absence, I have to start teaching all over again. That way we never finish the course book.

A 26 year-old female primary school teacher Kayin State near the Thai border

I left school when I was in the first standard. I only learned to write my name just before leaving for Mae Sot. I was afraid of not being able to write or sign my own name. As far as my education is concerned, the only word I can write is my name. I wanted to go to school when I was very young. My mother wouldn't let me attend school. She said I had to look after my younger brother.

An 18 year-old Bamar female returnee in Kayin State near the Thai border

When my sons and daughters first moved to Thailand, they did not want to study. Most of them were interested in agriculture. Until now, there is only one son who attended school. However, he decided to drop out of school when he was in grade five to look after his younger brother.

A Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

I started school at nine and studied through third standard. After that, I didn't feel like studying. I got bad grades and anyway I had to take care of my little brother. I went home to take care of my brother for two years and worked with my parents for two years. Then I heard that working in Thailand is a lot of fun. So, I went.

A 16 year-old Palaung male returnee
from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Temples offer education opportunities, but these are largely available only to male children and youth.

The monk at a temple in the capital city teaches a lot of orphans and poor children. They have very little opportunities. There are around 80 boys who attend this temple school. The abbot organises the studies and has responsibility for all of them.

A monk of Lahu ethnicity from Myanmar living along the Thai border

There are thirty-five to forty students. There are novices [boy monks]. Most of the novices have no parents here in Thailand. They have no identification card; even the elder monks are all from Burma and living here illegally.

A participatory observation at a temple along the Thai border with Myanmar

I am Shan born in Shan State of Burma and single. I have never been to school, but used to be a novice in the Shan monastery. There I learned Shan and basic Pali. Now I study night classes at the temple from Monday to Friday, the classes are open for the adult learners, from 6 to 8 p.m.

A 25 year-old Shan male married with two children working as a vehicle repairman in Chiangmai town

Not so long ago, the official in the district would come up with the new constitution stating that if a child does not have any identification card or document or the permission of staying in the Kingdom of Thailand, they cannot become a monk. Now the monks always quote this and migrant boys can no longer study at the temples as before.

A participatory observation at a temple along the Thai border with Myanmar

Many parents reported that when migrating they left their children with grandparents or other relatives in order that they may study. Consequently, many parents are separated from their children for a number of years and even lose contact with them, as a result of their constant mobility and difficulties in communication.

When he was four years old, we sent him back to stay with his grandparents. He stayed with them for two years. He did not like being far away from us and so he came back to live with us again. I want my child to stay with me also. But, next year we will send him back to Burma to study there again. A 28 year-old married Kayin female from Kayin State with four children living along the Thai border

There is no school for migrant children from Burma to study. The only ones that they can attend are very expensive. Their parents work as daily paid employees and cannot afford such high school fees. Some families send their children back to study in Burma and some leave their children with the neighbours who are jobless to look after them.

A 19 year-old Mon-Kayin male from Myanmar working along the Thai border

The grandparents send children to school because their parents have gone to Thailand to work. When they grow up, the children go across the border themselves to work. They go when they can start working. Parents can afford to send children to school while they're still in primary school. But, when they get to middle or high school, it becomes a problem. Parents can no longer afford the fees and other costs. Besides, there are very few teachers in our region.

A 16 year-old Kayin girl from Kayin State near the Thai border

I am so worried about my daughter. She is only seven years old. She is in the first grade now and staying back in my hometown while I work here in Thailand. I don't want to leave my child right now. She is still very young and I want to take care of her. But, I also want to stay here to work for another three years.

A Shan female married from Shan State living along the Thai border

My mother wants me to go to Bangkok to work, but I want to continue my studies. I don't want to be a sex worker. I just finished the sixth standard. I have no money for school registration and textbooks. Now the school will open and the fees and textbooks might be more than 700 baht. The informal school is only open on Saturday. A young Shan girl from Shan State living along the Thai border

For some permanent border residents, primary schools were available, but continuing education was considered almost impossible.

In our village, there are over 1,000 households and the total population is about 10,000. There are three primary schools in our village and most students drop out after finishing their primary school. Only ten students could continue their education in town.

A 50 year-old Shan male leader in Northern Shan State along the China border

We have four hundred students and four government-appointed teachers in our village middle school. The majority of students are girls. Most of them cannot go to the China-Myanmar border for higher education. Boys normally go to monasteries for their education in Bhamo.

A 45 year-old Shan male village leader living along the Myanmar-China border

But even among those who could study, formal education does not always lead to a good life.

Education is useless and expensive. Most jobs are occupied by Han Chinese, so making the effort to get good grades and stay in school is pointless. Anyway, people marry young here, so the children themselves aren't willing to pursue an education.

A young male returnee from Thailand in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

After returning from school, I stayed home and took care of my parents. Going out everyday to work in the fields was pretty hard. I had to think of some other way, so I thought of going to Thailand to make money to repay my parents for raising me. Just when I was thinking about going, a classmate wrote a letter saying I'd passed the entrance exam and could go to middle school. But, I didn't go. At the time, it was the general rule for us children to go and work in Thailand. And so I went and didn't continue my studies.

A 21 year-old Palaung male returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Young people here have a low level of education. They go to school but don't learn anything. There aren't many teachers in schools anymore. The teachers themselves go up to Thailand. When the young people come of age, they all leave. When they're about thirteen or fifteen years old they leave for Thailand. They envy the others. They see how those who come back spend money lavishly. When they think they're old enough to work, they go.

A 16 year-old Kayin girl in Kayin State near the Thai border

If things get difficult here, I'll go too. Formal education is of no use. If you can speak Thai, you're considered a 'master.' Once there, no matter how skilled or educated you are, you have to regard the person who arrived in Thailand earlier as your 'master'. A 15 year-old Kayin boy from Kayin State near the Thai border

I have just graduated and somebody told me to apply for further study and offered to pay for my school fees. But, I won't further my studies because my family is not ready for me to continue with my education. My father is very old and I do not want him to work hard for me. I would like to earn money for my family, therefore, I applied for a teaching job and studied by mail. I got a monthly salary of 500 baht that was enough for snacks only. So, I came to work in Thailand.

A 20 year-old Mon female from Myanmar working in a factory along the Thai border

The value of education as perceived by parents has changed. Many parents are encouraging their children to go and find practical life experiences that would better prepare them for their future rather than encouraging them to advance their studies.

Many children drop out in the fifth or sixth standard. For them, it's more important to have money or gold than to have an education. Their parents point out that all they will get is a little more than a thousand kyat once they graduate and become government employees. So education is slowly disappearing. In our time, our parents would give us a proper education as a form of inheritance.

A 32 year-old female Kayin teacher in Mon State near the Thai border

Young parents don't support their children to continue their studies beyond primary school. They want them to go to the towns to find work. When the children send some money back, the parents will be proud of them and say how very clever they are. They go around the village and show off what their children have done. This makes other children lose interest in their studies and other parents to forget about the value of education. Now, few parents encourage education. A 41 year-old Lisu male from Myanmar living along the Thai border

There are students who are very keen on education. But, some parents are either too poor or don't see the value of education. They only want their children to go to work when they are thirteen years of age.

A 22 year-old female Pa-O teacher in Kayin State near the Thai border

Some leave school in the fifth or sixth standard. It's because the Mons here are farmers. They believe that even if a person passes the tenth standard, it's of no use. Because of the present education system, it doesn't make a difference. They send their children to school until the fifth standard just to learn enough to be literate, then they make the children work in the field or herd cows. A 45 year-old male Mon health worker in Mon State working near the Thai border

Some students who passed the middle school entrance exams were unable to continue their studies because their families had limited financial resources. Most parents won't allow their children to continue education after grade school, preferring them to work instead.

A 41 year-old male villager in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

My mother wanted me to go to work in Thailand, but I wanted to study. When I was fourteen years old I went to Thailand with a broker. But, after a couple of years I got arrested and deported back to Myanmar. When I returned home my mother wanted to send me again. I refused to go explaining that I wanted to study more. She refused and kicked me out of the house. I really don't want to go back to Thailand because I went through a lot of trouble. I tried to explain to her that many young people do not succeed in Thailand and face many problems. But, she wouldn't listen and reminded me that I already had the most education of anyone in the family. As a last resort perhaps I will have to join the army.

A 17 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

My parents only support me to go to work in the cities as a sex worker. If I do this they believe I can earn a lot of money and they can build a new house like other people around here do. They don't care whether I will suffer or what my future is going to be. There is nothing I can do to convince them to let me continue my studies.

A young female migrant from Myanmar finishing the fifth standard at the Thai border

4.8. Drugs

Drug production, trafficking and addiction were critical issues identified by the communities at all of the research sites along the borders.⁶⁸ The frequency and consistency in which the issue of drugs came up was clearly one of the most dominant themes of this study. The drug-related findings are divided into discussions about addiction, production, trafficking and the impact it has on children and youth.

All of the border sites noted the problem of drug addiction, particularly among children ten years of age through adolescence and into young adulthood.

In our village, six out of ten men are drug addicts. Boys start using drugs at the age of ten. The members of broken families in our village are drug addicts. Recently, two Kachin boys died because they injected drugs. They were only ten year-old boys. I think it is a big problem for us.

A 25 year-old Kachin female from a Kachin village in Northern Shan State

About eighty percent of the young people in our village take drugs. Some start taking drugs at the age of fourteen or fifteen. It's impossible to prevent addiction because there are many drug sellers in this village. Some addicts take 'yaba'

⁶⁸ Xishuangbanna was the only site where youth, community and key informants did not place a strong emphasis on these issues.

['mad medicine'].⁶⁹ *It's cheaper than heroin. There are all kinds of drugs. If you take 'yaba', you become aggressive and start fighting.* A 23 year-old Kachin male Church Pastor in Kachin village along the Myanmar-China border

*Among young people, nine out of ten smoke cigarettes. Almost everybody drinks. About five out of ten take diazepam.*⁷⁰ *Two out of ten take opium. Two out of ten take heroin. Then there's 'yaba'. 'Yaba' is a pill. They heat the pill and inhale the smoke through a bottle of purified water. It's very fragrant. It smells a bit like chocolate. Some inhale one pill at a time. Some take two or three pills. One pill costs 250 kyat. It's available even in a small candy shop anywhere along the China-Myanmar border. Some are made in China and some are from India. 'Yaba' is stronger than heroin, therefore, the addiction is stronger than addiction to opium.* A focus group discussion with young Shan male and female in a Shan village along the Myanmar-China border

A person I know used to smoke 'Number Four' [heroin] while rocking his baby to sleep in his arms. After some time, the child seemed to have become addicted. There was a kind of withdrawal and the child cried often. He was taken to the doctor and to several clinics, but they couldn't find any disease. Finally, the doctor asked more questions and it was confirmed that the child had become addicted. An 18 year-Shan male living along the Myanmar-China border

In our village along the border with China, there are many AIDS cases and also many cases of death due to heroin. They have increased in recent years. Some of our friends were among those who died. Every household has at least one drug-related death in their family. A focus group discussion with male migrant workers (two Kachin and one Bamar) living along the Myanmar-China border

See the boy with the Indian features. He looks about twelve years old. He is addicted to drugs. In this border town there are many young addicts like him who are only twelve or thirteen years old. They are from different ethnic backgrounds – Shan, Bamar, Chinese and Indian. When the addicts cannot get their heroine regularly, they become very weak due to malnutrition and often die. So many of them are just children. A conversation during participatory observation with a Shan female along the Myanmar-China border

There are a few athletes in the village. Most villagers like to smoke, take amphetamines, heroin, raw opium or other kinds of drugs every day. There are a lot of people addicted to these and to alcohol. A 32 year-old male day labourer married with two children from Shan State living along the Thai border

⁶⁹ “Yaba” is used in the Thai language to refer to amphetamines. The term “yama” [‘horse medicine’] is also used. These words have been incorporated into use in Myanmar as well. In Chinese, amphetamines are referred to as ‘*Mar Huang Suan*,’ the name for ephedrin, the addictive ingredient in the drug.

⁷⁰ The generic term for Valium.

Amphetamines and heroin are always available. More and more addicts are increasing everywhere. Amphetamines are inexpensive. Each tablet costs only 25 baht and is easy to purchase. A participatory observation with Shan youth from Shan State living along the Thai border

If we really look at the people in the village, there are a lot of drug addicts. Many people take part in smuggling drugs. Drug problems can't be controlled, especially among young people.

A young Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

Many of the youth around the age of fifteen to twenty five are involved in drugs like amphetamines, glue and even heroin. A Shan male from Shan State married with five children living along the Thai border

I have many friends who use drugs. The most popular one is amphetamines. In the city of Chiangmai, amphetamines can be as expensive as 80-120 baht per tablet. When amphetamines are taken, the user works to earn money without stopping and some even work into the night. I feel very sad for them and I have warned many of them, but they do not change. Almost all of my friends from my village along the Thai-Myanmar go to find jobs in urban areas and face these kinds of problems.

A 14 year-old Kachin female from Kachin State living along the Thai border

The payment is very low in Thailand and we work very hard. Young people are very difficult to control. When someone tries to prohibit us, it is like persuading us to do it. Three of my friends and I became addicted to amphetamines. It is very easy to buy and only costs 30 baht for one pill. We can find all kinds of amphetamines at the Thai grocery store close to the factory. When people first use the pill they work very hard, but after a long time they get weaker and weaker. I found that it is very bad for my health. I decided to stop using the drug. At first, I felt nervous when I wasn't using it, but slowly I felt better and better. I could stop because of my girlfriend who encouraged me all the time. I owe her a lot and she is very meaningful to me. As soon as I stopped using drugs we got married.

A 22 year-old Kayin-Bamar male working in a factory along the Thai border

There are a number of types of narcotics popularly used and trafficked in these border areas, including raw opium, heroin, amphetamines, and cough syrup with codeine.⁷¹ This study found opium and heroin most available and commonly used along the China-Myanmar border. Amphetamines were the drug most available and frequently used along the Thai-Myanmar border.

In our village even married men use heroin. About 30 percent of the men and women inject drugs and the rest smoke opium. Among girls, there are eleven

⁷¹ This type of cough syrup is medically referred to as comethazine, known as 'Shwe' in Myanmar.

addicts out of households. Many have died because of drugs. In this village, there aren't any police, anti-narcotics groups or military intelligence. So people from all around the China-Myanmar border come to this village to buy drugs. A bottle-capful of heroin costs 100 kyat. One bottle of heroin costs 2,000 – 2,500 kyat. Some addicts sell the farmland, which they inherited from their parents or pawn the property. Some go and work as day labourers on others' farms and buy heroin with the money they earn.

A focus group discussion with male and female youth from Kachin village living along the Myanmar-China border

There is another kind of drug called "bird's nest". It's a mixture of raw opium and banana leaves that are dried and then smoked like cigarettes. It's also called "kha-khu". It isn't very easy to buy it. Some put water in a hollow bamboo stick and inhale the smoke.

A focus group discussion with young Shan male and female in a Shan village living along the Myanmar-China border

I used amphetamines once. When I used it, I did not want to sleep. Older friends taught me how to use it. They told me that it was not harmful. I only tried it once in my life.

An 18 year-old Kachin boy from Northern Shan State

Last water festival, my friend brought many tablets in his longyi.⁷² These were small blue tablets. My friend took fifteen tablets and I took only five with Mandalay Rum. After that, I did not know what happened. We had fights with other people. Finally, we slept on the pavement all night.

A 20 year-old Bamar male living along the Myanmar-China border

Almost everybody has tried it. Although they aren't sold openly here in the town, they're sold openly in the villages. These days young people don't drink so much any more. More of them are taking amphetamines. When I asked them why, they said that when you drink alcohol people know because of the strong smell, whereas "horse" pills don't have any smell.

A male health worker in Kayin State working along the Thai border

I do not have time for exercise like some others because I have to work to earn a living. Some of my friends also have no time for sports so to relax they become addicted to glues and other more dangerous drugs. A lot of them have been arrested, but still the drug problem has not disappeared. I have tried and used many kinds of drugs. After using it I feel kind of depressed, lazy and cannot work. It causes a lot of confusion to the brain. I have never tried injecting heroin into the veins. But, now I have quit using drugs. I have a lot of friends and read books. When I feel upset or broken, I go for a drink with friends or visit the brothel.

A 25 year-old Shan male from Shan State working as a mechanic in Chiangmai town

⁷² A traditional dress worn by many men in Myanmar.

My friend told me that it is cheap to buy an amphetamine pill. Definitely it's cheaper than alcohol to get a high.

A 19 year-old male returnee to Kayin State from Thailand

Boys are not interested in attending school anymore. When one boy starts to take drugs, his friends all follow suit. Drugs are easily available. When boys are unemployed, they become aimless and drift. Among young people, if they don't drink alcohol, they take 'Number Four'.

Two Kachin and one Bamar young male migrant workers along the China-Myanmar border

I came to this China border town for trade. Because of my friends I started to use drugs and lost my money. I don't want to go back to my family and make any problems for them. Here, I scavenge for used plastic in town and along the river and sell it for drugs. I beg food from the customers in these restaurants.

A 20 year-old Shan male drug addict in a China border town

Some children and young people are addicted to amphetamines and opium. It is very pitiful. It is easy to try these drugs at celebrations and fairs. Those who have not tried drugs before also have a chance to taste it at these celebrations. There are some people who put the drugs in bottles of alcohol or soft drinks like coke. In addition, many want to work hard or do not want to sleep, so they take amphetamines. When they become addicted, it is very dangerous because they become like a mad person.

A 32 year-old Shan male from Shan State working as a day labourer along the Thai border

Although most youth reported being introduced to drugs by their peers, a significant number of migrants in Thailand also reported being introduced to amphetamines by their employer.

I took 'yaba' when I felt tired. Sometimes we had to load onion and corn sacks on to ten wheel trucks. We had to do it in one go. The boss himself gave us half a tablet each on those occasions. I can't afford it any more now as I don't have the money.

A 21 year-old migrant returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

A young woman who worked in Thailand as a housemaid saved some pills which her landlord gave her to take, which she understood as vitamin pills. When she returned she showed those pills to me. They were amphetamines.

A village health worker in Kayin State near the Thai border

We did overtime work four or five times a month. It was compulsory. We were paid 25 baht extra per night. Before we left for Mae Sot, we were warned not to accept any drugs if they gave us any. At the factory, they came and offered us cold drinks at night. At first, we didn't take the drinks. But I became very sleepy and couldn't do my work properly. I began to produce fewer clothes. I tried drinking a little of the juice, and ended up becoming addicted and drinking it every night. Only then was I able to work without feeling sleepy. I also felt light and active.

A 29 year-old Bamar female returnee from Thailand living in Mon State

In Thailand, I had a job in a plastic factory. There were thirty employees, all were male from Burma. The boss put 'yaba' pills in the drinking water. From the day I started taking 'yaba' pills, I worked hard continuously day and night. When I became addicted, I kept a bottle filled with water containing "horse" drug, by my side as I worked. We each had a bottle handy. When we needed the drug, we would drink from the bottle. All the workers were addicted. Even if we wanted to quit the job, we couldn't because we wouldn't be able to buy the amphetamine pills if we did. Once I took seven pills in a day. After taking the pill, a person becomes high spirited and stimulated.

A 30 year-old Kayin male returnee to Mon State from Thailand

The local production of narcotics inevitably leads to wide availability and low costs for potent drugs.

September and October are the busy months of work at poppy fields. People from villages and also from town go and work at these fields. Employers give them 600 kyat per day and provide three meals. But it is very heavy work.

A 55 year-old Kachin female from Northern Shan State near the China border

People from Mandalay and Lashio invest money to cultivate opium and it is trafficked to China and to Hong Kong. For laundering drug money, they import goods from China to Myanmar, it doesn't matter how much profit they make from these goods. It is simply a way of transferring drug money to the business people in Yangon and Mandalay.

A 47 year-old Kachin male leader along the Myanmar-China border

When opium fields were destroyed, field owners were happy about the news because they could raise their price. When they carried out the destruction in an area, one field was arranged for destruction to show it had been done. Other field owners collected money for the owner who lost his field. He got more than the actual value of this field.

A 40 year-old Shan male living along the Myanmar-China border

We heard that amphetamines are produced in some border areas. One of the big factories nearby actually produces 'yaba'.

A 30 year-old Shan male living along the Myanmar-China border

This village is like a transit point for drug trafficking, causing more and more children and teenagers to become addicted every day. Those who have become slaves to drugs are mostly idle children and teenagers who wander around with nothing to do. They are not able to work in the farms and gardens or do not like it. Some teenagers, or adults who are not capable of doing hard labour, simply turn to narcotics and get involved in illegal activities.

A 41 year-old Kachin female from Kachin State married with two children living along the Thai border

Amphetamines are a major problem along the border. Many people are using the drugs and some are involved in smuggling. Because we are so close to the border where the amphetamine factories exist we are very vulnerable to the problems related to these drugs.

A Shan female from Shan State married with two children living along the Thai border

In addition to drug addiction and production is the fact that many participants noted the ease in recruiting migrants into the drug trafficking business.

I used to carry heroin to Bhamo. I carried thirteen packages of heroin in a bag and travelled to Bhamo on foot in the jungle. We spent twenty days to travel to Bhamo. I made 100,000 kyat for this one trip. If I can carry it up to the jade mine area in Kachin State, I can make 300,000 kyat.

A 31 year-old Kachin female living along the Myanmar-China border

Many women here are small time drug sellers. In the morning, they take 'Number Four' [heroin] from the women who stay at the guesthouse and sell it for a profit during the day. In the evening, they hand over the money to the professional drug dealers. They earn some profit, and at the same time they can take some of the drug themselves. Sometimes both husband and wife are addicts and also sell drugs. Sometimes, these couples spend the whole day dozing off and do not even remember to feed their child.

A participatory observation with a 21 year-old Shan living in a China border town

I made a lot of money selling 'Number Four' and used it to support my husband. Later on, I discovered that he'd been stealing my stock to use himself, which really bothered me. I took to smoking and began to lace my cigarettes with the stuff. It got to the point where I was taking it intravenously.

A Bamar female sex worker and drug dealer in a China border town

Some migrant men and women who are drug traffickers rent rooms in a China border town and sell drugs. Room rental is 20,000 kyat per month. Drug addicts scavenge food from garbage and beg for food from customers in a restaurant. They often sleep in front of shops, buildings and in unfinished buildings at construction sites.

A 17 year-old Shan male from Myanmar in a China border town

I used to work as a sex worker in a Chinese border town. Then, I married a Bamar man who opened a bicycle repair shop. In spite of getting married, I still worked as a sex worker. My husband stayed away from our room when I had a client. Then, we started to sell drugs along the border.

A 27 year-old Bamar female along the China-Myanmar border

I came to China with my brother and at first I worked at a car repair workshop in inland China. When I was there, I had a car accident and was injured. My brother

gave me some heroin to relieve my pain. After that, I started to use the drug. I came to this China border town and sold drugs for money. I was arrested and beaten by Chinese police, but I was released because they did not find any drugs on me.

A 24 year-old Bamar drug trafficker from central Myanmar in a China border town

The problem concerning narcotic drugs at the moment is that the hill-tribe peoples are being used as tools, but the real traffickers are reaping enormous profits from the business. For instance, people who are arrested, imprisoned or killed are mostly different hill-tribe peoples, but the real traffickers are powerful people that never get arrested.

A Lahu monk from Shan State living in along the Thai border with Myanmar

Many children have been orphaned or abandoned as a result of drug addiction or trafficking.

There are two daughters in my family. I am the oldest. I was in school but my sister has not attended school yet. My mother is now pregnant. Our father is now in jail in Bangkok. He was arrested because of amphetamines. Our mother said that he will be in jail for his whole life.

A young Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

My father is a drug addict and never took care of the family. When my mother died, my two younger sisters and I were sent to live with our grandparents. I have worked as a housemaid at my aunt's house but she treats me badly. She does not give me any money and beats me sometimes. I am scared to go away alone because I am a young girl. I have decided to go to Thailand. One of my cousins travels back and forth between this village and Thailand. I will go with her and do domestic work in Thailand.

A 19 year-old Shan female from Kayin State

Words of prevention are not effective without action against using drugs. That's why the number of users is increasing. There are about ten households of orphans in our village (of a total of 130 households). They are from many different ethnic groups. The majority of the children are only between seven and ten years old. For example, in that particular household, both the parents are opium addicts. The father was Wa and mother is Kachin. They have three children. The father recently died while the wife was still pregnant. The mother sold her youngest son of 6-7 months old for 20,000 kyat to a Chinese family along the China-Myanmar border in order to get money to buy opium. The Chinese family adopted the child.

A focus group discussion with 13-24 year old Shan and Kachin males and females from a Kachin village in Northern Shan State

Children of drug addicts become beggars in China border towns. Some children also become drug addicts. They are between the ages of twelve and fourteen. They scavenge used plastic (bottles and other things) here and sell it to get money for drugs. Some beg for money and food. They sleep on the roadside or in front of the

houses. Sometimes they eat food that is prepared for pigs. I think their lives are hardly human.

A participatory observation with a 21 year-old Shan female living in a China border town

Three families are also looking after three children whose father died of drug use in jail and whose mother has been sentenced to many years in prison for drug smuggling.

A participatory observation in a village in Northern Shan State near the China border

When I was four years old, my mother passed away and my father became a drug addict, smoking opium. Not very long after that, my father was arrested and imprisoned in Thailand. Since then I have had to live with my aunt.

A conversation during participatory observation with migrant children in a village along the Thai border

I live with my father. My mother died when I was still very young. But, now I cannot rely on my father because he has become a drug addict and a slave to opium.

A conversation during participatory observation with migrant children in a Thai border town

In our village alone, the current drug-related problems have deprived at least ten children of their parents. These children now have to depend on their relatives or others for their survival. Some of their parents died due to drug abuse and some have been arrested.

A 42 year-old Shan female from Shan State married with three children working as a day labourer along the Thai border

Participants discussed their frustrations and inability to deal with the drug-related problems in their communities.

My cousin was arrested because of drug abuse. His parents acted as guarantors and bailed him out and brought him to their farm in the mountain area. But he still used drugs and did not work. Last month, the family got into a fight. He tried to strangle his father. The father asked his daughter to bring a stick but she could not find any stick and brought a hoe. The father beat the boy's head with the hoe. My cousin died in this fight by accident.

A 22 year-old Palaung male living along the Myanmar-China border

Drugs are bought in large quantities in Myanmar and sold in small amounts for individual buyers in a China border town. Their capital is tens of thousands of yuan. The profit is exciting. However, if they run out of the stuff, they have hardly anything to eat and there were more arrests this year. These past few days, the Chinese police have been arresting drug dealers as well as sex workers. If they catch a 'Number Four' dealer, and it's a serious case, then they ask for bail

money in lakhs.⁷³ If he can't find the money they send him to a jail in China. However, when such persons are freed, they come back here and do the same job again.

A conversation during participatory observation with a 21 year-old Shan living in a China border town

In China, they usually hold a day of execution every year. It is punishment especially for big criminal cases like murder cases but they also give the death penalty to drug traffickers.

A 22 year-old Kachin male driver living along the Myanmar-China border

There are a lot of sex-related diseases as well as other strange illnesses here. Girls are oppressed by their brothel owners and afraid of getting sick. Some customers tell them that 'Number Four' and other drugs can prevent them from contracting disease. It is usually 'Number Four' and the girls get addicted quickly. These last few days I've been going to the China border town everyday to help a girl quit the habit. She's been doing grade four for two months now, and has an eight month-old baby girl. Because she's been taking the stuff while breast-feeding the baby's gotten thinner and thinner, that's why she wants to quit. I've helped seven people here quit heroin.

A Bamar doctor practising in a China border town.

There are many young drug addicts in Shan villages. In the past eight years, there have been about forty-five deaths due to drugs among youth in our village alone. Young people start taking drugs when they're over eighteen or nineteen years old. About 30 percent of young people under the age of twenty-four use various forms of narcotic drugs. The community loses a large number of youth this way. So far the community has made efforts four or five times to cure addicts. Now, many families of addicts keep them tied up at their homes. A focus group discussion with Shan male and female youth in Northern Shan State along the China-Myanmar border

The spread of narcotics in this community is growing every day. I feel the need to organise activities to resist it. Talking about this, the faults lie with the State authorities themselves. They are eradicating drug trafficking and addiction only in the urban areas while the cause is at the border areas. The number of drug addicts is growing every day. The most popular drugs are amphetamines known as 'yaba' [mad medicine] or 'yama' [horse medicine]. Those who take heroin are the minority.

A 55 year-old Kachin male from Kayin State working as a farmer along the Thai border

The spread of narcotics in the community and among the teenagers is increasing each day. The border areas are close to where the drugs are produced and the narcotics influences are sure to flow in continually from the border. In the border

⁷³ One lakh is the term used in Myanmar to refer to 100,000 kyat.

communities, it is very difficult to resist. There is very little chance to succeed at eradicating the problem because one has to fear the influence of the drug lords and risk exposing oneself to great danger. Maybe because it is a border area, one never knows. For that reason, there is a need to educate the community because it is very important for their future.

A 46 year-old Kachin male from Kayin State living along the Thai border

The family has no income but only expenditures. We have many children we don't want to have, but don't know how to prevent it. Besides, my husband is a drug addict, using 'yaba' and heroin, so that the police arrested him and sent him to prison for two months. Now he is coming out of prison but we have heard no news about him. Actually, I want him to be in the prison for a year, after that he can stop using drugs, so it is the best. It is useless when he comes back without giving up using drugs and it would also be a big burden. I want him to give up using drugs. I cried and requested many times, but I was not successful.

A Kachin female married with four children working as a farmer along the Thai border with Myanmar

At the same time, however, there are attempts to resist drug addiction, such as training and education relating to drugs and encouragement of sports, such as takraw and volleyball. Playing sports attracts some of the children and teenagers, encouraging other interests. Children like to take part in those sports, but many are still waiting for some sports equipment and organisation. A 25 year-old Lisu male from Shan State working as a farmer along the Thai border

The children have to walk to school and back home, which is very far and takes a long time for this great distance. It is quite dangerous for the children because of those who are drug addicts. For the children who do not walk in groups, or for girls, it is particularly dangerous.

A participatory observation with migrants from Myanmar along the Thai border

If the elders don't allow or they give an order not to sell drugs, the dealers just go elsewhere, usually to the farmlands. These remote areas then are turned into drug vending places with the dealers hoisting banners or other noticeable marked clothes. Sooner or later, the elders come to know about that and the vending place is moved to somewhere else. Later on, the place is shifted again to elsewhere. Places on the hillside are believed to have been alive with drug users.

A focus group discussion with Shan and Kachin youth, 13-24 years old from Northern Shan State living along the Myanmar-China border

There is news now about the spread of narcotics in our village and still more and more adults and teenagers are becoming addicted each day. I fear this will spread to teenagers between twelve and eighteen years old and to even younger children in their families. The concerned authorities are only flirting with the laws and never seriously try to eradicate narcotic drugs. For this reason, I want people to come and give education in the community so that the problems could be solved

and would never occur again. A 36 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State married with three children working as a farmer on the Thai border

4.9. Child Labour

Child labour is widespread in Thailand, Myanmar and China, but particularly along the border areas and among migrant populations. This is largely a result of extreme poverty and, as will be noted later in the report, children are often left orphaned or abandoned by their parents.

My mother is the only person earning money for our living expenses and my education. Last month when I was sick my mother had no money to pay for the medicine. She had to borrow money from her friends. My mother has to buy rice and try to find a way to return these debts. I feel so bad for all of the responsibilities my mother has. I would like to go to work to help her.

A seven year-old Shan boy from Shan State living along the Thai border

I stopped going to school after third grade. School was too far – over ten kilometres away. Too far for a girl to walk, my parents said. They wanted to build a house, but there was no money. So, the only thing to do was for me to go and make money in Thailand.

A 19 year-old Palaung female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I went with my mother to Thailand when I was thirteen years old. Things were hard at home and there was no money. I couldn't help around very much at that age any way, so my mother brought me to work in Thailand.

A 17 year-old Palaung female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Now, I really want my children to grow up quickly. They can start to look for a job and not live in the poverty of their parents.

A Shan female from Shan State married with three children living along the Thai border

My oldest son just went to Chiangmai with his aunt. The younger child was left with her grandmother. The grandmother always tries to persuade her to visit her aunt in Chiangmai, but she is still so young.

A Shan male from Shan State married with two children living along the Thai border

Many young children were observed working largely in the service and entertainment sectors (such as teashops, restaurants and hotels that often include direct and indirect sex work), or in day labour or agricultural related jobs, or were found begging. In addition, child soldiers are common throughout the border areas. According to the study participants' attitudes and perspectives, children are of a 'workable age' as early as age six or seven.

Those working in the service and entertainment sectors were most common at the border checkpoints and in urban areas.

Young people from mainland and local ethnic groups work at karaoke lounges. They also work as domestic servants. They are allowed to go out only seldom. They earn about 1,500 kyat per month. They are in every wealthy man's house. Most of them are between seven or eight years old and they usually come from central Myanmar. They make this contact through their relatives who have already been working along the China-Myanmar border.

An 18 year-old Bamar male living along the Myanmar-China border

Last month, we helped one ten year-old boy. Someone brought him to work at a teashop along the China-Myanmar border. This person took the boy's wages from the teashop owner. The workload was too heavy for a ten year old. He ran away from the shop. The staff from one hotel collected money and gave him 900 kyat. We asked a bus driver to take this boy back to Mandalay and the driver agreed to help.

A 20 year-old Bamar male selling lottery tickets living along the Myanmar-China border

Our family moved to the China-Myanmar border six months ago. My father works as a loading dock labourer. Today, my father hasn't gone to work because he fell off the truck and was injured. He used to get 200 or 250 kyat per day. My mother washes the clothes of other people. I dropped out of school when I was in the fourth standard. I also work at this teashop. My salary is 1,500 kyat a month.

A 12 year-old boy from central Myanmar working in a teashop along the Myanmar-China border

Because of draught in central Myanmar where we lived, most boys and girls from our village come to work here. We start to work in other towns when we are thirteen or fourteen years old. Most boys work as waiters in teashops and younger girls work as baby sitters and the older girls work as housemaids. We could not go to school. I attended second standard and then dropped out from school when I left to work in other towns.

A 20 year-old Bamar female from a village in central Myanmar working along the Myanmar-China border

That woman has an eight year-old son. When she cannot find money she pawns her son to a food shop for 200 or 300 yuan. If she finds money, she gives the money to the owner and takes her son back. We can't count how many times she has pawned her son. The boy cleans the dishes while he is in the food shop.

A Shan male from Northern Shan State currently a businessman in a China border town

As for my daughter, she works to look after the shop, I don't know whether she will get her salary or not because the owner of the shop said she is so young and is just learning how to work. If she can work, then I will ask for her salary. If she can't work and he won't give her some money, I will search for him and ask him to pay that amount of money.

A 35 year-old Shan male from Shan State working as a farmer along the Thai border

Many of the service and entertainment jobs included indirect sex work. Below are examples of those involved in direct sex work.

This place is not suitable for children, especially for girls. These two girls sell fruit in front of my shop. They are living with their aunt who is a sex worker and they are gradually turning to the same work as her. They are about twelve or thirteen years old. Their elder sister is going to take them back and she's trying to persuade them to earn money by 'good' means. I think children from our hotel were peeping in while the sex workers were with their customers in the rooms. Yesterday, I saw four to five year-old children play-acting like a sex worker and her customers.

A 25 year-old Bamar female living in a China border town.

Many young children, either alone or with their families, were found scavenging or begging. A significant number were doing this work as a result of the drug or alcohol addiction of one or both of their parents.

I am ten years old. I don't know my younger brother's age. We don't live together. We beg separately. My father drinks all the time and we don't go near him. We sleep everywhere in this China border town. Others give us food. I can speak Shan, Myanmar and Chinese. I have never gone to school.

A ten year-old Shan boy from Northern Shan State in a China border town.

The majority of beggars are children and they are supporting their parents or other adults through begging. During one observation there were over twenty children begging on the streets of a China border town. In talking to the Chinese authorities, they report up to 500 beggars from Myanmar in the town at any one time.

A participatory observation along the China-Myanmar border

I have no parents. They died several years ago. There is just me, my younger brother and an elder brother. We are all staying with our aunt. She has no income. My elder brother is addicted to drugs. He never tried to find a job, so I have to beg for food for my two brothers. Actually, I'm embarrassed by having to beg, but I have no choice. There is no place where they will agree to let me work for them. They said I'm too young. If I'm older, I won't beg any more. I will try to find a job.

A Shan boy from Shan State living along the Thai border

There are about thirty-five to fifty child beggars along the Mae Sai – Taichelek border crossing. Of the twelve children begging we spoke to, five were girls and seven were boys. All were between the ages of seven and fourteen. None had ever been to school. All of them spoke of their family's poverty, with five of them explaining that one or both of their parents were drug addicts. Among these twelve children four were glue sniffers.

A participatory observation at the Mae Sai-Taichilek checkpoint

The children who have no parents have no place to sleep and no food to eat. Those who have relatives are a little bit better. Those who have no relatives become beggars. They are being slaves for other powerful people. These children have problems finding food and they don't even think as far as an education.

A Shan female from Shan State married with two children living along the Thai border

Many children in the rural areas are working as day labourers, often on farms or preparing produce for the markets.

Three families are living together in one house and each family has at least six children. The husbands are working as manual labourers and the older children also find work when they can.

A participatory observation in a village in Northern Shan State

Every day, I have to find work. But my child is still very young, so no one wants him to work. Only some workplaces will hire him, mostly he can't find jobs. He is hungry on the days he can't find work. I know my child should be going to school, but I have no money to support him to eat, let alone go to school.

A Shan female youth from Shan State married with two children working as a day labourer along the Thai border

I have been to Thailand once. I spent all I earned on my living expenses. There was nothing left. The employer cheated and didn't pay me. I'll go back later, when I'm a little older.

A 13 year-old boy returnee from Thailand now living in Kayin State

I went to Thailand with high expectations, but I faced a lot of problems. Even herding cows here is better – I don't go hungry. I was hungry over there. That's why I'm not going back. I'll help my father with farming. I'm not very well at the moment. I'm still suffering from the effects of the work I did there. We had to make carpets. We had to carry big rolls of carpet. It was hard work. We couldn't go out, in case we got caught. In the end, I got arrested. It happened while I was asleep in the afternoon. I had done overtime work the night before and fell asleep. The boss still owed me money, but I didn't go back to the factory when I was released. We were deported to the border, so I came back home.

A 14 year-old Bamar male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

I have two sons. The oldest one already got married. Then he moved to Thailand to find work and sent some money back to me. The younger brother is eleven years old and has already followed his brother and sister-in-law to Thailand. He doesn't attend school. He is young and he has no documents. The teacher would not allow children who do have no any documents to attend school. If he returns to the Shan State, even though he can't attend school, he can do some other work, such as feeding the buffaloes and oxen.

A Shan female from Shan State married with two children working on a farm along the Thai border

Recruitment of child soldiers continues to be a reality along all the border areas.

My younger brother was forcibly recruited and I am still trying to negotiate for his release. Most boys are recruited who are over the age of thirteen.

A 24 year-old Paluang male living along the Myanmar-China border

Nowadays, they have boy friends or girlfriends when they are thirteen or fourteen. Some are living together at that age. My younger brother lived with his girlfriend and got married at the age of fifteen. Some parents arrange for their sons to marry at the age of fifteen or sixteen because of forced conscription. They usually don't recruit married people.

A 20 year-old Kachin female teacher in Northern Shan State near the China border

4.10. Trafficking of Persons

Trafficking of persons, predominantly children and youth, was common at all of the study sites. The majority of these young people were trafficked into sex work, marriage, domestic service or begging rackets. The study particularly highlights the trafficking that occurs along the Myanmar-China border, as many of those trafficked were either from the border area or trafficked to work in cross-border towns. In addition, the study looks at migrants who had been trafficked from Xishuangbanna to Thailand or beyond to Malaysia and had then returned home. However, it was more difficult to reach those trafficked from within Myanmar into Thailand, as many of them simply pass through the border areas and are sent to work further inside Thailand. Since this project was based along the border areas, it primarily documents the trafficking that occurs among vulnerable migrants along the Thai border and does not focus on those trafficked further inside Thailand.

Trafficking into sex work was largely into brothel type settings and migrants were held in conditions tantamount to slavery.

If she can bring other girls back from Burma the brothel owners will pay their way, as well as a commission. Usually, if you give the girl's mother some money, you can bring a girl over. You can also get them from brothel owners in Yangon. Some girls come by themselves.

A middle-aged brothel owner in a China border town

Last year, I helped send a girl back to her family. She was fourteen years old. First, she worked at a beauty parlour as a trainee. Someone whom she knew very well asked her to work in China. They promised her a better place where she could earn more money. So she went along with that person. When they arrived in China, she was left at a brothel. She ran away from that brothel and came to us for help. She had worked at that brothel for five days.

A 24 year-old Bamar male working at the border crossing gate living along the Myanmar-China border

I started that line of work in Thailand on June 10th. It was full of hardship. There were all kinds of customers, including real bad ones. There was no escape. All of those who surrounded me worked for the brothel owner. When they made me go to the 'waiting room' and sold me, I was separated from the other two girls who had come with me. I don't know what became of them after that.

A 21 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

After we were brought to Thailand, my friend and I were forced to become sex workers. My friend was more pretty and wound up as a 'first class' sex worker for special customers. As for myself, I had to sleep with whoever picked me. I worked everyday for two months without receiving anything. Then, the boss sold me to someone else.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I helped a Chin girl run away from China. It was February 20, 2000. I remember the day so well. We saw her far inside of China. She asked us the way to Myanmar. After getting help from me, she started to tell me her experiences in China. A Shan woman came to Yangon and offered her a job along the China-Myanmar border. The Chin girl was working at a company at the time. She sold her gold necklace for her travel expenses. When they arrived at the Mandalay railway station some people pointed to the Shan woman and said, "there is that bad woman again." But, at the time she didn't think anything of it and continued to the China-Myanmar border. The woman took her directly to a village inside China and left her in a house and disappeared. There the girls was forced to work in the field in the daytime and at night time Chinese men came and slept with her each night. Whenever she cried, the old lady there would slap her in the face. When the girl tried to refuse to fulfil the men's desires, the men would squeeze her neck. After seven or eight days she ran away when the old lady had gone to the market without locking the gate. She begged the bus driver to give her a ride to the China border. He bought her a meal before taking her back and I met her along this trip.

A 28 year-old Kachin female living along the Myanmar-China border

The family had two daughters, both of whom were tricked into going across the border to work. They were sisters of the same mother, but different fathers. Another woman in the village took both of them to work in Malaysia.

A 35 year-old male community leader in a village in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

In the village, the parents or relatives give support to their daughters to become sex workers so they can get big amounts of money and build a luxurious house. Those who work for seven and eight years can collect some money. They spend the money to build two or three floor houses or sometimes send a big amount of money back for her parents. Their parents feel happy. But for some girls who are not in a good situation they cannot even contact their parents. They communicate with their parents by the brokers. Sometimes, the brokers take all their money.

When these girls return home, the parents would ask where is all the money? They don't know what to answer because they had sent some money back home every month. When their parents learn of the situation, they ask the brokers, but the brokers themselves just say nothing and keep quiet. These are the problems they face. Instead of getting a new big beautiful house and some more money to spend they have nothing. In addition, some of them already are infected by HIV/AIDS. At the moment, they have no money to go to the hospital to cure themselves. They have no good mood to continue to work and they eventually die from AIDS. Most of these young girls are less than twenty-six years old. Almost ninety percent of those infected by HIV/AIDS are sex workers.

A 71 year-old male village leader from Shan State along the Thai border

I lived in a Thai border town and an agent offered me a job in a factory. When I arrived it was not a factory, but a karaoke club. At first I did not know what it was all about, but later I didn't know what to do. I didn't even have bus fare to go home. After that it was like I was in prison. Many of us were cheated like this. The one who persuaded us to come was no longer there. That is because they are the brokers and are paid by the owner of the karaoke club. Once they are paid they disappear.

A Shan female from Shan State who was working a karoake club in Thailand

Most of the women from Burma working as sex workers are not normally allowed to go outside. Only those few who are willing to do this kind of work can do so.

A participatory observation with female sex workers from Shan State in Thailand

Girls and young women from Northern Shan State are being trafficked into forced marriages in China.

I was lured by a Palaung woman with the offer of a well-paid job and taken to a China border town. I was given some drugged food. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a Chinese town. The house belonged to a Chinese man who made fake identity cards for trafficked girls. My money and Myanmar national registration card were taken from me. The next day I was taken on a long car journey to Kunming, and from Kunming by train to a village in another province. The Palaung woman had a Chinese husband who accompanied me. We stayed with the father-in-law of the Palaung woman. The Palaung woman contacted several potential buyers who were looking for a bride. But each time a man arrived, I threatened to kill myself rather than marry him. The only other alternative was to work in the fields. I did so and also cooked for the old man.

One day I came across another Kachin girl who had been sold as a bride in the same village. She had been treated so badly that she could hardly speak. Everyday her husband and mother-in-law beat her. I learned they were punishing her for not conceiving a child. They had bought her for 10,000 yuan. She was no longer mentally stable and couldn't remember her parents' names or her address.

When the Palaung woman and her Chinese husband returned to my village to look for another girl my father informed the police and the two brokers were arrested. My father obtained a telephone number from the Chinese man, and was able to contact me from a China border town. He learned I was here. By this time I could speak some Chinese so I demanded the old man take me back to Myanmar.

A 20 year-old Kachin female from Northern Shan State

Some Chinese people buy girls as wives or as workers. Most of the Chinese who buy girls are from inner China, even as far as the border with Hong Kong. There are many brokers. Prices will be different according to the beauty of the girls. If a girl is beautiful, they pay up to 3,000 yuan to a broker. We rescued many girls from brokers in this China border town. The reason for human trade is the Chinese family planning policy allows each family to have only one child. If they have a daughter, the family name will disappear when she marries into another family. Therefore, they try to get a son rather than a daughter. They are allowed to use ultra sound (to find out the gender of the child) and abortion is legal in China. This has resulted in a shortage of women there. Also, if they get married to Chinese girls, they will spend more than ten thousand yuan. So, they spend 3,000 yuan to buy ethnic girls from Myanmar.

A 17 year-old Shan male from Northern Shan State who migrated to a China border town

After my stepfather tried to rape me when I was fourteen years old, I ran away. I met a woman who sold me to a man in his forties deep inside China. I had to be his wife. The family was very good to me. Later on they gave me 4,000 yuan. I returned with another woman who had been sold to people in the same province. Then she got it into her head to sell me to her owner's brother. When I got to the border, I found out that I had been sold to do sex work. After a while, I went off to another place in China with another Burmese woman.

A Bamar female just after her return to Myanmar from China

My friend and I agreed to go to China with a woman who told us that there were many job opportunities along the Chinese border areas. There were another eight or ten Shan and Way girls who went along with us. At first we did not know where we were going. I was the only one who could read a little English among our group. Therefore, on the way to inland China, I saw one signboard that read 'To Kunming' and I noticed that we were going to Kunming. When we arrived at a Chinese village, the lady (broker) forced us to choose a Chinese man to marry rather than the other jobs that she mentioned before. Finally, I married with a Chinese man who was fifty years old. He has a limp. He made handicraft for our family. We have two children now. He is a good man for our family. I returned home along with my two kids for their education. My friend married a blind Chinese man. They also have two children. However, she did not bring her children back. She was arrested when she arrived on the Myanmar side of the border. Therefore, she is scared to meet other people and tell her experiences.

A 30 year-old Wa female recently returned to Shan State after having been trafficked to China when she was 20 years old

Two years ago, one of my friends asked me to accompany her to collect her money across the China border. She brought me to some town in China and tried to sell me to a Han Chinese who had already given her money to buy him a wife. I did not accept it and threatened her. Finally, she gave up and married this man because she could not pay him back the money. After her marriage, I left this town with a new friend I met there. However, the new friend sold me to another Chinese house for 1,000 yuan. I stayed there for six months. I cried day and night. The owner got disappointed and sent me to the Chinese government authorities. The authorities interviewed me. By that time, this interview was shown on Chinese TV. Two policemen accompanied me by train and car to a border village close to the Burmese border.

A 19 year-old Kachin female working at a beauty parlour along the Myanmar-China border

I have five children. My second daughter was tricked into going to China when she was eighteen years old. My friend, also a Kachin lady, came to my house and asked my daughter to marry a rich Chinese man who wanted to marry girls from our town. My daughter refused to accept her offer, but she came to my house frequently and persuaded her. Finally, she asked my daughter to see her bridegroom at the China-Myanmar border and my daughter agreed to go to the China-Myanmar border. The Kachin woman took my daughter and handed her over to a Chinese woman who then sent her to inland China. Later they sent three wedding photos and her belongings. I was very angry with this because sending back the girl's belongings means that my daughter doesn't belong to her parents anymore. I was worried about my daughter and asked the Kachin women to look for her in China. After my repeated demands, she agreed to go. When we arrived in a China border town, I met the Chinese woman. She said that the girl had been sent deep inside, China. It took twenty days to go there and she needed 10,000 yuan to travel. She also said that if I caused any problems for her, she would also give me trouble. When I was back in my village the, Kachin leaders tried to negotiate with me to accept 200,000-300,000 kyat from the Kachin woman for my daughter. I refused their offer. I only want to meet my daughter.

A 45 year-old Kachin mother of a trafficked girl from Northern Shan State

In May 1999, the father of a seventeen year-old high school student who was sold into China came to us. They lived in a small town in Northern Shan State near the China border. Her father said that he had sold his two buffaloes to find his daughter. Two sex workers from a China border town also disappeared at the same time as the Kachin girl. Last month, we also rescued two Shan girls from the bus that goes into China. The broker was an old Shan lady who stayed in a China border town. We heard that she had already taken money from the Chinese people and had to give back the money to them.

A 27 year-old Bamar male working as a gem broker in a China border town

A woman took a Shan girl and myself to her sister who lived in Northern Shan State. Her sister took us deep into China. They sold us to a Chinese man for 4,000

yuan each. I was twenty-one years old. I had to marry a police warden of a prison. I had two children with this man. First, I worked as a teacher in school and got 3,000 yuan per month. Then, I worked as a policewoman for two years. When I had night duty in prison, I gave help to sex workers from Myanmar who worked in that area. My husband did not allow me to go home to Myanmar. Therefore, I ran away from China to Myanmar.

A 31 year-old Kachin female in Northern Shan State along the China border

The police recently arrested two older women with about eight or nine girls, who were about fourteen to fifteen years old and who she had promised jobs in China. The girls were from Central Burma and had been dressed up in bridal costumes in a beauty salon, their photo taken with a handsome young man and sent to her family. The parents were told that she had gotten married. Afterwards, the girls were to be sold.

A 20 year-old Kachin female in Northern Shan State along the China border

Not only were girls and young women trafficked into domestic households, but many also reported being trafficked from these environments into sex work. Those trafficked may or may not have known the type of work they were expected to perform and all reported being forced into arrangements that were abusive, denying many of their basic rights.

The person who comes and collects the worker will offer a job at a house doing domestic work. Then this person will take one or two years' pay from the employer. Some naïve workers work until the two years are up. Some are rescued secretly by their friends. I have also heard of girls being sent to brothels too.

A 15 year-old Kayin female returnee to Kayin State from Thailand

Most of the girls who work in factories like us often try to get jobs as maids through brokers because they offer a higher salary. But, once they get into the house, they can't leave. Often when they ask for money at the end of the month, they are told that the broker already took their pay. This meant they had to work on without being paid. Some girls also faced a lot of abuse. Some of the girls were able to run away and return to work at the factory. A friend of mine who came back after working as a maid, never went out and was always afraid. Even on holidays when we workers went out, she wouldn't go out. She was afraid that her former employer would come and take her away.

A 20 year-old Indian female returnee from Thailand to Mon State

I was working in Thailand for a year when the boss I worked for tricked me into following him to Bangkok, saying he was taking me to a place not far away. Once we got there, it turned out he was selling me to another man. He sold me right there and I wound up working there for two years without pay. After two years, I knew a little about the world outside. I met a real womaniser. After he had fallen for me, I got him to find a truck to send me to the border. Once the arrangement was made, I travelled to the border at night to be safe.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

I was sold to this boss, a Bamar man, who didn't make me do sex work. But, I had to clean his house, the toilets, take care of the kids for his minor wife, cook, and wash the dishes and everything else in the house. I remember his legal wife came once and picked a quarrel with the minor wife. If it hadn't been for me she would have killed the minor wife and her kids. But, in saving them I offended the legal wife and it was no longer possible for me to continue working there. Later on, the boss sold me to another family and I had to begin a new debt.

I was sold to this boss to work in his house. In addition to the usual housework, I had to do every kind of hard labour you could think of. The boss was really bad. The very first day he forced me to have sex with him. I was so mad that I decided to put up with everything and please the boss. But, I also started finding customers on my own. After I had made a bit of money, I eventually found this really generous customer, probably in the business of buying women or something. I snuck off with him. To tell the truth, I sold myself to him willingly because there weren't any better options. I got to Bangkok and worked in a nightclub. I had to do whatever they told me to do. Unfortunately, I got pregnant and once my belly started to get too big the boss kicked me out. Now, I have so many problems and my return home is full of difficulties.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Trafficking of young children and infants was also reported from Myanmar into China.

My nephew was sold to a Han Chinese in a China border town in January 2000. He was four years old. The brokers were also Shan and we knew each other. My sister [mother of trafficked boy] went to China with our Chinese friends and gave money to the Chinese police to find him. After twenty-six days, we rescued him in inland China. He was about to be sent to Taiwan. They had given him an injection that made him unconscious when he was sold in a China border town. My sister spent one million kyat to rescue her son. Now, she is quarrelling with her husband about this money.

A 23 year-old Shan female living along the Myanmar-China border

Some women sell their children to Chinese people. They get 2,000-3,000 yuan for one child. Some get up to 5,000 yuan. I think it has become a good business among Myanmar women. Some women deliver their child and sell to someone who will pay a good price. I know of women who have been doing this more than once. If you want to know these women, I can introduce you.

A 40 year-old Bamar businessman from Yangon in a China border town

A sex worker in a China border town was pregnant last year and gave birth to a boy. He was a chubby baby, with thick hair. When he was one month old, the 'auntie' at the brothel sold him for 10,000 kyat. She took the money, saying she had paid for the child delivery expenses. She probably got more – a baby boy

usually fetches about 30,000 – 40,000 kyat. The sex worker had to return to work afterwards, just a month after her giving birth to her child.

A 21 year-old Shan female working on the China side of the Myanmar border

Along the China-Myanmar border, a two-month old baby girl was sold for over 200,000 kyat. It happened about three months ago. When the husband was jailed, the wife sold the child to a rich Chinese man from Lashio in order to pay for the lawyer's fees.

A focus group discussion with

Bamar male loading dock worker living along the Myanmar-China border

I used to export goods, such as eels to China. When I arrived at the border checkpoint I saw a car being arrested because they had put children in the wooden boxes that they used for crabs. There were at least three or four children who were injected with narcotics.

A 24 year-old Kachin living along the Myanmar-China border

When I was hospitalised at a hospital on the Myanmar side of the border in 1999, the authorities sent some abducted children to the hospital for medical treatment. An old Bamar woman had abducted these children. The authorities took action against her. I saw twenty-one children. Among them, three children died in hospital. They were unconscious when they arrived at the hospital.

A Shan male farmer from a village along the Myanmar-China border

In our village, one Chinese man was caught and they searched him. In his bag, they found a Chinese identity card, Chinese money and some letters offering to buy children. He had already sold nine children.

A 50 year-old Kachin female in Northern Shan State near the China border

When sex workers here get pregnant, they sell their babies to Chinese people from a China border town after their delivery. They usually get 40,000 kyat for a boy and 20,000 kyat for a girl. Chinese people adopt these children and bring them up as Chinese.

A 20 year-old Bamar female
from central Myanmar working as sex worker in a China border town

I lost my child this evening at about five o'clock. We did not know who had taken him. His grandfather found him in a car at the road junction and brought him back. Someone had lured him with food and abducted him into this car.

A conversation during participatory observation with the mother of the
abducted child along the Myanmar-China border

Trafficking into begging rackets is common in major cities. While this study was not able to collect primary data on this, many participants observed that begging was prevalent at all the border sites, particularly the major border checkpoints and towns.

During the time I went to work in Thailand, I saw children living along the border being sent to Bangkok. Their parents let them go. In Bangkok, there are many

child beggars. They were from Myanmar. Once I talked to them and they explained that their parents had sent them with brokers. They had to stay at a place where other children were kept. Each child had to beg and earn 500 baht per day. If they couldn't get that amount, they were beaten. The children were taught some basic phrases in several languages, so that they would be able to beg from all kinds of people. Once the police raided the house where the children were kept. They caught about twenty children. The children were all from Myanmar without documentation and were put in jail. A policeman told us that one particular child had been arrested four times already. When we asked him if it was true, he said that his parents had made him go again and again. For his parents, this was a way of earning money.

A young female returnee from Bangkok to Mon State

Children who are over thirteen years old can find a job and earn a small income. But, some of them just take care of the house or their younger brother or sister. Those who are old enough can get a job selling things in the shops, taking care of other people's babies or working in a small factory. They get very low pay. Some children, like me, are separated from their family after they arrive in Thailand and are not old enough to work, so they have to beg. The children from Burma have to be careful because they are normally transferred to work in other provinces in Thailand, begging in towns that are controlled by gangs. These children are easily beaten at any time.

An eight year-old Akha boy begging in Mae Sai at the border crossing.

According to the findings of this study, migrants were frequently deceived by the terms and conditions of their employment and found themselves in debt-bondage, illegal confinement and abusive environments, where they had no recourse.

4.11. Vulnerabilities of Children

Migration clearly places children in exceptionally vulnerable circumstances, either as migrants themselves or as a result of the migration of those around them. Many of these vulnerabilities have been noted above, however, it seems critical to highlight the direct impact migration has on children which differs from older members of their families and communities. The majority of children, who are orphaned, abandoned or separated from their birth parents, face a wide range of struggles and abuse, in addition to having no means of claiming citizenship. Moreover, the changing social norms that occur rapidly as a result of migration have had a significant impact on children along all three borders.

Children do not have any identification documents, as national identity cards in all countries are not issued until the child is age sixteen or older. Lacking such documentation, children are extremely vulnerable to arrest, detention, deportation and harassment and, in some cases, arrest upon return home.⁷⁴ Many children who remain out of their country find it difficult to claim citizenship abroad and even at times upon their

⁷⁴ Both Myanmar and China have strict laws about illegally leaving the country without official approval. In all three countries it is hard to return officially if you cannot prove the citizenship of your home country.

return. In addition, many children were born abroad and have become stateless, resulting from the inability to register their birth. The vast majority of children participating in this study had no identification documents and were considered illegal as a result.

I am married but have no children. My parents are from Shan State, but my birthplace is here in Thailand. Yet, I do not have any citizenship nor will my children. I have only been to Shan State in Burma once, but it is not good to live, so we came back to live near to the Thai-Burma border. Since I was a child I have never seen my parents, only heard their news. I have two sisters and one brother and now I am living with my husband. I can read and write Shan a little and do farming, feeding chicken and pigs to help us support the family.

A 26 year-old Shan male farmer living along the Thai border

The family of that girl were wealthy people. Her grandmother, mother and she migrated to a China border town because they lost their all their money. The grandmother and mother became brothel pimps here. The girl is just seven years old. Her future is uncertain, as she is illegal, without any documentation and can't go to school. Who knows what she will become?

A

conversation during participatory observation with a Shan male from Northern Shan State working in a China border town

Illegal status often leads to arrest, detention and deportation. Most detention facilities and processes for undocumented migrants make no consideration for children or youth. Detention facilities are either local police stations or detention centres with no special facilities for children or youth. In addition, children or youth were deported in the same manner as all other undocumented migrants.

I endured many hardships during my four years in Thailand. I once spent forty-five days in prison. Then I was dumped in the wilderness somewhere. There were eight of us and we had to walk fifteen days through the mountains before we found our way out.

A 23 year-old

Palaung male returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

There are also cell leaders inside the jail. I saw one when I was arrested. He was Bamar. I was in jail for three days. There was a Shan family there also with two parents and four children inside. They were jailed for taking amphetamines.

A 30 year-old Kayin male returnee from Bangkok to Kayin State

We got arrested four times while staying there for five years. But we never landed in jail because the boss bailed us out each time we got arrested. He didn't cut it from our pay either. Still we had to always be careful.

A 21 year-old returnee from Thailand to Mon State

While we were detained at the police station when I first migrated five years ago, we had to do menial jobs in the station. They gave us pocket money. They also fed us properly. But they gave less food to the people inside the jail. There were also

beatings. We were the youngest among detainees. After one month, the police took us three boys and some other detainees to (the border) riverbank at Mae Sot. They kept detainees for only one month. Of course we went back inside Thailand the next day. This time we went up to Bangkok.

A 21 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

Their illegal status left migrants, especially young people, vulnerable to violence without redress. The majority of participants reported living in fear most of the time.

Two Bamar girls were raped along the China-Myanmar border recently. They live in our ward. They came to work along the China-Myanmar border and rented a room in our ward. One day they went into a compound owned by some Shans to steal firewood. The owners caught them and raped them. My mother saw this incident. The girls did not complain about this to the authorities because they are illegal. An 18 year-old Kachin female living along the Myanmar-China border

Robbers come every now and then. We have to pay tax because we are afraid of their guns. They would come into the house and take whatever they see, be it rice, animals, money. We suspect there are informers among us who tip the robbers which house has money and which has rice. We don't know the political affiliation of the robbers. The only measure we can take is organising village young men to guard the village. Young people would pass some nights without sleep, if they were suspicious any danger would come.

A village headman in Kayin State near the Thai border

The older ones exploited some of the new migrants. In some cases, the person who exploited a young migrant worker (some as young as fourteen years old) would be his own older brother, who would, for instance, exploit the whole salary of the younger boy. In some cases, the worker did not even see his salary for months. All the boy was given was some drinks and horse pills [amphetamines].

A 27 year-old male returnee from Thailand in Kayin State

Even people from my own village bully me and create problems if I don't lend them money. When I was working at the nylon factory, I stayed in the same room with two friends from our village. One night they attacked me because I didn't lend them money. They punched me hard, in both my eyes. There was a lot of blood on my face. They seemed to have taken 'yama'. One of them held me while he told the other to go and get a knife. I pushed him violently aside and escaped. When I got to the boss, he took me to hospital. He settled the hospital bill out of my own wages. I was sacked, and so were the two who attacked me.

A 20 year-old male Kayin returnee from Thailand in Kayin State

My daughter and her newly-wed husband were killed five months ago in Thailand. They were both twenty-five. We could only hold a funeral service now because we had been waiting to bring the bones back home. They were murdered by migrants like them because my daughter and her husband did not lend money

to them. There are these groups of people who would not work hard but live on what they earn by bullying others. The news appeared in the Thai newspapers, but we can get no more information because they had no documentation.

A 60 year-old mother in a Kayin village near the Thai border

Many children were found orphaned or abandoned all along the border areas. The study's findings indicate that the major factors contributing to abandonment of children were related to drug trafficking and addiction, HIV/AIDS (and other illnesses) and loss of contact with family members during migration.

There are five or six orphans in this village like myself. Most of their parents died from diseases, some died from using drugs. These children can't attend school. For me, most of the time, my family members are not living together. We stay in different places.

A 21 year-old Kachin male working as a day labourer along the Thai border

There are many orphans in our village. Some of their parents died from serious diseases that they couldn't cure because they have no money. There are many children whose parents went to work in other provinces and left them with old people or their relatives. Some of these children can go to school, but most of them don't.

A 36 year-old Shan male farmer from Shan State farming along the Thai border

The father of these orphans left them when their mother was seven months pregnant with the youngest child. The mother recently got arrested. Now, the youngest child is two years old. The other villagers who stay nearby look after them temporary. The people who take care of them only come during the daytime, which creates many problems for the villagers living near them who take responsibility for looking after the children.

A participatory observation with migrants along the Thai border

The orphans in this village can't go to school. Some of their parents work illegally and were arrested by the police. My relatives look after three of them, but the children can take care of themselves.

A young Palaung female from Shan State living along the Thai border

There are many orphans in this village. Some of their parents have died and some are in jail. I met some children whose father died and mother was then arrested leaving three children behind. The children used to go to school, but now nobody can support and take care of them. They have no clothes or food. The neighbours pity them and provide some small support for their daily survival. They are very young and need someone to take care of them.

A Palaung female from Shan State working as a farmer along the Thai border

There were two orphans. One was ten years old and the other eight. They were from China. On Saturday, the Chinese school was only open half day and then

sent the children home. But, these two children went to swim at the dam nearby the school. At first, the two children only swam at the dam side, but the younger brother was swimming deeper and deeper. The older brother tried to help his brother, but both of them finally sank. At that moment, a man who was fishing there saw the two of them and tried to help. He could only save the younger brother, not the older one. Many of the Chinese in the village tried to help to find the body of the older brother, but they failed. After that, everybody realised these two children were orphans. Their parents were arrested for drug smuggling. It has been two years since the accident. Finally, the youngest one was sent to live with his grandmother.

A conversation during participatory observation in a migrant village along the Thai border

In our community, there are at least seven or eight orphans. Most of their parents died from using drugs. Among them, some can't attend school. Even when they do go they are stubborn and also very difficult to teach. They are used to life just wandering around the villages.

A 46 year-old Kachin male married with three children living along the Thai border with Myanmar

There are many orphans here because most of the parents were arrested for drug smuggling. One recent arrest left three children behind. The first one is nine years old, the second is seven old, and the youngest is just two. The other villagers really feel pity on them and give them some food. However, most of the neighbours are very poor. The two oldest children still attend school and the youngest one is left alone at home. If the little one feels hungry, he just goes and begs for food at the house nearby. He sometimes just sleeps on the side of the road. When the two brothers come back from the school, they clean their youngest brother. The eldest one takes responsibility for many things. He can clean the house, cook, wash and take care of his younger brother. Recently, one man came and took the two elders brothers to work with him, but not the youngest one. Finally, no one took care of him. Finally, there was a kind person who came and sent him to his mother in the jail.

A participatory observation in a migrant community along the Thai border

Other children are actually orphaned as a result of their parents dying of AIDS. Though some children are cared for by their relatives, many others must care for themselves and their siblings.

Now, there are five orphans in the village. Their parents all died from HIV/ AIDS, so they are now staying with their relatives. Most of them are between six to fifteen years old. They are studying. Some are in elementary school and some of them are in high school.

A Kachin male from Kachin State married with eight children living along the Thai border

There are two orphans in our village. Their father and mother were my friends. They died of AIDS this month [September 1999]. The two daughters are six and

eight years old. Their relatives do not live with these girls because they are scared of the disease. So, the relatives hired a housemaid to care for these children.

An 18 year-old Bamar male migrant worker at furniture shop along the China border

There are two or three orphans whose parents died from HIV/AIDS. These orphans are suffering now. There are many people in this community, but they do not have enough income. I don't know what will happen to these children.

A 17 year-old female from Shan State married with one child working as a farmer along the Thai border

I've never been to school. My parents are dead. I have four siblings. My elder brother left for Thailand four years ago, and never came back. I don't know where he is. First my aunts adopted my younger brother and sister but now they've been adopted by rich Thais. But here in this village, I'm all alone. I eat at other people's houses – one meal here and one meal there. I can't work very much because of poor health. I'm now reduced to being a beggar. [There was a wound on his back. It was an open sore about ½ inch deep and 1 inch wide. He had had it for a long time and it hadn't healed. There was no money for treatment at the hospital or the clinic].

A 14 year-old returnee from southern Thailand to Mon State

There are a lot of orphans. These orphans stay with their relatives after their parents pass away. Some of them are handed over to the temple.

A 35 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

Children between the ages of six and eighteen who are orphaned or whose parents are too poor are permitted to stay and study at the temple. The children go to the primary school in the village. They just live, eat and do self-studying here at the temple. However, we cannot keep girl orphans here once they start menstruating because this is a temple.

A key informant working at the temple in Mon State

Now, there are three orphans whose parents died. They are staying with their relatives. They are between six and twelve years old. None of them attend school.

A married Shan youth from Shan State living along the Thai border

My niece and her husband went to work in Thailand. They left their young daughter with me. Her husband died there last year. After my niece came back, she also developed the disease and died. Nothing happened to the child. The child is now in the 4th standard. The grandparents, aunts and uncles look after her. She is not ill-treated in any way, as the grandparents love her very much.

An elderly female in Kayin State in a village near the Thai border

Here there are many orphans. For example, there is a seven year-old girl who lost her parents. She lives with her grandmother. The grandmother is a fruit

vendor. She barely sells enough fruit to feed her granddaughter. There are also two brothers whose father died last year and mother this year. One boy is fourteen years old and the other is five. They live with their aunt and uncle. The father had AIDS and gave it to his wife. Now they have both died from it. There is another orphan boy eleven years old. He works along the border herding buffaloes. He doesn't have any parents or relatives. A 50 year-old Shan male village leader in Northern Shan State along the China border

Many parents do not migrate with their children and leave them in the care of their relatives. At times, this arrangement does not work out and children are abandoned to fend for themselves.

I don't know whether there are any orphans in this village or not. My child is like an orphan. There are many children whose parents are divorced or have moved to work in other places. This causes a lot of problems for children. But I don't know what to do. The political situation in the country causes more problems, such as domestic violence and then there are more orphans. I am quite worried about this. A Shan female married with two children working in Chiangmai town while her children stay along the Thai border

Most students who attend school here are very poor. The parents have to work to buy food each day. Some of the orphans are supported by kind persons for food and basic education and can attend school. Some of the parents work in other provinces and leave their children to old people to look after them.

A participatory observation with Shan youth from Shan State living along the Thai border

From now on, no one knows whether these orphans can go to school or not. They don't even have clothes to wear, or food to eat. Who can take the responsible to look after them unless somebody is given that responsibility?

A 33 year-old Shan female teacher from Shan State working with migrant children along the Thai border

This man is twenty-six years old and has a son four years old. He is planning to migrate again – this time with his wife. As for the child, they will leave him behind at an aunt's house in Kyone-doe. He will send one tical of gold per year. He thinks that should be enough. A village leader in Kayin State near the Thai border

I looked after one child. I don't know who his parents are or where he comes from. I don't know if they are dead or not. I know an old lady was looking after him, but she died a few years ago. I felt so much pity on him, so I decided to look after him. Now he is six years old. There are a lot of orphans like this. Most of them do not go to school. A Lahu male from Shan State married with five children making charcoal along the Thai border

There are many children without parents in our village, but they're not strictly orphans. Their parents have gone up to the hill [to Thailand], and they are left with their grandparents. School-age children are sent to school. When they grow old enough to be able to work, they go to Thailand to join their parents.

A male village health worker in Kayin State near the Thai border

This child here has a father and a mother, but they're divorced. His father remarried. His mother went to Yangon to work as a maid. His grandmother is poor, so he has nobody to look after him. The monastery looks after him. He is now in the first standard. He is bright. The parents of some of these children went up the hill and never returned. Assuming they were dead, the community elders brought the children to the monastery. Some children have lost their mother, some have lost their father. Some abandoned children (in the village) live with their grandparents or aunts. That small monk is an orphan. His aunts brought him to the monastery and left him in the care of the head monk. This monastery has a lot of orphans. They help with routine work around the monastery, and go out to collect food (alms) from the community.

A 22 year-old teacher at a village in Kayin State near the Thai border

My parents died several years ago. I'm alone. I can't remember who my relatives are. The only person I know is my grandmother. She said that all of her sons and daughters are working in Bangkok. Some of them work as painters. They send money to my grandmother, so she saves some of it to pay for food and my school fees. She almost buys nothing for herself. I love my grandmother very much. I know I give her a lot of troubles. When I was sick, she had to run around and buy medicine for me by herself. In the future, if she dies, I don't know whom I am going to stay with. I really don't know!

A young male Shan student from Shan State living along the Thai border

The changing social and sexual norms for many young people who migrate often expose them to more risks.

The border is not suitable for children, especially girls. These two girls sell fruit in front of my shop. They are living with their aunt who is a sex worker and they are gradually turning to this work. They are only about twelve or thirteen years old. It has become so common that yesterday I saw four and five year-old children play acting like sex workers and their customers.

A 25 year-old daughter-in-law of a beer bar owner in a China border town

In our border village, seven out of ten single girls sleep with men. They meet them at hotels in border towns. Just recently, one thirteen year-old girl was pregnant. They usually go to China for abortions, if they have enough money. A 21 year-old Shan female from Northern Shan State working along the China-Myanmar border

In our village, there is a girl who got married at the age of thirteen. She has a child already. There's another girl who married at fourteen, and another girl who was only sixteen years old. Girls are getting married younger and younger it seems.

A focus group discussion with Shan youth between the ages of 16-17 living along the China-Myanmar border

Young men are not faithful. They don't just date one girlfriend. They go around the villages dating many girls and encourage them to have sex. Recently, I saw a group of five young male youth from Northern Shan State go to a brothel in a China border town. A twelve year-old boy was among them. The older boys each went into a room with their partner and the twelve year-old boy sat waiting outside. Then I saw an older woman take the young boy into a room saying she would show him how to do it.

A 29 year-old Shan female living along the China-Myanmar border

There are many factories in Mahachai. Some people from Myanmar cheat one another. I knew a young man who told a girl that he would find her a job and took her with him. They lived together and then when her money was gone, he went away. This happens easily and often.

A 20 year-old male returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

I had a friend in the factory where I worked in Thailand. Her husband had an affair with another worker right before her eyes. There are so many divorcees in this factory. Because we are not in our own country, nobody knows what they are doing. People feel free without realising any of the consequences.

A 22 year-old Mon female returnee from Thailand to Mon State

In the factory where I worked there were four storeys. There were a total of 200 workers, many of them were young men and women from Myanmar. At the time I had many girlfriends in the factory, both from among the migrants and also Thai girls. When the employer was not around, the guys would sleep with the girls. The girls would give us a sign showing their interest such as buying us food or gifts. We didn't use any condoms at that time because we didn't need to as all the girls were sealed packages [virgins]. I had many girls like that but I didn't need to worry because I gave the girls a strip of pills that only cost me about 35 baht. I used a condom only once, but it broke.

A 24 year-old Bamar male returned from Thailand to Kayin State

In addition, a significant number of girls and, in some cases, boys reported marrying early for protection.

Nowadays, young people have boyfriends or girlfriends when they are thirteen or fourteen years old. Some are living together at that age. My younger brother lived with his girlfriend and got married at the age of 15. Some parents arrange for their sons to marry at the age of fifteen or sixteen to avoid them being recruited as soldiers.

A 20 year-old Kachin female teacher in Northern Shan State near the China border

After I came to Thailand, I met my husband who had been living here for thirteen years in his own home. He is an old man age eighty-two. He had seen me when I was working in a terrible state. At that time, we worked so hard, but we didn't get money to survive. I wanted to go back home, but had no money for travelling. Knowing this, he came to offer me 4,000 baht to marry him. Before that I did not know him and I did not love him. However, due to my hardship I decided to live with him, hoping he would be kind to me. Now I have a son with him.

An 18 year-old Shan female from Shan State living along the Thai border

I was able to leave my job at the karaoke bar when a man gave my photo and 10,000 baht to the police to arrest me. The police came to the karaoke bar, called the owner and showed him my photo and asked for me. I was brought to the police station for three days and then that man came and took me. I got married with that man and I have a son a little over a year old. As for my two friends I worked with at that karaoke bar, one has fled and the other is still working there. I hope that before I die, I have a chance to see my parents again.

A young Shan female from Shan State working along the Thai border

My first marriage was with a Chinese-Myanmar man in a town along the Myanmar-China border when I was eighteen. I was sold to someone in China at the time. When I escaped and returned to the China-Myanmar border, I remarried with a Shan man. When he went to the Pharkant jade mine, I married another man who worked as a mason. He was a drunk and did not want to earn money. But it was safer to be married than single. I had two children. I sold food along the China-Myanmar border and worked in the opium fields. Finally, I divorced him and my fourth husband was a Shan from the China-Myanmar border. He was also a drunkard. I sold clothes in the villages. Now finally, I started selling drugs here.

A 30 year-old Kachin-Kayin female drug trafficker living along the Myanmar-China border

4.12. Return and Reintegration

The return and reintegration of migrant children and youth is extremely difficult both physically and psychologically. This section documents the attitudes and concerns of returnees, the complicated logistics and fears of those returning, the reintegration process and the attitudes towards those who return. The section concludes with the aspirations and future dreams reported by study participants.

Migrants talked often and were constantly considering whether to return home, weighing their limited options carefully.

When I first arrived and work in Thailand, I came over the Thai-Burma border and worked on a farm for 50 baht per day. I worked there for five days and then I

went to work at a repair shop in Chiangmai town, where I got 160 baht per day. I have to pay for my rent and my income is not enough, just enough for each day. I don't know what work I can do. I have no identification card, even though I have been here for about eight years. Actually, I want to go back to visit my relatives in my hometown and stay there peacefully. If the situation is getting better, I will definitely go back immediately.

A conversation during participatory observation with Shan migrant youth in Chiangmai town

I have no friends here in Thailand. I can't go far from my house, but only to watch the Thai soap operas until 10 p.m. every day. I want to go back home. In Shan State, even though I did not go to school, I could feed the buffaloes and oxen, come back in the evening to have dinner with my family and get up early for the next morning. It was not boring. In Thailand, I have no good clothes to wear like the other children and no friends. I am very lonely.

A 14 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

Returning home was described as a difficult task by many, especially those who do not speak the national languages, or know their surroundings, or possess identity cards and/or money.

To enter inland China is very difficult. They check every one and you need to show nine types of recommendation letters. But they don't check on the return journey. When I ran away from Guangdong, I came to the border by train, plane and bus. I could do this because I took 100,000 yuan from my husband when I ran away.

A 31 year-old Kachin female who escaped from China and returned home to Northern Shan State

The owner of a leech farm bought me for 3,000 yuan. There were many people from Myanmar in this farm. Among them fifty were women. One day, I ran away from this place at midnight with my child. But they caught me at the railway station and separated my child from me. After that I never saw my child again. I tried again to escape in the daytime. That time, I went to the police station and the Chinese police helped me by sending me to Kunming. When I was in Kunming, five Kachin girls escaped from the snow capped mountain area. They were wearing thick coats that time. I was locked up in custody for one week at the Kunming police station. Then they sent me to another police station. Finally, they sent me to a China border town.

A 30 year-old Kachin-Kayin female living along the Myanmar-China border

I was told I would be given a decent job in Thailand, but I was sold to a massage house as a sex worker. I escaped from the massage house and went to the Thai police who sent me to the immigration detention centre. Since I entered Thailand illegally, I was detained while they made further investigations with the Chinese Embassy. The Chinese Embassy agreed to issue me travel documents but I was to pay for my own travel expenses back to China. Finally, a religious charity group

offered to pay my travel expenses. Now I am just waiting for the travel documents from the Embassy so that I can return home. A young Shan female from Xishuangbanna Prefecture in the Thai immigration detention centre in Bangkok

In August 1999, migrant workers came home from Thailand in thousands. In Myawaddy, there were 2,000 to 3,000 returnees at that time. The Thai government was cracking down and the employers themselves let the workers go home for a while. They told them to come back once the police crackdowns stopped.

A 40 year-old male key informant along the Thai border with Myanmar

Just when my fortunes had reached rock bottom, I started my journey home from Thailand. I had a contact to help me. One day there just happened to be a truck to Mae Sai and the contact paid to have me board the truck and hid me in the trunk. Once I reached Mae Sai, I didn't know where to go. So, I hid out in a little hotel until night. Then I looked up a woman whose child I'd once saved. I had some money and this woman also gave me a little. I continued on my way the next day. Because I had to pass through both Thai and Burmese customs to get home, I was afraid to go all by myself. I waited for a truck. Then, I met a kind-hearted person and told him my story. He took pity on me and hid me in his truck under some rugs. I hid in the truck and sneaked back into Xishuangbanna across the border this way. After reaching China, I found a vehicle that took me straight to my village. Once I got back I was virtually broke and covered with filth. The villagers took me for a madwoman. I entered the village as a madwoman big with child. I was already seven months pregnant. Once the villagers got it straight who I was, they all rushed forth to welcome me. My family all cried so hard that they fainted. A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Fearing the Chinese authorities, the old man asked his son-in-law to accompany me to Kunming. From Kunming, I took several buses to the border. Then I spent one night at a guesthouse and one night at the house of the man who made the fake identity cards. He and his wife were surprised to see me and requested not to report anything to the authorities. They told me that so far, eight girls had been taken to China like me and were also sold to Chinese men seeking brides. The next morning, I arrived in a China border town. At the border gate, I was asked to produce a permit for entering Myanmar. I had no documents, but I spoke Burmese and talked to them until I was allowed to enter. The difficult journey home from China took seven days after having spent over four months in another country where I was completely isolated.

A 20 year-old Kachin female returnee from China to Northern Shan State

I went to Thailand with friends and worked as a mason in Chiangmai. In Chiangmai, I met many more Shan friends from Northern Shan State. I worked very hard, but I wasn't happy. I was always worried because I did not have an identity card. I could not save any money and spent all I earned. I came back recently. I spent all of my money on the return journey. I don't want to go any

more. A 22 year-old Shan male returnee now farming in Northern Shan State along the Myanmar-China border

The Thai police and a Bamar man hired by them searched us. This Bamar man knew where we kept our money. One of us brought back 7,000 baht. All were in one thousand notes that his boss sewed into the lining of his coat. But this Bamar man knew such tricks and took it all. The police and he did not even give us one 'pya' [the smallest denomination of Myanmar currency].

A 28 year-old returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

There are also some rules and regulations that include not allowing people to go to work in Thailand. The leader of the village called a meeting and told us not to go and work in Thailand. If they find out, people won't be allowed to come back to the village. Those who come back to the village have to give 10,000 kyat to the village head. But, most villagers do not give money because they don't have enough. A 20 year-old Bamar female working along the Thai border

Reintegration is different and difficult for all, but the general response is to either not talk about the negative experiences abroad, or to deny them.

The villagers' attitudes towards me have changed. It's as if they bore a grudge against me. When I first returned, the villagers all went to see me, but after a few days the gossip really started to spread. They said things like 'Give us money and we'd like to go too.' Or 'your mother and father can't afford to raise you so you go to abroad and mix with men.' They're bad to me and say without reason that I sold my body while abroad.

A 19 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Many girls were tricked into going abroad to work but they never say they encountered any problems. I know two girls who were sent to Malaysia and called home to say they are doing well and plan on getting married.

A young Akha female in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

My friend is twenty-three years old. She returned from Bangkok because of poor health. She is very ill and also very disappointed. She had sent home all that she earned in Bangkok, but her family still wasn't able to save or improve their lives. The girl's parents lost all their possessions and their daughter's earnings playing various lotteries.

A young female in Kayin State near the Thai border

A girl returned home from Mae Sot because the landlord harassed her, holding her hands and touching her. At home she sells fabrics and also ground rice paste and refuses to talk about her experience.

A community leader in Kayin State near the Thai border

We have five siblings. My mother is a widow. My older brother and sister are working in Bangkok and my younger sister goes to school leaving only my mother and my younger brother to tend to the family's land. I decided to come back from Thailand because there was no one to work on the farm, but I am thinking of going back after harvest when the paddy is stocked.

A 21 year-old male returnee to Kayin State near the Thai border

Returnees bring back money, build better houses, have better living standards, eat better food. However, they learned bad habits as well, especially young people.

The father of a migrant in Kayin State near the Thai border

There was a girl in our village with AIDS. Now her family lives in town. She went to Thailand and sent a lot of money to her family. Her parents built a big house made of brick. They bought bicycles and motorbikes. When she came back, people said she had AIDS. She has died now. Before she died, she told her parents, 'I have worked hard so that you can live comfortably in a big house. I have done my duty.' If she was able to send so much money home, you can imagine what sort of job she did over there.

A 20 year-old Kayin male returnee from Thailand

After I divorced my husband, I went to work along the Thai-Malaysian border. I got the night shift. Some nights I got money and other nights I didn't get anything. I was really disappointed. After that, I decided to come back to the Thai border. Now, I am jobless and no one will help me. There is no job for me. I have no income and I have no identification card. There is only one choice for women like me.

A 25 year-old Thai Lue female from Shan State living along the Thai border

In Thailand most of the maids from Myanmar are abused. Some return home after their lives are ruined. Others think their lives are ruined so they remain in Mae Sot and become sex workers. I have met many of girls with these stories.

A 39 year-old Indian female returnee from Thailand to Kayin State

In general, the attitudes towards migrants were not positive, particularly for female migrants.

They go abroad and become people's minor wives or sell their bodies. The attitude towards them is negative.

A 22 year-old Shan female merchant and farmer in Northern Shan State near the China border

They say that it's bad here? That there's not enough to eat or wear? Why go? Only bad people go. The attitude towards them is that they are wrong.

A 19 year-old Shan male living along the border in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Attitudes are pretty mixed. Most people call them bad for stopping at nothing to make money. There's been no word from them yet, so we don't know whether

they're dead or alive.

A 30 year-old Shan women's group leader along the border in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

These girls were all tricked into going, but they're not likely to encounter any problems. I heard of two girls who were sent to Malaysia and called home to say they're doing well and planning on getting married.

A 37 year-old Shan male accountant living along the border in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Boys are concerned about marrying Kayin girls, although they themselves are Kayin, because most Kayin girls have been to Thailand. They assume that the girls who have been to Thailand are no longer 'pure virgins.' Some parents arrange marriage for their daughters as young as fifteen years.

A Kayin male youth in Kayin State

At first my daughter didn't dare come back home. She lived in Thailand for about five months. A friend who happened to see her told me about her. I was very worried so I went to Thailand myself. At first she wouldn't let me see her. She was hiding. When I saw that she was pregnant, you can imagine how I felt. I brought her back home. About four or five months later the child was born. Then we went back to Thailand to telephone the boss who fathered the child. At first he didn't believe it was her and he hung up. Then every time we called they said he was out. Then finally the boss' wife came to see us and asked to bring the child asking us and asked us how much money we wanted. But, my daughter told them she would keep her child and that she wasn't the type of mother who would sell her own child. The boss' wife gave us 4,000 baht for our travel expenses. Now we are back here and you can see how poor we are. When this happened, the neighbourhood looked down on us and spoke ill of us. Although we live from hand to mouth, we are not scheming and dishonest people. We try to have good will towards others. We think it is because my daughter's past bad karma, that this has happened to her.

A 50 year-old Kayin woman in Kayin State

Some of them come back bringing bags of gold. Don't be fooled by them-there's nothing to admire.

A 28 year-old female Bamar returnee from Thailand

If any Shan woman goes to work in towns in Thailand, the Shan people will look at her as a stranger or in a negative way. They will just conclude that all these girls and women are sex workers. She will have no dignity. But, some really do work as sex workers.

An unemployed Shan male from Northern Shan State married with two children living along the Thai border

Some people from our village went to Thailand. Five girls from our village went to Thailand to work at a textile factory. They went there with their friends. Village people look down on girls who come back from Thailand. People assume the girls work as prostitutes there, even though they say otherwise.

A 21 year-old Shan girl working as a hostess at a TV-Game centre along the Myanmar-China border

When I returned alive and bearing silver and gold, villagers didn't say a thing. That doesn't mean no one said bad things about me behind my back though. Well, I pay them no heed. I have made my money. Besides, whether or not I have made money is none of their business.

A 24 year-old Shan female returnee from Thailand to Xishuangbanna Prefecture

Let them do what they want. If someone's got what it takes, and isn't afraid of hardship and hard work, then (working abroad) is a possible choice. To say those who went were tricked because they thought of nothing but making money shows you haven't thought of all aspects of the problem. Villagers are not sympathetic towards those who get tricked. You should comfort them and teach them, that's the way to prevent it happening again.

A village leader in Xishuangbanna Prefecture

If they do well over there, people say they're good. If they don't then there's no end of the talking behind their backs. Everyone says they're bad. I guess it would be better if they hadn't gone.

A Shan male trading across the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand

At the conclusion of many of the interviews and focus group discussions, participants were asked about their future hopes and aspirations. The simplicity of these dreams highlights the struggles by many along the border, including migrant children and youth.

In the future, I want to have a stable job and work. I want to have a regular income. I want to study and be educated for my future. I want to help to develop our community. While I am here in Thailand, I want to learn how to do development work to improve the living condition of the villagers, especially the life of the Shan women. I am really interested to learn how to let women know about their rights equal to men.

A 25 year-old Shan male from Shan State working in Thailand

In the future, I would like the children to have an education so they will not have to face difficulties like us. If they have no education then they will be other people's slaves like us.

A married Shan male
from Shan State married two children living along the Thai border

I would like to have two children about three years apart in age. If it is possible I would like my children to go to school. I would like to feed my children as best as I can and be a good parent.

A young Kayin female from Kayin State living along the Thai border

The most important thing is to think about the children's and my future. I would like my children to be able to study. On the other hand, I worry very much about their health and my own as well. We have no money even though I work very hard. I really do not know how to solve these problems. A Shan female from Shan State married with two children working as a day labourer along the Thai border

I don't have a future. I have given up. I was married to a Chinese-Myanmar man when I was eighteen years old and sold to a leech farm in China. When I escaped from there I remarried with a Shan man along the border. When he went to work in the jade mines, I married another man. He was a drunk and did not want to earn money. We had two children. I sold food and worked in opium fields. My fourth husband is also a Shan and drunk all the time. Now I just sell drugs along the border and it doesn't matter what happens to me or anyone else.

A 30 year-old Kachin-Kayin female living along the China-Myanmar border

We worry for the future of the children. We are afraid they will not be able to be in school or when they are sick, there will not be enough money to pay for the hospital fees.

A focus group discussion with Shan male and female migrants from Shan State living along the Thai border

I would like to have a permanent job and not move to any other place. I would like to have money and be a good person in society.

A young Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

Our living is quite simple. We do not have any plans for the future. We would just like to not die of starvation. I would like our Lahu people to have more education and development to dream for a future.

A Lahu male from Shan State married with five children living along the Thai border

I would like my children to have the chance to study very high. If they are disciplined and do not get involved with drugs I will be satisfied and happy. The educated person or those who have knowledge will make the community and country progressive and developed.

A 26 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State married with three children living along the Thai border

Education is the future of these children and the development will come after. The youth need professional knowledge in order to solve the family's poverty problems.

A 46 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State married with three children living along the Thai border

I cannot even read and do not know what to say. If possible, I would like to stay in one place and not move anywhere again. I just dream because in real life things will not be that simple. It takes time and because my parents are poor they do not have any money for me.

A 21 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State working as a day labourer along the Thai border

From now on I will focus on farming even it is a hard job, but I will not give any trouble to anyone. I would like to feed a lot of pigs and chickens and then sell them to make a good income.

A 26 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

I would like to study and be good in Shan and Thai languages. I want to have a permanent job in the future and help my mother.

A young Shan male student from Shan State living along the Thai border

I would like to have a house and a chance to study. I like to draw and would like to have a better future than now.

A young girl from Myanmar living on the street in a Thai border town

I am old now and I wish the children and youth have a chance to study and work. I have worked hard since I was very young, but now some days I do not have enough rice to eat and I have to ask from the neighbours. For me, I want to have rice to eat and nothing more.

A Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

Another guy worked in Bangkok for two years and returned over three years ago. Now he is seventeen years old and wants to go back to work in Thailand again. However, he cannot afford the broker fees that are now 60,000 kyat. Although, he worked in Thailand and didn't save anything he thinks that this time may be different.

A conversation during participatory observation in Kayin State near the Thai border

When asked about their dreams for their future all those in the group discussions from kindergarten to fifth standard said they wanted to go to Thailand to work when they grew older. Most said they expected to go after they finished the fifth standard. Focus group discussions with children in Kayin State

We will migrate because we don't know what else we can do here.

A focus group discussion with male and female youth between the ages of 12 and 16 in Kayin and Mon States.

4.13. Community Response

The participants of this study identified a variety of ways in which the community has thus far responded to the critical issues faced by children and young persons. The responses have come from many stakeholders, including government departments (such as social welfare, justice, health, labour, education, etc.), government-supported organisations, non-governmental agencies, community-based groups or individuals, religious bodies (such as monasteries, churches, mosques, etc.) and employers or brokers (who are often seen as individuals supporting the community).

In addition, various community members have undertaken initiatives to address a broad range of needs, as presented below.

Basic Needs

The local temples are known for providing free room and shelter to thousands who pass along the border or to those from poor nearby areas.

The food is very simple and the same almost everyday. But the monastery provides it free so I cannot complain. A discussion with children at a monastery along the Thai border in Myanmar

In addition, villagers often make contributions to help pay for necessary community needs or to earn merit, according to Buddhist teachings.

Road construction is seen by many Buddhists as a merit-gaining act leading to longevity. So, many villagers contribute labour, materials or funds. Another example is the bridge that was built collectively by the villagers. In some villages there is still the tradition where young unmarried men and women actively participate in public welfare projects, such as digging drinking water wells.

A participatory observation in a border village along the Thai border with Myanmar

The youth group helped to dig holes for toilets at the primary school. They also help in other social development activities. A participatory observation in a Shan migrant community along the Thai border

Orphanages

More and more religious institutions have come to provide shelter to orphans. This has traditionally been common for boy children who are taken into monasteries, churches or mosques to study as novices. However, some religious institutions have found ways to also offer a home to girl children. Typically, such religious institutions house between thirty to more than one hundred children.

I have lived here for three years now. My mother was sold in Bangkok and stayed there for three years. When she came back she died. She was very ill and coughed all the time. She became very thin. Her husband was not my real father and he left a long time ago. I used to stay with my grandmother, but she is too old now so I stay at the monastery.

A 13 year-old boy at a monastery in Kayin State along the Thai border

At the dormitory in the monastery, the children's bedding was piled at the head of each mat and each child had a box for their belongings next to it. The bedding seemed frayed with not all children having bed nets. Children had few amenities and there was no soap available at the time of the visit. It seems that children's life at an orphanage is only slightly better than children living on the streets.

A participatory observation made in Myanmar near the Thai border

In Kayin State there are nine centres for children in difficult circumstances that are affiliated to the monasteries with support from the Social Welfare Department. Children can receive primary education and skills training, as well as become novices.

A staff member of the Department of Social Welfare in Kayin State

There are fifty-one children living at this orphanage run by the monk of this monastery. We accept children between the ages of six and eighteen. The orphanage not only accepts orphans, it also accepts children who are missing one of their parents and are very poor. Some children don't go to school. These are primarily the older children who are too old for the local primary school. We give them vocational training. There are courses in furniture making, agriculture, sewing and hair dressing. The government gives us some help but we always run out of money. When the monks go around with their alms bowls and gather food, that makes things a bit easier. We just try to make do with whatever is given to us. However, we don't accept girl orphans because this is a monastery. Besides we would need a woman warden and separate accommodations if there were girls. An interview with a monk at a monastery in Mon State along the Thai border

To solve the problems of attractions between opposite sexes, girls brought to the orphanage are required to become nuns. Young nuns of school age are allowed to attend classes together with the boys. Some nuns, who have already begun to develop, but are not yet literate, are taught in the evening by older nuns. Younger nuns also join the evening classes because they are sometimes too busy doing chores or their duties to attend the classes during the day.

A participatory observation at a Mon monastery in Mon State along the Thai border

Education

Many of the religious communities have taken responsibility for education, providing resources of land, teachers and buildings. Many of the formal and non-formal education classes take place at these religious sites.

Inside the monastery there is a classroom and a dormitory for the children: one for the novices [boys] and one for the nuns [girls]. There were three teachers and the classes were from kindergarten to fourth standard. School started every day at 9 a.m. with one hour for lunch and classes were dismissed at 4 p.m. There were eighty students, but not all were orphans living at the monastery. Some children were from poor families who sent their children to this school because they could not afford sending them to state schools. The teaching tools were rudimentary. There were only a few blackboards and no proper tables for anyone. The teacher was Bamar and most of the students only spoke Kayin making it very difficult for them to communicate.

A participatory observation in Kayin State near the Thai border

We just opened a school along the border for about fifty primary school students. Already there are over 600 students. There are classes from pre-school to sixth standard. Most of the migrants have recently migrated here and are very poor, working as farmers. Sometimes they leave their children at home alone and go to find jobs on other farms for long periods of time. Most of the parents are happy for their children to attend school until they are ready to work. A Thai male teacher working with migrant children along the Thai border with Myanmar

I teach the fifth to eighth standard classes at the school. The school is adjacent to the monastery. There are a total of 150 students. About half of the students are orphans staying here. Most of the children are Pa-O. There are four teachers altogether including a monk from the monastery. The problem here is that we don't have any books. We have only a few teachers' guides. We can't afford to buy them either. There are many students here who are very keen on learning. There are children who want to attend the school, but are not accepted because we do not have enough teachers. We do not have enough funds to support the school the way it is. It is hard to refuse children who want to learn.

A 22 year-old female Pa-O teacher at a monastery school in Mon State

There is a temporary school set up for migrant children who cannot go to the Thai school. There are 180 to 200 students in this school. There are five teachers. The school has not enough desks and tables for the students. The rain would fall through the grass roof. The children have tattered and dirty clothes. The teachers' salaries are paid for by the students' parents. The only problem is that the very poor families are unable to spend even this small amount to send their children to school.

A participatory observation at a primary school set up in Thailand along the border with Myanmar

I study at the school in this monastery. There are four in our family. I am the only who has gone to school. My parents don't think it is important for me to go to school, but because the NGO school is free I can convince them to let me attend. The school is for poor children like me who can't go to the Thai schools.

An 11 year-old Shan boy from Shan State living along the Thai border

I am working on a farm. My income is enough to pay for my expenses. My employer is kind to allow me to study evening classes in my free time.

A 25 year-old Shan male from Shan State living along the Thai border

The local cultural association encourages students from the remote areas to study high school education by supporting a boarding school for students from inaccessible areas. Boarders pay a small fee for their accommodations and food.

A participatory observation in a village along the Myanmar-Thai border

Villagers here are from Shan State and have donated their labour to construct a school for non-formal education classes. There is a Thai teacher willing to come and teach Thai and a monk who will come to teach Shan and English. As for the

primary school, the children's parents contributed their labour, wood and brought their own tools to help build the school.

A discussion in a Shan migrant community along the Thai border

I work in a restaurant for 300 baht a day. This is a good income, but not enough for our whole family. I do not have proper documentation and so while working I have to be very careful about the police. Life is very difficult. One of the opportunities here is I can attend adult education courses that will improve my future. A 21 year-old Kachin male from Kachin State working in Chiangmai town

Abuse and Social Problems

Migrant communities have struggled to address the social problems in their community. In many discussions it was this area that they felt most frustrated and weak in their ability to deal with. Drug related problems, trafficking and protection were the main concerns raised by villagers in this study.

I was working at the border gate collecting taxes and a fourteen year-old girl came to us asking for help. She had been trafficked to China, sold to a brothel and had just run away after she had been forced to work five days there. I collected money from my friends and we helped to send her home. A 24 year-old Bamar male customs agent at the border crossing between Myanmar and China

A Kachin woman from Kachin State was sold to a brothel in a China border town. She was married with two children. She ran away and came to our church saying she was Christian. We arranged for her trip back home. Girls who run away from brothels always come to our church for help.

A Shan male from a church in Northern Shan State along the border with China

In the past, the community gave treatment to drug addicts to try to cure them. The severe cases were kept in quarantine while treatment was being given. The parents of the addict had to provide their rice and pay 2,000 kyat per month to feed the warders. Now there are too many addicts and it is as though everyone has given up. A 22 year-old Shan male from Northern Shan State living along the China border

In some Shan and Kachin communities, the leaders make those who have trafficked persons pay an amount for compensation to the victim's family. The house and properties of the traffickers have even at times been confiscated to provide the compensation. Some villages have set up their own protection vigilance team around the clock to keep out drug sellers and complete strangers.

Research team's observations over time in villages in Northern Shan State and along the China border

Males in these communities organised vigilance teams to guard the village. This is one way to prevent traffickers of drugs or persons to enter their village. Compared to surrounding villages with the same socio-economic background, the villages with vigilance teams have fewer people going to work in Thailand.
Participatory observations over time in Kayin and Mon State border villages

A young Akha girl was trafficked from Xishuangbanna through Myanmar and Thailand and sold to a brothel along the Malaysian-Singapore border. She escaped after three days and was helped by a family in the area. After one month she was taken to the Chinese Embassy in Kuala Lumpur and supported until documentation and funds were raised for her return home. International and non-governmental organisations provided these resources and the girl was returned home with assistance from the organisations. Local community efforts were made to secure health care and a job for her upon return. A direct observation by SC(UK) staff involved in the return and reintegration efforts

Last year, the owner of a local beauty parlour arranged for a Kayin girl from Yangon to work at her shop. When the girl arrived she had to work and if she refused to do this work, the owner beat her. She asked for help from a man who came to her and this man sent her to a friend's house near where I work. Our department collected money and sent her back to Yangon.

A 45 year-old Kachin female working along the Myanmar-China border

Health

Some villagers reported small-scale initiatives in their community to deal with general health information and problems. In addition, some villagers reported HIV/AIDS awareness and various mechanisms of support for those infected.

Now, if we have malaria or other illnesses we can get health services from a clinic that opened along the border a few months ago. It is funded by a non-profit organisation, so they can give us free health care. We are so lucky because many people get malaria here.

A young Shan female recently arrived at the Thai border from Shan State

Last month the volunteers from the village and the district health department had a campaign on AIDS awareness and prevention. More than 80 persons participated in this campaign. A participatory observation in a Shan village along the Thai border with the majority of the population from Shan State

There have been a number of non-governmental and international organisations that have come to the China-Myanmar border for short periods of time to focus on problems related to drug addiction and HIV/AIDS.

A local government official in a China border town

Villagers are afraid of those dying of AIDS. During our time in the village we witnessed one woman dying of AIDS forced to spend months in her mosquito net until she finally died. The worse case was that of a man dying of AIDS who was buried before he actually died. Research team observations in border villages in Myanmar

In this border town, there is a youth organisation working on human rights training and drug prevention by producing and distributing posters, booklets and newsletters. The youth meet twice a month to plan their activities.

A participatory observation in a Thai border town with Myanmar

An international donor has funded a health centre on the border in co-operation with three village health volunteers who take care of the centre. The volunteers are trained in basic health care from the nearby Thai health centre. A participatory observation in a Shan migrant community along the Thai border

The local hospital has organised a group of people living with HIV/AIDS and created some core activities for this group. It has also supported free medicine, monitored and co-operated with outside funding agencies, and produced an herbal garden with traditional herbs to help those with AIDS. A Shan female from Shan State participating in an AIDS programme in a Thai border town

Promoting culture and community cohesion

Many community leaders and members seek to follow their cultural traditions and holidays, using it as a forum for bringing community and family members together. Many communities also sought to encourage native language literacy and reading materials.

We try to help migrant people. We put their interests first. If somebody dies in the middle of the night and there is a knock on the door, we can't go on sleeping. We have to get up and do whatever is necessary. There is no burial place for people from Myanmar here. We have to bury the dead secretly on the hill where they hold executions. A 27 year-old Muslim Bamar male in a China border town

The village leader of these Kachin migrants has tried to encourage ethnic activities, including Kachin literacy, dances and music. Mostly adults attend, not children and youth. A participatory observation in a Kachin migrant community along the Thai border

The village leader has formed a co-operative with monks, teachers and other village members. They provide basic information, help deal with village problems and network with other groups in the communities. A participatory observation in a Shan migrant community along the Thai border

Many people in this community are involved in keeping alive Shan culture. The headman organises many cultural events. The youth have worked to promote modern music and entertainment to support community development and monks assist to teach Shan language and support those who have no chance to study at the government school.

A participatory observation in a Shan migrant community along the Thai border

The owners of the orange farms, supervisors and local teachers have actively arranged education for children, youth, housewives and men living on the plantation to learn Shan and Thai languages. They have joined in the planning process and have given many suggestions for programme implementation.

A Shan male from Shan State working on an orange plantation along the Thai border

Community and Criminal Justice

In general, the study found very little activity around issues of community and criminal justice, although a few participants did mention local initiatives worth mentioning.

The Muslim community along this China border town has organised themselves. They have raised money to build a mosque and play an important role in mediating affairs within the community and the local authorities. The Muslim school also teaches Bamar and Arabic languages and has an average of twelve students.

A participatory observation with members of the Muslim community from Myanmar in a China border town.

The army has assisted our village by looking after sensitive areas near the border and has acted as resource persons in meetings on issues related to drugs and government migration policies.

A Shan youth from Shan State living along the Thai border

Though many of the initiatives undertaken by community members received some in-kind contributions, most communities lacked the necessary capital to fund activities, communicate, organise, evaluate, replicate or expand their initiatives so as to reach a level of sustainability and effectiveness.

From the community responses gathered at the study sites, SC(UK) teams were able to establish a deeper understanding of the needs and partnerships necessary to work with various community stakeholders in developing appropriate strategies for implementing and strengthening community responses to the migration of children and youth. This participatory research process allowed many of the children and youth impacted by

migration to not only get involved in developing responses, but also in planning and reviewing various interventions.⁷⁵

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

There remains an urgent need to continue to expand efforts to work with children and youth to address the critical issues surrounding migration that deny a wide range of the most basic rights to hundreds of thousands of children and young persons in the Mekong sub-region. SC(UK) plans to translate and disseminate this report widely and work to find appropriate ways to bridge the communication and implementation gaps between migrant communities, local, provincial and national networks and regional bodies. The purpose of this report is to provide an awareness of the realities and perspectives among migrant children, youth and their communities, as a means of building respect and partnerships to address their vulnerabilities to exploitation and abusive environments. This participatory action research (PAR) project provided SC(UK) with significant insight into the needs and concerns of migrants along the borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand. The recommendations outlined below are based on those concerns and needs, as well as the lessons learned in implementing this participatory approach to research, including appropriate ways of working with young migrants, effective interventions, advocacy efforts and areas in need of further research.

5.1. *Methods of working with migrant children and youth*

Participatory approach to research

- Include children and youth participation at the various levels of research and decision-making, using innovative and culturally acceptable ways to involve them in identifying and responding to their experiences and environment.
- Develop trust and confidence among beneficiaries.
- Provide opportunities to develop self-esteem and a sense of responsibility for addressing critical issues in one's community.
- Encourage children to identify their own problems and develop interventions, together with governmental and NGO agencies and community-based organisations, to ensure sustainability by providing skills and knowledge to grow beyond current projects.
- Realise direct participation is an unfamiliar approach for many in the Mekong sub-region and provide ongoing guidance and training in participatory approaches that is adaptive to the various communities' experiences, skills and environment.

⁷⁵ The actual participatory action research (PAR) activities and pilot interventions that emerged from this project are presented in a separate report entitled *Breaking Through the Clouds: A Participatory Action Research (PAR) Project with Migrant Children and Youth Along the Borders of China, Myanmar and Thailand*.

- Recognise that the diversity of participants and realities of each site require time and patience to explore, to review pilot initiatives, to implement research strategies and to develop appropriate interventions.

Flexibility required

- Respond with a wide range of approaches that are appropriate to the situation.
- Develop flexible ways to measure impact among highly mobile, isolated, diverse and vulnerable children and youth.
- Realise it may not be possible to predict the timeframe for implementation of projects with undocumented migrant populations along the border. Many unforeseen political, economic, military or social events may interrupt the best of plans.
- Ensure the participation, as well as the safety, of those involved with a sensitive and flexible approach.

Cross-border collaboration

- Facilitate cross-border links, exchanges and sharing of resources.
- Co-ordinate cross-border programmes.
- Provide cross-border perspectives and strategies necessary for understanding the spectrum of issues and strategies for interventions.

Remain inclusive of ethnic diversity and marginalised groups

- Translate materials and information into local languages.
- Honour and establish respect for cultural differences by adapting resources accordingly.
- Acknowledge the high degree of illiteracy, especially among the most vulnerable, and seek to include this population in outreach initiatives.
- Explore ways to reach children and communities regarded as 'illegal' as a result of their lack of documentation or unemployment. These individuals are often isolated and live in vulnerable circumstances.
- Develop awareness and sensitivity to the fears of migrants, regardless of how valid or appropriate they may appear.
- Establish measures to ensure security and confidentiality of participants.
- Seek to identify those who are not included in activities, making a special effort to reach children and young persons not easily accessible.
- Recognise that children and youth often have little free time available due to long working hours and numerous family responsibilities.
- Establish ways of working that are inclusive of all family members, especially young women and girl children.
- Adapt interventions to the high mobility and unpredictable events that are common among migrants and often beyond their control.

Build partnerships

- Establish partnerships among non-governmental and governmental stakeholders at the community, provincial, national and cross-border levels.
- Hold clear expectations and take an active role in monitoring unrealistic expectations between partners maintaining neutrality between competing political and other groups.
- Provide referrals to children and young persons and their communities that address issues or concerns that are not a component of the current project.

5.2. *Effective Interventions*

Research Process

- Ensure that the assumptions of those outside the village and the realities and perspectives of the communities impacted by migration are understood. This is particularly important for the most vulnerable and isolated, such as children, young persons and females.
- Seek to include qualitative data that can transcend assumptions and incorporate the voices and perspectives of participants.
- Develop skills among local community members that allow them to take an active role in developing, implementing, analysing, writing and disseminating the research. This not only improves skills, but also provides more nuance and in-depth understanding of the issues, values, perspectives and decision-making considerations.

Documentation and Dissemination

- Increase awareness of critical issues related to migration, such as immigration and labour laws and the contact agencies that provide emergency assistance.
- Provide situation updates.
- Exchange information and experiences across borders.

Life skills and literacy

- Support intervention strategies that decrease vulnerabilities associated with low levels of life skills, including reproductive health (including HIV/AIDS), literacy, language, basic math, and limited knowledge of, laws, children's rights and basic rights.
- Support youth mobilisation projects including, sports, art, and other community-based activities to encourage creativity, focus energy and build confidence in the whole person.
- Develop strategies for working that promote self-reliance.
- Encourage positive cultural identification, literacy and values that bind families and communities together.

Protection and safe return

- Strengthen existing cross-border links to establish safe channels for returnees based on cross-border networks.

- Develop and adapt interview guidelines to assess protection needs and the concerns of trafficked persons.
- Provide individuals with a clear understanding of their options in relation to their status as migrants.
- Assist in developing basic outreach and emergency services that reach the most vulnerable, either directly or by linking them with training and other support initiatives.
- Ensure that services are safe and accessible to the community.

Support for reintegration

- Secure appropriate counselling and care services to assist in reintegration and provide training and support to service providers.
- Assist those returning with information and life skills training that provide both knowledge and establish (or re-establish) connections with other community members.
- Establish private sector collaboration in developing long-term strategies for securing better employment opportunities.
- Engage families and communities in reintegration initiatives in order to sensitise them to the realities of trafficking and to help prevent further trafficking and re-trafficking.

5.3. Advocacy and public policy

- Build slow and gradual government collaboration with partners at many levels that address the sensitive issues surrounding undocumented migration.
- Carefully plan and implement interventions that do not depend too much on external input or overwhelm the indigenous and migrant populations along the border areas by providing overtly visible assistance that may compromise sustainable interventions in the long term.
- Translate critical documentation and training materials to broaden the discourse among policy makers and program implementers and expand awareness of the issues and appropriate responses to the vulnerabilities of children and young persons impacted by migration.
- Use both political and developmental frameworks to address the root causes of trafficking and the worst forms of exploitation and abuse. These efforts must include top-level government commitment throughout the Mekong sub-region in order to develop appropriate responses.
- Encourage participation in (and where necessary development of) local, national, cross-border and regional networks that include governmental, non-governmental, community-based and international collaborations.
- Increase awareness and technical training to partners in both civil society and government.
- Provide practical and technical input to networks and partnerships in the Mekong region.

5.4. Identifying vulnerable populations

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) conducted over the last two years allowed SC(UK) and the research team to identify many types of vulnerable children living in cross-border areas in China, Myanmar and Thailand, as listed below. PAR also provided a holistic approach to effectively address migrant children's concerns and vulnerabilities, and took into account that many children are exposed to a number of issues at any one time. Limited resources and the sensitivities of migrant youth, however, precluded SC(UK) from addressing all the issues in this report. SC(UK) believes that an appropriate strategy for working with vulnerable populations, like migrant children and youth, is to link children who are not participating in existing programmes to other agencies that specialise in addressing their needs. This requires strengthening the capacity of local community-based groups to reach these populations. The children SC(UK) identified as particularly vulnerable include:

- Young sex workers in Myanmar and Thailand⁷⁶
- Domestic workers in Thailand
- Factory workers in Thailand
- Child labourers along all the borders
- Slave wives, particularly into China
- Street children along all the borders
- Child beggars, particularly in border towns and urban areas along all the borders
- Child scavengers along all the borders
- Orphaned and abandoned children along all the borders (including those institutionalised)
- Children and youth engaged in using, trafficking and/or producing drugs
- Child soldiers
- Children in confinement (detention centres, police stations or prisons)
- Children with special needs such as (physically, mentally or psychologically handicapped)
- Children in refugee camps and displaced or relocated communities

5.5. Critical issues requiring further research

This project was unable to explore in depth a number of issues that are critical to developing sustainable partnerships and appropriate interventions. In addition, project participants expressed concern that there is no adequate information or documentation available to address these issues. SC(UK), therefore, recommends further research be conducted in the following areas:

1. Exploring the impact, nuances and responses to drug abuse and trafficking among children and youth along the border areas, especially as

⁷⁶ Current SC(UK) projects along the China-Myanmar border involve working with sex workers, from Myanmar and China, who are working in China border towns.

to whether migration increases their vulnerability and impedes interventions.

2. Document in more detail the realities faced by migrant girls and young women employed in domestic service to determine to what extent they are trafficked, abused and/or exploited, their concerns and needs and the opportunities available to reach out to them.

3. Developing strategies for identifying and prosecuting those who profit from the trafficking of children and persons, while simultaneously ensuring the protection and safety of the victims.

4. Identifying to what extent migration has resulted in increased domestic violence; the impact domestic violence has on children and young persons; and what approaches are possible to address these abuses, without further escalating tensions and jeopardising the victims.

5.6. Expanding research and interventions to other vulnerable border areas

The participatory approach to research is an effective way to identify, understand and develop appropriate interventions among vulnerable populations. The approach provides researchers with a means of addressing sensitive and complex issues. SC(UK) recommends that participatory action research (PAR) be used in other border areas in the Mekong region impacted by migration that have received little attention, and few, if any, interventions. These areas include:

- Vietnam-China border
- Lao-China and Lao-Thai border areas
- Myanmar-Thai border with Eastern Shan State
- Migrants from China in Thailand

Based on this study's findings and recommendations, SC(UK) has begun to initiate programs, partnerships and advocacy efforts to address the critical issues that deny children and youth some of life's most basic securities and indivisible rights.