



INTO THE LIGHT

**YOUNG FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS IN THAILAND'S
SEAFOOD SECTOR AND THEIR ACCESS TO DECENT WORK**

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Fishing boats, Rayong

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
KI	Key Informant
LPN	Labour Rights Promotion Network
NIS	National institute of Statistics (Ministry of Planning, Cambodia)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SNS	Social Networking Service
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
USD	United States Dollar



Longtail boat at sunset, Thailand

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Current migration trends are evidence to unprecedented human mobility around the globe. The UN Migration Agency estimates that in 2017 there were around 258 million international migrants around the globe (Ladek 2018), out of which over 32 million were between the ages of 15 and 24. Nearly 52 percent of migrant adolescents and youth worldwide lived in developing countries, the largest number (36 percent) residing in Asia (UNDESA 2016). The proportion of women among the young migrants in developing countries is significant at nearly 45 percent (GMG 2014). Despite the high proportional number of young female migrants, they continue to face unique and persistent challenges when navigating the labour market and realizing their aspirations.

In the labour market, gender-based discrimination, harmful traditional practices, restricted opportunities and the lower value placed on women's economic contributions often result in higher rates of unemployment among young women. However, issues faced by young migrants have been less addressed by migration literature and support programs. This study sheds light on this often-ignored population of migrants, focusing on a group of young Cambodian migrant women in Thailand working in the seafood sector.

The fishing industry in Thailand is a sector that is heavily reliant on migrant labour. Fisheries exports from Thailand were pegged at USD 6.6 billion in 2014. The fishing and seafood industry employed more than 600,000 people in 2017, of which 302,000 were registered migrant workers (ILO, 2018). Therefore, migrant workers are an important resource for the Thai fisheries sector. At the same time, studies have reported the harsh working conditions in the fisheries sector for migrants in Thailand (Brennan, 2009; Chantavanich, Laodumrongchai and Stringer, 2016; Derks, 2010; EJF, 2015; ILO and ARCM, 2013; Yukata, Michikita and Tsubota, 2018). Despite the poor work conditions, young Cambodians continue to migrate to work in the Thai fishing sector. In order to ensure that youth within this sector do not face a dead-end when it comes to their career and overall life, it is important to understand the existing working and living conditions and understand as well as their aspirations.

Young Cambodian women, in particular, are struggling to expand their life choices. Labor force participation rate for women aged 15-24 is about 74 percent (World bank, 2017) in Cambodia. There are no clear figures for young Cambodian women working in Thailand. Opportunities for young women migrants within the fisheries sector in both countries need to be expanded in order to support their aspirations for a better future.

1.1 Research Questions

In order to understand young Cambodian women migrant workers' life choices, the following research questions were explored:

- (1) What is the socio-economic situation of adolescent and young Cambodian women (i) working in the fishing industry in Thailand; (ii) living in Thailand as dependents of parents/spouses working in the fishery industry; (iii) left behind in Cambodia by families that have migrated to Thailand to work in the fishery industry; and (iv) who have returned from Thailand?
- (2) What are the gender stereotypes in households, communities and the fishing supply chain?
 - a. What are the roles appointed to men and women, respectively?
 - b. How do these roles affect social norms and gender stereotypes?
- (3) How do gender norms affect young women's access to education, training, social protection services, and ultimately, decent work¹ opportunities in both countries?
 - a. What challenges and obstacles do young women face in accessing these services and opportunities?
 - b. What other factors influence young women's access to the same?
- (4) What is the cost and benefit of young Cambodian women's involvement within the fishing supply chain? What are the subsequent ripple social benefits?
- (5) What program interventions are recommended to enhance young Cambodian women's economic advancement, particularly, through access to decent employment opportunities, education, vocational trainings and social protection services?

¹Decent work refers to "opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income; security in the workplace and social protection for families; better prospects for personal development and social integration; freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives; (and) equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men". (ILO's Decent Work Agenda)

1.2 Methodology

Data collection was carried out in December 2017 and the analysis was completed between January and March 2018. Three field studies were carried out: two locations where migrant workers are working within the fisheries sector in Thailand (Rayong and Trat provinces) and one location in Cambodia where nearly half of the respondents in Thailand came from (as a reference point to understand the options that young women have back home in Prey Veng province). The research carried out in Thailand was facilitated by the NGO Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN), who have been working to promote labour rights in the fishing industry. LPN have schools for migrant children from fishing communities in Trat and Rayong, allowing the researchers access to the communities.

Twenty young Cambodian women migrant workers (aged between 18 and 25 years) were interviewed in the Muang district of Rayong province and in the Klong Yai district in Trat province. Six women were interviewed in the Peam Chor district, Prey Veng province in Cambodia. In addition, the researchers also interviewed 6 individual Key Informants (KI) in Thailand and Cambodia and conducted 'informal discussions in all three locations previously mentioned. KI's included village heads in both Cambodia and Thailand, NGO staff, a health volunteer in Thailand and officials from a local school and the Department of Labour and Vocational Training in Cambodia.

1.3 Study Areas: Rayong, Trat and Prey Veng

Two study areas were chosen in Thailand: Rayong and Trat provinces. The two locations were selected based of the differences in working conditions and impact on young women migrants' lives.

Rayong and Trat are both situated along the eastern seaboard of Thailand. Fishing vessels are loaded and unloaded at the piers along the waterfront by migrant men. The catch is sorted at the piers by migrant women and then shipped to factories for further processing. The good fish are packed for export and the rest is processed as feed for aquaculture. A small portion is also sold in the local market or given to workers for personal consumption. Processing in factories is carried out by both migrant women and men. The catch includes a wide variety of sea crea-



Young migrant woman selling fish at the port

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tures, each of which is processed differently by different skilled workers at home and in factories. All of the fishing vessels use nets, which are in constant need of repair. Net repair is a major livelihood for both Thai and migrant women and men.

Rayong has more commercial fishing ports (41) compared to Trat (11), with larger ships docking at Rayong with larger-scale catch. Most of the fish in Rayong go to processing factories nearby and are packed for export. Women in Rayong have a varied livelihood both in the seafood industry and outside. They work in the docks, in factories and at home to sort, clean and process the catch. In Rayong, migrant women earn around THB300 per day. They tend to be in Thailand longer and visit Cambodia less frequently.

In contrast, Klong Yai district in Trat province is 10km away from the Cambodian border and the landing site stands alone without any major factories around. Trat has more small-scale fishing ports (101) com-

pared to Rayong (53) and catch is used for both export and domestic consumption. Fish are processed solely in the factories along with larger crabs, whilst only the smaller crabs are processed at home by women. Respondents in Trat have border passes, pink cards², work permits and are paid lower wages (THB5,000-6,000 per month) when compared to migrant workers in Rayong. At the same time, migrants residing in Trat tend to have stronger connections with their home communities and visit frequently.

In both locations, Cambodian men working as seafarers are bound by contracts lasting between 10 and 22 months, and are paid a lump sum after the completion of their agreed term of contract. Until then, they are given a small stipend every month, which is not sufficient to support their families through remittance. As a result, the seafarers' wives and/or sisters migrate with them to Thailand to work in the fish processing industry and earn a daily income while they wait for their male counterpart's pay. Women are found working in seafood processing jobs such as fish-sorting, squid-peeling, crab-picking, fish-processing, shrimp-processing, anchovy-processing, boiling fish, drying fish, making fish sauce, among other roles. In the fishing industry, women also mend and patch nets both at home and at the piers. Additionally, women are also found in the domestic labour industry, carrying out professional domestic work as housekeepers and cleaners in hotels, hospitals and offices, and as waitresses or helpers in restaurants.

Ta So village of Ruessei Srok commune in Prey Veng province, Cambodia, is around 10 to 20 kilometers away from the Vietnamese border. Prey Veng is one of the poorest and the most populous provinces in Cambodia. The livelihood in Prey Veng is largely paddy farming, now being modernized with short-term rice varieties and machines for ploughing and harvesting, tasks which traditionally employed much of the population.³ However, according to NIS (NIS, 2016), 41.5 percent of farmers (includes farm labourers) have less work available, leading to migration becoming a natural way of life for people in Prey Veng.⁴ About 9 percent of the population is composed of internal migrants, while 4.2 percent of the population are overseas migrants (UNICEF, 2017).

1.4 Profile of Respondents

About 30 percent of the interviewed migrants were 18–20 years old, 25 percent were aged between 21–23 and 45 percent of the interviewees were 24 or 25 years old. Despite their young age, 75 percent of them were married and 23 of the 40 respondents had between one and three children. Among the women who said they had been married at some point, thirteen had one child, while eight women had two children each and two had three children each. Two women were pregnant at the time of interview.

The next chapter presents the working and living situation of young women in Cambodia, detailing their livelihood options and the gender norms and barriers that shape the direction of their lives. Chapter 3 provides an evidence-based analysis of the gender norms and stereotypes, socio-economic situation and the cost-benefit of young women migrating from Cambodia to Thailand's seafood industry in Rayong and Trat. Chapter 4 provides an overall analysis of life advancement options for young Cambodian women.

1.5 Structure of the Report

The next chapter presents the working and living situation in Cambodia for young women, detailing their livelihood options and the gender norms and barriers that are determining the direction of their lives. Chapter 3 provides evidence-based analysis of the gender norms and stereotypes, socio-economic situation and the cost-benefit of young women migrating from Cambodia to Thailand's seafood industry in Rayong and Trat, through young migrants' experiences at their end destination. Chapter 4 provides the overall analysis of life advancement options for young Cambodian women.

²Pink-colored cards were issued by the Thai government since the past two decades to migrant workers who registered themselves at the local OSS. It gives them temporary permission to stay and work in Thailand, though they may only live in the province where they are registered. ³Interview with KI, Prey Veng province, 26 December 2017. ⁴ Interview with KIs, village headman and NGO staff, Prey Veng province, 26 and 28 December 2017

CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT IN CAMBODIA - OPTIONS FOR YOUNG WOMEN

2.1 Livelihood in Prey Veng

More than half of all households (59 percent) in Cambodia are small land owners with less than 1 hectare of land, while 25 percent of the households own 1-3 hectares of agricultural land (NIS 2016: 19). Less than 40 percent of all agriculture land in Cambodia is irrigated (NIS 2016: 22). Cambodian rice yields were reported at 3.3 tonnes per hectare in 2014. It is the lowest in Southeast Asia, according to a study by ADB (2014).

Literacy rate in Cambodia is slightly higher for women (92.6 percent) compared to men (91.9 percent) for the age group of 15-24 years old (NIS 2016). More

girls than boys are enrolled in school at the lower levels. However, from lower secondary level up the percentage of enrollment for boys becomes higher than girls, only 24.9 percent of women aged 15-24 were in school (NIS 2016). Almost 5 percent of women aged 15-24 years have never attended school, among the main reasons given were “must contribute to household income” (42 percent), and “did not want to go to school” (12 percent) (NIS 2016).

In Ta So village in Prey Veng province, there were about 150 students⁵ enrolled in each grade, ranging from grade 1 to 8, with an almost equal ratio between boys and girls. In grade 9, there were only about 110 students, with more boys than girls. In grade 10, this is further reduced to about 100 students, with the percentage of boys being about 55 percent. In grade 11, there were just 67 students in all, 60 percent were boys and 40 percent of them were girls. In grade 12, there were only 46 students (40 percent of them being girls), illustrating that two-thirds of all students (more than 70 percent of girls) have dropped out between grades 8 and 12.⁶



Young women mending nets at the pier, Rayong

⁵According to KI interview realized in December 2017.

⁶Interview with KI, Prey Veng province, 26 December 2017

The average education level attained by young women in Prey Veng is middle school.⁷ Since girls drop out of school early, they are also likely to marry young and start working early. Dropping out of school before reaching secondary levels is a limiting factor to the occupational choices available to young women in Prey Veng (Table 2.1). The core occupation for women (and men) is agriculture, mainly paddy rice production in-season. Wages will slightly increase if they migrate to Phnom Penh or to other provinces, but for young women there is still a strong expectation that they should be near the home, and parents are more likely to restrict daughters mobility.⁸ “Girls can’t travel far from home because they could be raped and they will get a bad reputation,” KI respondent in Prey Veng. The preferred non-farm occupations for young Cambodian women are retail-vending and micro-businesses, however formal training for these two careers does not exist in Prey Veng province.⁹

2.2 Case Study: Declining rural livelihoods in Prey Veng

Limited opportunities for earning a sufficient income, and lack of social protection options for Cambodian women and girls leaves them vulnerable to risks. Still, girls are expected to support the family in times of difficulties, as demonstrated by Rattana’s story.

Rattana is the 19-year-old daughter of a farmer. Her parents owned 1 hectare of land, a buffalo, some chicken and pigs. The family had 4 children – two boys and two girls. With their rainfed land they were able to produce one ton of rice which they sold for only 100,000-120,000 Riels, not enough to feed the family. Then, her mother fell ill and her father borrowed money for the treatment. To make matters worse, they lost all their poultry during a bird flu epidemic and their income from pig farming decreased due to an influx of cheap pork imported from Vietnam.

Since the family did not have enough money to support expenses for her to attend school, Rattana quit school at Grade 8. She did not receive any encouragement to continue studying from teachers or family. Rattana and her brothers then went to work as agriculture labourers. Her brothers got jobs which included spreading herbicides, chemical fertilizers and pumping water. The brothers also fished along the pond to sell fish for daily support. However, agriculture work for young women is restricted to seasonal and irregular such as transplanting and harvesting. In the past few years, young women have been unable to find work harvesting rice because farmers are renting machines instead of hiring labourers.

With limited options for employment, Rattana and her sister decided to migrate to Thailand. When Rattana became sick and returned to her village, she was unable to access state support for families earning an income below the poverty line, since local authorities took into account the income of her sister who continues to work in Thailand.

TABLE 2.1: Jobs available for young women in Cambodia

Jobs in the Village in Prey Veng



Agricultural Worker
USD60-150 per month in season



Small Micro Vendor
USD100 per month



Domestic Worker
USD60-100 per month



Helper in Shop
USD100-120 per month

Jobs in Phnom Penh



Market Vendor, Street Vendor, Night Vendor
USD200-300 per month



Domestic Worker, Nanny, Housekeeping Staff
USD100-200 per month



Garment Factory Worker
USD153-170 per month



Helper in Shop
USD150-200 per month



Construction Worker
USD190

Jobs in Other Provinces



Agricultural Worker
USD150-200 per month

Source: Field Survey 2017
(This excludes options of working on their own farm)

⁷Interview with KIs, village headman and NGO staff, Prey Veng province, 26 and 28 December 2017

⁸Interview with KIs, Prey Veng province, 26 December 2017

⁹Interview with KIs, Prey Veng, 28 December 2017

2.3 Restriction to girls' education, training and mobility

Girls and young women are not only expected to contribute to the family economically, but also to primarily adhere to the decisions of their parents and/or husbands. Young women are discouraged from being independent and mobile due to fears for their physical safety and gender-based violence (GBV). Additionally, social norms assigning childcare and unpaid reproductive work (i.e. household management) to women restrict young women's mobility, agency, access to opportunities, as well as continued access to knowledge and information. Thida's story shows such a case.

Thida is a young woman living in a small village in Prey Veng province. She is 19 years old and has an infant daughter. Her husband is a farmer and lives in the farm he works at. He visits the house in the village every 2-3 days. She has a shop selling snacks, clothing, household supplies and basic farming supplies. Her shop and house are next to her mother's house and restaurant.

She was married after grade 10 after her grandmother told her mother: "You have only 2 girls, no boys. You should get her married so that she can help you in future." Her grandmother also believed that a girl has to be around the kitchen and cannot go outside to work like men, so there would be no point in educating her further. Her mother said that she loves Thida very much and worries about her safety should she be far from home. For example, if Thida gets raped, her reputation will be spoiled. It is for this reason that Thida's mother has a house and a shop for Thida next door, to keep her daughter safe.

Thida was a dutiful daughter, so she got married to a man her mother chose, even though she would have liked to study further. When she became pregnant, she suffered from a number of health problems, for which her mother spent a large amount of money treating. After her child was born, her health recovered, but her husband's attitude didn't. He drinks and scolds her more now. She is scared of her husband and looks to her mother for all kinds of support in life, including childcare, health and financial support, as well as dealing with her husband's behaviour. She is too scared to ask her husband to allow her to study or go for vocational training. She does not have anyone to look after her small child as there is no preschool facility in her area. She is afraid of alienating her husband and her mother as they are the only people she can get support from, so she confines herself to childcare at home.

With limited opportunities, young women in rural areas earn very low incomes and continue to be trapped in the cycle of early marriage, poverty and subsistence livelihood by the dual bind of gender norms and fear of losing their loved ones. The next section further explores the barriers and obstacles faced by young women.

2.4 Constraints for young women to build their non-farm career in Prey Veng

The previous case studies showed the barriers and constraints that impact young women's efforts towards education and vocational training, improving livelihood and gaining access to social protection. In addition, other obstacles that young women face in expanding their non-farm career choices are: (a) Lack of skills for non-farm careers due to limited access and/or encouragement for further education, and vocational training opportunities; (b) Limited non-farm career available in Prey Veng; (c) Restricted mobility to travel and social expectation to care for the family; (d) Disregard towards women's capabilities to perform non-farm tasks.

(a) Lack of skills for non-farm careers due to limited access and encouragement for further education and vocational training opportunities

Young women in Prey Veng lack skills to take up non-farm careers due to the low levels of education and high dropout rates among young women. KIs in Cambodia held the view that women should be home-bound and focused on care-related work. Even after a new high school was set up in the village in Prey Veng three years ago, the dropout rate remains high among girls. There is a 30 percent dropout rate for secondary school girl students in Prey Veng province in 2016.

Most female students drop out to support their families¹⁰. Many migrate to Phnom Penh, Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri, while some also go to Thailand. Social networks play a key role in keeping girls in or out of school as dropouts and migration take place in chains. When one girl leaves, her friends and neighbors soon follow.

The migration of parents also disrupt children's education. If parents migrate, children are more likely to quit school and follow them. Girls tend to migrate with their parents, since (i) they prefer to be with their parents rather than grandparents or aunts and uncles¹¹; and (ii) parents expect daughters (aged over 10 years) to help around the house in destination communities so the mother can earn an additional income. When their education is interrupted, young women lack the foundational skills and knowl-

¹⁰Interview with KI, NGO staff, 28 December 2017

¹¹Parental out-migration has a negative impact on children according to Vutha et al (2014), especially since in the absence of any official support for children, they are left in the custody of aged grandparents who are unable to support them adequately.

edge necessary to access training and decent work opportunities (UNESCO 2013).

(b) Limited non-farm careers available in Prey Veng for young women

As table 2.1 shows, there are few non-farm careers available for young women except as small vendors or domestic helpers. One route for young women to build a non-farm career outside informal employment, without going for higher education, is to go for vocational training courses. There are vocational training courses run by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training in Cambodia, but none of the respondents were aware of these courses, highlighting the lack of access to information. The courses offered each year depend on the availability of public or INGO funding.¹² Tailoring, hair dressing, beautician courses are offered to women and while these courses are free, there is no stipend or accommodation for students. Therefore, some families are not able to send them to the courses until completion (Key informant, DoLVT, Prey Veng). Distance from home is a major barrier for young women.

“Courses conducted in villages have a larger number of women, while workshops held in the district have more men participating.”

– KI, NGO official, Prey Veng

For training courses like motorcycle repair, mechanic and carpentry are also available but tend to be dominated by male students. Women are not encouraged to join these courses and individual women interested in learning such courses have to not only convince teachers and administrators to get admission, but also deal with the male-dominated environment on a daily basis.

(c) Restricted mobility to travel and social expectation to care for the family

Young women are expected to be near the house and not travel far¹³. The fear that women will lose their virginity if they stay away from home is high among parents¹⁴. Such gender norms restrict young women's mobility, and consequently their education and employment opportunities.

“I love my daughter and I am worried about her safety [so] I can't send her far away to study. A woman should be around the kitchen.”

– KI, female, Prey Veng province

Further, women are expected to be the main caretakers of the family home and children.

“Only [a] mother can take good care of children, so we do not have crèche..”

– KI, village head, Prey Veng province

Such social expectations not only deprive women of access to childcare services, but also restrict their mobility to seek training or non-farm careers on a daily basis.

(d) Disregard towards women's capabilities to build their career in non-farm occupations

Women's priority is supposed to be household work, and so they are not encouraged to build a career independently. Instead, they are encouraged to do small unskilled labor to support the family. With a social expectation of caregiving roles, women's income generating roles are disregarded and their capabilities are not developed. Such gender norms lower the expectation for women and women are not considered to build one's own career, but to support their husbands and brothers to become good breadwinners. Women tend to be considered “weak”, not only physically, but psychologically, and are suitable for support roles rather than leading role.

2.5 Move or not to move

Livelihood options for young women in Cambodia are limited to factory work, petty trading (grocery or cosmetics shops), farming, dress-making and cosmetology. Most jobs had incomes of around USD150-200. Respondents in both Thailand and Cambodia were firm that international migration is the only option for a better life.

¹²Interview with KI, government official, 28 December 2017 ¹³Interview with KI, Prey Veng province, 26 December 2018 and <https://www.wheretherebedragons.com/news/a-proper-woman-breaking-down-gender-norms-in-cambodia/> ¹⁴Interview with KI, Prey Veng province, 26 December 2018

“We can earn a little money in Cambodia by doing agriculture and garments, but that is just enough for daily expenses. To earn more money and to build a house, we have to work abroad.”

– KI, female (29) belonging to a family of migrant workers, Prey Veng province

For factory workers in Cambodia, the average income is about USD160-200, which is largely spent on rent, food, travel, transportation and medical expenses incurred in relation to unhealthy living and working conditions. Remittance is very low, sometimes as low as USD10 per month. In contrast, mothers working in Thailand sent about THB1,000 – 3,000 (USD 33 – 100) per month for their children. Therefore, migration is a more economically beneficial option for young women who need to support their families and raise their children.

In-country migration is relatively safer than international migration due to lack of barriers such as language, legal status and ease of travel.¹⁵ Despite the risks associated with international migration, prospective migrants receive little support from governments or NGOs in Cambodia.¹⁶ The strongest migration-related support services are the anti-trafficking programmes in the country. Countries like Korea and Japan have training and placement programmes for prospective workers, but the largest number of Cambodians migrate to Thailand, where they have a vast network of brokers who are connected by word of mouth.

CHAPTER 3: YOUNG MIGRANT WOMEN IN THAILAND

3.1 Migration to Thailand

3.1.1 Reason for migration

A majority (19) of the respondents are from families of farmers, while 10 respondents were from families of landless labourers. Migrants in Rayong came through the border in Battambang, while most migrants in Trat came through the border in Koh Kong. The two major reasons for migrating were financial (to pay back loans or earn for the family) or family related (to join family members already in Thailand). Two women respondents had migrated to escape from an abusive situation, specifically domestic violence. To describe the level of poverty, many respondents used the term “angko kilo” (angko means rice, kilo is kg) — meaning to buy a little rice every day after work. It may be interpreted as a hand-to-mouth situation. The pre-migration stories of respondents show that they felt that they do not have any possibility of improving their lives or securing any employment.

Some respondents (4 in Trat and 6 in Rayong) have tried a number of different jobs including: petty trading, selling snacks, working in a small grocery store, farming and domestic work in Cambodia, before deciding to migrate to Thailand, as neither job enabled them to earn enough to support their family. It is important to note that they came to Thailand with an aspiration to obtain gainful employment that allows them not just to support themselves and to improve their lives, but also remit money home and save. Some came totally alone to escape from abusive family members.

¹⁵Interview with KI, government official, Prey Veng province, 28 Dec 2017

¹⁶Calculated from interview with KI, government official, Prey Veng province, 28 Dec 2017

Respondent #6: female fish sorter (18) in Rayong, migrated to Thailand to escape from abuse endured at her grandparent's home. She first went to Bangkok, where she worked in a medical shop organising drugs. The pay was good and she had a work permit. However, she was abused by her aunt with whom she lived with in Bangkok. To escape abuse once again, she moved to Rayong where she lives with her friend's family. At present, she does not have a work permit or passport and her income has drastically decreased from THB300 every day to THB100-200 per day when work is available.

Seven respondents had migrated to Thailand as children. The age upon their first migration ranged from 5 years old to 17 years old. For those who came before the age of 15, all of them came with parents. For age 15 and older, some came with parents, or with their husbands, but some came independently to join the family in Thailand.

3.1.2 Mode of travel

Around 40 percent of the respondents reported that they came to Thailand accompanied by brokers, while 60 percent came with friends and/or family. In the case of respondents travelling with brokers, they were engaged only in travel, but not for job placement. The broker leaves migrants with their friends and relatives in Thailand, who then help them find work. As a result, Cambodian migrants tend to live in a community, working in the same place, and migrating in chains.

None of the respondents interviewed had migrated through the joint Thai-Cambodian Memorandum of Understanding system¹⁷. More than seventy percent of the respondents have been in Thailand for 5 years or more. All of them were previously undocumented migrants and said that they were frightened of the police and lived in fear. Over time, they registered themselves and received a pink card that allowed them to temporarily live and work in Thailand. Newer migrants who have been in Thailand for 0-4 years travelled to Thailand with a passport, or border pass. They then applied for a Work Permit through their employers. Two of the respondents in Trat said that they had entered Thailand by boat, either with bro-

kers or with friends/neighbors. Three respondents in Rayong stated that they were brought into the country at night after walking across the border near Battambang. All the others travelled by land across the borders and entered the country with a stamp at the border¹⁸.

3.1.3 Documents for migration

Respondents interviewed held a range of documents including: (i) Pink card (12 in Rayong, 7 in Trat); (ii) border pass (8 in Trat); (iii) Passport (or a Nationality Verification) and work permit (2 each in Trat and Rayong¹⁹); (iv) Under process (5 in Rayong, 1 in Trat). One respondent each in Trat and Rayong were currently undocumented, married to a Thai man and had a refugee card. Pink cards were also sourced in three different routes: (i) through employers, (ii) through brokers, (iii) through husband's employers. All recent migrants reported that they had gone to the One Stop Service Centers with their employers and signed a number of documents, but had no direct information about the cost or process. The employer was their only source of information. None of them could remember signing a work contract or knew their employer's name and address. They only knew the name of the pier where they worked and the nickname of their Thai manager.

The cost of the new work permit reported by respondents ranged from THB5,000 to THB20,000²⁰, with respondents being unclear about the cost of each document since they ask an agent to do all the process on their behalf. They all reported that their employer had applied for the documents and had paid the fee in advance and the amount was being deducted from their salaries. Some respondents paid brokers up to THB20,000 to get their work permits. Employed migrants borrowed money from their employer to pay for the work permit, whilst unemployed migrants borrowed from the husband's employer.

Two women reported that they used to have pink cards, but after these expired they have not gone through any registration process due to the high cost. Their husbands are seafarers and their husbands' work permit was considered more critical for continued employment over the women's.

¹⁷Thailand and Cambodia signed the first Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation of workers in 2003 (Kusakabe et al, 2018). However, due to the laborious process and high cost, this has not been a popular route for migration among migrant workers. Since the past two years, the government of Thailand has attempted to shift all migrant workers to this system. ¹⁸ Border passes are only valid in the specific area where it is issued. Migrants who leave the province to work elsewhere become undocumented in the process. ¹⁹ One respondent had escaped from her aunt's house in Bangkok and her work permit was left there. Further, the work permit's validity is limited to the province and employer. She is now living and working in another province, for another employer. As a result, she is now an undocumented worker.

“There are no fish in the sea, so we don’t have enough income to pay for passport and work permit.”

– Respondent #3: female fish sorter (25) in Rayong

“I don’t have a full-time job because my child is small. So, I will not apply for Nationality Verification now. It is very expensive and we still have debts to pay back at home.”

– Respondent #19: female fish sorter (28) in Rayong

As a result of the high cost, women were willing to risk their safety and become undocumented migrants. However, this also meant that their options for work become limited as most employers do not employ undocumented workers. Undocumented workers therefore seek work in “irregular” places, increasing their risk of violence, trafficking and being cheated of their salary. However, all of them stated that their husband/father would get a work permit, irrespective of the cost.

More than 70 percent of the respondents said that they had taken a loan from their employer for expenses or work permit costs and this was subsequently deducted from their wages. Deductions ranged from THB500 per month to THB2,000 per month. Such advances could lead to situations akin to debt-bondage for migrant workers. Only two women could specify their total loan amount, monthly deduction and length of deduction. Both these women had completed middle school and dropped out of school in grade 8-9. All the other respondents were dependent on their employers to keep accounts.

3.2 Working conditions and pay in the fisheries supply chain

Upon reaching Thailand, young migrant women start to work in the seafood sector, either in a factory or at home. Finding work is not difficult, as their friends and relatives are able to introduce them to work almost immediately after they arrive in Thailand. Though obtaining work is not a problem, working conditions are tough. Long working hours are common, with 12-16 hours being reported by most respondents.

3.2.1 Jobs for Women

Seafood processing: Women working in factories are paid by the quantity of seafood processed; with incentives for reliability of the employee. Young women who did not take leave and came to work on time were paid THB60-70 per kg, but if they took a day off, they were paid only THB50 per kg. One kg of peeled octopus meat earned them THB6 and one kg of processed fish earned them THB80-100 per kg. Factory workers in Trat reported being paid thrice a month, on 10th, 20th and 30th of the month.²¹ Seafood processing is not restricted to women, older men who are unable to go to sea to fish are also employed. Payment terms are similar to the women, though men have the opportunity to carry out extra work such as portering and are paid more for it, THB335 per day.

Fish sorting: Fixed salaries were reported in Trat, ranging from THB2,500-6,000 monthly for fish sorters. Some women were paid THB3,000 per month during low season and THB6,000 per month in high season. In Rayong, women used to earn THB8,000 per month, but this now has dropped to THB6,000 or less after the restrictions following IUU ruling.

“I am planning to go back home to my children because we earn much less now than we used to. Earlier, we could earn THB300-400 every day by sorting fish. Now, we earn only THB100-150 most days and we don’t get work every day. So, we are waiting to see if the situation improves. If not, we will go back home. My husband will stay here and send money for us.”

– Respondent #2: female fish sorter (25) in Rayong

Mending nets: This is carried out by both women and men, Thai and migrants, at home and at the piers. The pay varies depending on the kind of net and the kind of work being done. High-skilled repair work is paid more than low-skilled repair work. One respondent began learning this skill with her brother and was paid THB180 per day. Now, as an experienced worker, she is paid THB300 per day, but the work is not available every day. Working hours are from 9 am to 5 pm with an hour’s break for lunch. Smaller boats also need repairs and this is done as home-based work. Migrant women earn THB200-300 for this work, depending on the avail-

²⁰The process involves Nationality Verification and work permit. Actual cost of NV is THB4,360 (THB2,360 for travel documents, THB500 each for visa, medical checkup, health insurance and work permit valid till March 31, 2018. The actual cost of the work permit is THB4,500 (THB100 for application form, THB1,800 for work permit, THB500 for visa stamp, THB500 for medical checkup and THB1,600 for health insurance). The work permit is valid for 2 years. However, the visa, medical and insurance costs have to be paid every year (THB2,600).

²¹No factory workers were interviewed in Rayong.

TABLE 3.1: Job profile and income range of young women in Rayong, Trat and Cambodia

	Job Profile of Respondents	Rayong		Trat		Cambodia
		No.	Income range USD/month [^]	No.	Income range USD/month [^]	Income range USD/month
In fishing industry	Crab Picker	0	-	7	USD95-315	
	Crab Picking Business	0	-	2	USD475-635	
	Fish Sorter	12	USD190-315	9	USD95-190	
	Fish Baller	1	USD315-475	0	-	
	Squid Peeler	0	USD95-190	1	USD45-95	
	Net Repairer	1	USD60-230	1	USD160-190	
Not in fishing industry	Housekeeping Staff	1	USD285-315	0	-	USD150-180
	Restaurant Staff*	3	USD285-380	0	USD445	USD150
	Not Earning (Full-Time Wife of Fisher)	2	-	0	-	
	Agricultural Worker	-	-	-	-	USD60-150
	Factory Worker					USD160-200
	Petty Vendor					USD100-200

Note: [^]The data has been converted from THB to USD at 31.5 THB/USD and then rounded off.

*One is a seafood restaurant, the other two serve all kinds of food.

** This data was supplied by a respondent who was earlier working as a waitress.

Source: Field Survey 2017

ability of work and their contacts with small boat owners or middlemen²².

Home-based / Freelance work: Many migrant women, especially women with small children and long-term migrants, were involved in home-based crab picking and net repairs. They were paid by work done and work was quite regular as they had a network of brokers who delivered and picked up the work. They reported earning THB3,000-10,000 per month, depending on the season²³. New migrants who lacked connections with local subcontractors were unable to take up this work. Home-based and freelance work is seen as an extension of women's domestic work and women themselves view this as looking after the house while their men are away, rather than being a fisheries worker. Hence, they appreciate employers giving them an opportunity to earn while being at home.

²²See Table 3.1 for income by job profile and location

²³See Table 3.1 for income by job profile and location

3.2.2 Impact of Gender Stereotypes towards Division of Labour on young women

The previous section has explained in detail the work that women do in the fishing industry. However, it doesn't explain their motivation for staying in the job and location, despite the low pay and unfair terms of payment. The main reason for women being trapped in low paying jobs in the fisheries sector is that they are waiting for men to return from sea.

Men are promised THB10,000-11,000 (USD315-350) per month working on the boat and a bonus when the catch is good. Bonus can amount to around THB500-2,000 (USD15-65) per month, so the total income men earn from boats is THB10,000-13,000



© Plan International

Young women crab picking

(USD315-410) depending on the employer. However, this amount is not paid monthly, rather a small advance of not more than THB2,000 (USD65) is paid each month and the balance is paid at the end of the contract, which is after 10-22 months.

On the other hand, the highest amount that women in Rayong and Trat can earn is from seafood processing such as crab meat-picking and octopus or shrimp-peeling, which can earn them a maximum of THB12,000-13,000 (USD 380-410) per month (Table 2.1). They are paid in piece-rate and an experienced worker can pick crab meat or peel octopus and shrimp quite efficiently. However, earning THB13,000 (USD 410) per month is rare and only happens when there is a lot of catch. Therefore, women can earn as much as men do, but they can only do so in certain months. In months that are low in catch, they can earn only around THB4,000 (USD 125). The maxi-

mum pay that women can earn is almost the same as the minimum that men earn on boat.

Women earn less income than men, but no women work on boats. Working as seafarers is considered to be strictly for men. Employers perceive men as stronger than women, and they prefer workers who can work long hours hauling heavy nets into the boat. Both women and men see working as seafarers as attractive because of the higher salary and regular income. However, due to the terms of payment, there is a need for support during the contract period of several months. Men will come back once every two weeks or several months. They need money to support themselves while they are on shore. They also need to remit money back home every month. For this reason, the wives and/or sisters of seafarers need to migrate along with the men. Women's income sustains the family, while men's income is considered savings. Women live alone in Thailand, while the men are at sea, which raises questions about their safety. To overcome possible problems, women live in ghettos next to their extended family members who support and protect each other.

They go to work in groups and return in groups. They borrow small amounts of money from each other when needed. However, the absence of men also means that the entire burden of household chores and childcare is on the women, besides the income-generation. Women are, therefore, left on shore to manage a double burden, which they do with the support of other women.

The recent effort by Thai government to regulate the fishing sector, in response to the EU's trade restriction based on IUU fishing concerns, has restricted fishing activities and reduced fish catch. This in turn reduced the income of women migrant workers who are engaged in seafood processing. Even though the income decreased, women are not able to move on as they wait on shore for their husbands to return from sea. There is little effort to support women's transition to other jobs, through training, information sharing or awareness raising. Some respondents negotiated with employers for free fish to mitigate the loss of income. Employers would give 1-2 kgs of fish, which could be sold in the market for THB35 per kg or for their own consumption. Some migrants made fish sauce or dried fish for their personal use.

3.3 Gender in the workplace

3.3.1 Opportunities for job upgrading

Four out of 20 respondents in Rayong and 3 out of 20 respondents in Trat came to Thailand when they were below the age of 10. They learned from their mothers how to pick crabs and how to sort fish when they started working. Respondent #7, 19-year-old female fish sorter in Rayong, reported that she earned THB50 per day when she was a child, but after she learned the work, she could earn THB300 per day even when she was below 18 years old. Respondent #18 in Trat, a 25-year-old female net-repairer said that she used to get THB180 per day when she started working, but after learning from her brother, she now earns THB300 per day. She is proud of her skill and her income: “Mending the net is easy, but patching the net is a skilled job.”

Two respondents who have their own crab picking business expressed pride in their work and had the highest income. Other women doing crab picking work also expressed pride in their skill. However, women employed in fish sorting said that they were just

working to earn a living for their family and they were not learning any skill that would be useful when they return to Cambodia. Some find that fisheries do not give them any improvement in their pay and career, so they move on to other occupations.

Respondent #17 in Rayong moved from fish sorting to working as a waitress. She heard of the vacancy and applied by herself. She speaks Thai as she migrated to Thailand with her parents when she was a child. She used to earn THB300 per day as a fish sorter, she now earns THB400 per day as a waitress, because she has learned to speak Thai.

Respondent #5: a female hotel housekeeper (19) in Rayong, started working as a domestic worker when she first came to Rayong and quit that job when her uncle got her a job in the hotel where he was employed.

One respondent was harvesting rubber in southern Thailand. When rubber prices fell, her income dropped, so she moved to Trat for fish processing.



Young men and women at the fishing port, Rayong

Other respondents noted that changing jobs in Thailand requires social networks and access to information about availability of jobs and locations. Young women had small social networks restricted to their immediate family members and neighbours and therefore did not have access to information about jobs outside the fisheries sector.

3.3.2 Childcare and work

Some women chose lower pay in order to balance their work and childcare responsibilities. Two respondents moved from factory-based to home-based within the same job (such as crab picking or fixing nets) after having children, so that they could multi-task work and childcare and still earn money. One respondent became a freelance fish sorter, so she can care for her child. Another said:

“I started picking crabs at home [in Cambodia] earning around 15,000 - 30,000 Riel per day and now I have my own business and earn about THB15,000 per month.”

– Respondent #1: a female crab picker (25) in Trat

Respondent #5 in Trat used to earn more than THB10,000 per month when she was processing shrimp in Rayong. However, despite having debts that need to be paid, she is now working as a fish sorter in Trat, so that she can be closer to her children. She earns only THB5,000 per month.

Mothers who had left their children in Cambodia said that they missed their children very much and would like to go back as soon as possible. All decisions with respect to children were taken by women, including healthcare, returning to Cambodia due to the child’s illness, education, among others. Even if such decisions involved considerable investment in money, moving from country, quitting the job and so on, the women still said that they took the decision, informed and persuaded their husbands about it. Although a few women took job-related decisions by themselves, many of them reported that decision-making about changing jobs were taken in consultation with the family in Thailand, whereas decisions about returning from Thailand were taken in consultation with the family in both countries.

While their gender role as a mother limits a woman’s time, mobility and increases their workload, it also empowers them. Through their roles as mothers, women seek and gain some individual autonomy within the family and society, as seen in their control over decision-making concerning the children.

3.3.3 Social protection

Social security and other benefits can also improve job conditions, but migrants have little access to such benefits. Eight respondents (3 in Rayong and 5 in Trat) did not have any information about social protection. The other 32 respondents had some information about the available facilities in Thailand for migrant workers, such as free education, free school lunches, free medicine, legal migration routes and police protection. Only 13 of the 40 respondents said they knew about the migrant health insurance scheme, which they had paid. More respondents in Rayong than in Trat knew about the health insurance scheme. Some respondents in Trat crossed the border to go to the hospital in Koh Kong because they were scared of Thai doctors. One respondent living with HIV said that she preferred the hospital in Cambodia in fear that she will not get a job if a Thai hospital reveal her HIV status to employers. Trips to the hospital tend to take many hours and because this affects their income, many workers prefer to avoid going to hospitals. No work-related injuries were reported; one respondent quit her job in a crab factory and chose to work as a fish sorter because her hands hurt after long hours of opening crabs. Women feel that they do not get any protection from institutions in Thailand as seen in the quote below.

“All respondents are aware that they can approach the police, but prefer not to, as they have to pay the police. “If we call the police, we have to pay THB500-1,000 to the police.”

– Respondent #6: female crab picker (24) in Trat

Young migrant women believe that without making an informal payment to the police, the police will not take any action on their complaints.

3.4 Living conditions in Thailand

Cambodian migrant workers tend to live in enclaves in Rayong and Trat along with their families, in areas close to the workplace. Each unit has on average four people, with the range being from 3 to 9 people, including seafarers, women and children. This is less crowded when compared to living conditions in factory-based accommodation in Bangkok and Phnom Penh. Such living arrangements are important for Cambodian migrants for their security and peace of mind. Some migrants feel that they are discriminated by Thais in hospitals, markets and by their landlords and managers. Since most migrant women do not speak good Thai, they prefer enclaves where they have Cambodian neighbors to speak with. This is seen as an advantage since it provides security for migrant women living alone, but at the same time, it can be a disadvantage as Cambodian men tend to gather for drinking and use recreational drugs in other places, reducing integration with Thai society. Enclaves provide them security, but also limit their access to information needed to look for better jobs. Similarly, young migrant women travel to work in groups, so that they are protected from possible harassment en route and restrict their social interaction and integration with Thai society.

Out of the 40 respondents in Thailand, 38 lived with their immediate family members. Respondent #15, a 20-year-old female restaurant worker in Rayong, was living with her parents until recently when they went back to Cambodia due to the lack of work. They requested their neighbor to house their daughter. Respondent #6, an 18-year-old female fish sorter in Rayong, escaped from her relative's house in Bangkok after being mistreated and had gotten her passport confiscated. She is now staying with her friend's family. Living with family ensures their physical safety and reduces expenses, as well as reducing loneliness and homesickness. All 40 respondents said that housing and food quality is better in Thailand as compared with Cambodia. They cook Cambodian food, speak and watch television programs in their native language.

Seven respondents reported that they lived with both parents and husband. In some cases, parents cared for children; in other cases, they were living with parents/siblings. While all the men (husband, father, brothers) were going to the sea, women stayed at home, sharing household chores and childcare and worked as fish sorters or net-repairers.

3.5 Education and training

Young migrants have only limited education from Cambodia and generally do not have access to education and vocational training in Thailand. Of the respondents, 30 percent had completed only grade 2–3 and had started working by the age of 10 by selling vegetables and homemade snacks on the streets, or helping their family in sorting fish, picking crabs and peeling shrimp. Some women (3) were illiterate and had no education at all.²⁴ Almost 50 percent of the respondents do not read and write Khmer comfortably. In Trat, 9 women had started working after completing grade 5–6. The reasons for dropping out were poverty-related, followed by a lack of interest in education. In some cases, migration of parents was responsible for children dropping out of school.

Two respondents went to Thai schools after migrating. They were the only ones who could read and write Thai to some degree.

Respondent #19: a female crab picker (21) in Trat started school in Thailand when she was nine years old by joining grade 2 at Klong Makhm school. She completed grade 5 but stopped going to school because she felt shy studying with younger children.

Respondent #16: a female fish sorter (18) in Rayong came to Thailand when she was 3 years old with her family. She has no idea why they left Cambodia. She was studying in Thailand in a public school, but quit at grade 6 when her mother told her that the family couldn't support her education anymore. She wants to continue higher education, but does not think it is possible.

Many others, who have been working in Thailand for several years, can speak Thai fluently, having learned the language by watching TV and speaking with friends, colleagues and neighbors. The latest arrivals speak little or no Thai. Without Thai language skills and any further training, it is difficult for young migrants to upgrade their career. Four respondents were aware of an NGO-run training in Rayong and Trat, but could not attend because of time constraints.

²⁴According to NIS (2016), 4.9 percent of women aged 15–24 years have never attended school (Table 13, page 44), 75.6 percent have completed primary school (Table 17, page 46), 41.1 percent have completed lower secondary school (Table 18, page 46).

“We have to go to work anytime the employer calls, so we cannot go anywhere. Sometimes, they call us at 2 or 3 am, other days they call us at 9 am. We have to be here at all times when a boat comes.”

- Respondent #10: female fish sorter (21) in Rayong

Aside from their confined living condition, legal status and educational level, another limitation young women’s face is the lack of control over their own time. They have to report for work whenever they are called for, limiting their mobility and availability to attend classes. Thirty-eight women said that they would be interested in trainings under specific conditions; “If the training is near the house,” “not too expensive,” and “if it is interesting” and “can give me better income in future”. Respondents expressed interest in the following courses — Thai and/or English languages, growing vegetables, weaving clothes, tailoring, dress-making, cosmetology and how to run a business. However, not everyone was interested in training in Thailand. As one respondent explained: “I know that there is training for hair dressing here, but I prefer training in Cambodia, not Thailand. With the training, I can’t start a shop here, I can only be a worker in a shop.”

3.6 Young women’s family responsibilities

Being a daughter comes with various expectations from the family. They are expected to always be around the house, help with domestic work and look after younger siblings. They are also expected to financially support the family.

“I left school when I was doing grade 5 because my mother and auntie wanted me to come to Thailand to take care of my youngest brother.”

- Respondent #14: female factory crab picker (23) in Trat

Respondent #18: female fish sorter (25) in Rayong, dropped out of school when she was 12 years old to help her mother with the household chores and take care of her younger siblings.

For these young women migrants, their income is either given to parents and sent as remittances to family back home, or if they are married and have children, income is spent on day-to-day expenses in the household. Only 16 of the 40 respondents (40 percent) sent money home every month, where 8 sent money for parents and/or siblings and 5 sent money home to their children. Three of them had taken loans and were paying monthly installments to repay the loans. Remittance ranged from THB1,000 per month to THB7,000 per month, though most of them sent back THB2,000-3,000. Some women who have families back home, but are not able to earn enough to send remittances, responded to be considering returning home.

Women who are using their entire income for day-to-day expenses are able to control only the daily expenses. For larger expenses, they need to depend on their husband’s income, with only 7 of the 40 respondents saying that they were able to take decisions regarding large expenses.

3.7 Aspirations and life options for young migrant women

Young migrant women are sending money back home to pay off debts and purchase land to build houses. They dream that one day, they will be able to go back home and live in their own house.

“I plan to go back to Cambodia in 2 years. I want to build my own house in Cambodia and open a small shop for sewing clothes. I have to earn money and save it. If I had not come to Thailand, I [would] have nothing in Cambodia. I can go to work in the rice field with my parents or work in a garment factory in Phnom Penh with my friends. In both jobs, income is less. [than in Thailand]”

- Respondent #1: female fish sorter (19) in Rayong.

However, most migrants expressed simpler aspirations, such as leading a more comfortable life in Thailand. They spend considerable sums of money purchasing phones, kitchen equipment, fans, fridges, TVs, motorbikes and other goods for their daily use in Thailand.

Migration to Thailand is not just a livelihood option, but also a way to build a sense of pride and accomplishment and gain respect and love with the family and community. By living alone in a foreign country (while their husbands are out at sea), women have proved to their family members that they are able to earn for themselves and support family members financially. Even though the pay is low, the fact that they are able to earn money gives young women a sense of achievement.

“An 18-year-old female fish sorter in Rayong, ran away from home and school because her grandfather beat her. However, after migrating to Thailand she said: “I feel that my grandparents love me more now because I send money for them.”

- Respondent #6

“My mother is very proud of me, because I am the only one in my family who has migrated. When I first came here, my husband would keep all the money. But now, after 3 years, I keep all the money and I also make all the decisions.”

- Respondent #12: female fish sorter (25) in Rayong

Some had aspirations in Cambodia, but were not able to achieve them due to the lack of money and opportunities. They feel that they are in Thailand with a broken dream.

Respondent #5: A 19-year-old hotel housekeeper in Rayong wanted to be a police officer, but dropped out of school to follow her parents when they migrated to Thailand. She now plans to work and earn, but has no more plans to continue her education.

“If I had an education, I could earn enough money in my country. I wouldn't need to migrate..”

- Respondent #18: a female fish sorter (25) in Rayong

All of the young female migrant workers seemed to project their dreams in their children, working in order to ensure better life options than the ones they had. All of the 23 married respondents in Thailand said that they wanted to educate their children so that they do not have to work in low-paying jobs.

3.8 Cost and benefit of migration for young migrant women

Young migrants pay for migration financially, psychologically and socially but benefit from migration in different ways as well. For example, for a young female migrant currently living in Trat, earning an income of THB6,000 (USD190) per month from fish sorting, will continue to earn the same even if she stays in Thailand for several more years. Although minimum wage in Thailand might increase, there are no opportunities to upskill, hence their pay will be at the minimum. Additionally, they need to pay around THB5,000/year for their visa, work permit and health insurance.

If a young woman had remained in Prey Veng, Cambodia, their work opportunities would be limited to agricultural labourer, shop helper and/or working on her own family farm. The cash income from her wages work would be around USD100 per month.

Healthcare costs in Thailand can be considered as zero because of the annual health insurance paid along with their visa fee. Healthcare cost in Cambodia can also be considered to be zero because of the availability of free healthcare for the poorest families.

The cost of living in Trat is around THB4,750 (USD 150 for cheapest room rent and minimum food) for a four member household, around THB1,750 (around USD54) per capita. The socio-economic survey of Cambodia shows that, for second quintile group's average monthly per capita consumption is 216,000 riels (USD54) in rural areas.²⁵ This shows that the expenses incurred while living in Thailand and in Cambodia are almost the same.

²⁵Calculated from the NIS 2016 (pages 81-82) data on monthly consumption and percentage of food expenses in rural areas.

Working in Thailand pays higher wages, making migration a better economic choice.

However, the cost of working in Thailand can increase with stricter government regulations being introduced for obtaining work permit. Additionally, migrating to Thailand has intangible costs that cannot be put into numbers, such as: (i) loss of ties with children and family, (ii) loss of social circles in Cambodia, (iii) psychological costs of living in fear and (iv) feeling of being discriminated against by Thai people. Such personal costs have long term implications for young migrant women as they grow older. Due to their legal status in Cambodia, they can make long term investments in their networks as well as in their homestead and farmlands. Such investments are important in the long term, as it would give them an income to rely on when they grow old. Without such investments, they are forced to depend on their children in their old age. Noting that children of migrants are vulnerable to having lower access to education or even citizenship in Thailand, their earning capacity can be limited in the future and supporting parents would be a heavy burden for these children. Such long-term costs have not been taken into account in the calculations below.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

Young women in Cambodia and young Cambodian migrant women in Thailand are under pressure to meet the expectations of family and society, who perceived the role of those women as being obedient, home-bound and care-giving sisters and wives, who are also supporting the family financially. The conflict between the triple burden of unpaid care, family and home responsibilities and working to earn an income is a source of considerable stress in the lives of young women. Gender norms affect young women's career and income negatively, due to gender-based barriers to education, training and access to decent work opportunities as well as gender-based restrictions on mobility.

4.1.1 Gender stereotypes in fishing supply chain and its consequences

The fisheries industry in Thailand is gender segregated. There is a clear-cut gender stereotype that boat work is for men and land work is for women. No young migrant women work on a boat, although working on a boat pays better than working on land. Sorting fish, processing seafood and mending nets

TABLE 3.2: Comparative table showing income and expenditure of young women working in Thailand and Cambodia

Place	Trat		Prey Veng	
	THB	USD	THB	USD
Income Expenses				
Women's Income	6,000	190		100
Per capita consumption	1,750	54	216,000	54
Medical insurance and visa (annual cost)	5,000	160	0	0

Note 1: 1 USD = 32 THB; 1 USD = 4,000 KHR

Note 2: All numbers are rounded off to the nearest 10s.

Source: Field Survey 2017

are considered more suitable for women as it is close to home and family. Migrants justify this gender-based division of labour by referring to stereotypes of physical strength and dexterity and there were no reports of men wanting to do what was considered the women's job or any women wanting to do what was considered the men's job. This division of labour is supported by the stereotype that men are stronger, leading to large differences in pay. Men are paid THB10,000-13,000 per month, sometimes with other benefits such as housing, whereas women's wages are based on the work done and the pay is irregular. Such differences in wages further strengthen the stereotype that men's work is harder and more important.

Young migrant women in Thailand are always seen as 'helpers' of either their parents or their husbands. Many young women come with their family as children. They either take care of the siblings or help their mothers in seafood processing. These women would give all their income to their parents and do not have any decision making on what and where they would be working. The lost opportunity to be educated as they follow their parent's decisions is not compensated by any independent income for themselves. Young married women define themselves as "in waiting"- waiting for their husbands to come back from sea and earning just enough to survive.

Young migrant women from Cambodia see themselves as supplementary income earners for the household and would feel that they are only supporting men. Therefore, the decisions concerning where to work, whether in Thailand or in Cambodia, and what to do in the future are made by the male head of household. There is little space for women to be heard and exercise their own agency within the family decision making dynamics.

Women are seen mainly as caregivers to their children and are forced to bear the triple burden of household chores, childcare and minimum wage work independently, while the men are at sea for most days. The absence of men also increases young women migrant's vulnerability in terms of their physical safety at home, at work and on the road. To mitigate the risks, young women migrants live with their extended families and always go to work or to the market in groups with other women. This strategy keeps them safe and builds a strong social network among migrants in Thailand, but drastically restricts their mobility in public spaces.

4.1.2 Socio-economic situation of young Cambodian women in Thailand and back home: Opportunities and limitations

Existing gender stereotypes and gendered division of labour shape the opportunities and possibilities that young Cambodian women have in Thailand and back home. Young migrant women find that the living situation is better in Thailand than in Cambodia, where they lived in poverty. However, there is little that they can do to increase their income in Thailand, due to the gender stereotypes prevalent in the industry as well as the laws governing migrant workers in Thailand. They are bound to live and work at a specific area near the port, since they are waiting for their husbands or family members at the shore.

Some respondents were young unmarried women who do not live with their family members. These women had relatively more control over their income. However, living alone increases vulnerability to harassment from both Cambodians and Thais, causing them to live and work with friends.

In theory, children can benefit from remittances received from migrant parents. But in reality, the social expectation is that girls are kept closer to their parents and will help around the home rather than pursue their own aspirations and career.

Therefore, parents' migration leads to young women dropping out of education to following their parents to live in Thailand, and subsequently work in the same areas.

For the Thai fisheries industry, the benefit of having migrant workers is obvious. Without migrants working in catching fish or in post-harvest activities, the industry would not be able to operate. For young female migrant workers from Cambodia, they have gained an economic benefit by working in Thailand – being able to earn more cash income, being able to remit back home and be able to eat better quality food. Calculation of their income and expenditure in Thailand and in Cambodia clearly shows that they are better off financially when working in Thailand.

However, the increased complexity and cost of legal migration process can lead to further reduction in their economic gain, while there is little increase in benefits such as access to education, vocational

Two daughters and her mother recently moved to Trat province, Thailand.



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training, social services or decent work. Being away from Cambodia for a long period of time deprives young migrant women of accumulating social capital and physical and financial assets, which makes it difficult for them to be reintegrated into in their place of origin.

4.1.3 Factors influencing young Cambodian women's access to opportunities for upward mobility

Gender stereotypes in the fishing supply chain limit opportunities in Thailand, and the social expectation that daughters should be near their parents and support the parents far more than sons, restrict career opportunities for young women in both Cambodia and in Thailand. Women in rural areas are expected to help their parents with the household and generate an income, instead of pursuing higher education opportunities away from home. Although it is often discussed that migration brings women outside their own community – freeing them from social restrictions – this is not the case in the fishing communities in Thailand. As depicted in section 3.8, the economic situation in Thailand for young migrant women is far better than in Cambodia. However, the improved economic condition does not reflect in better career options for young women.

Young women who migrate to Thailand face challenges to take advantage of educational or vocational training opportunities. Their language abilities, legal status, lack of job stability and the expectation to help with household chores and earn an income are the main barriers. With the lack of opportunities to improve their skills or exposure to new opportunities, there are very little possibilities for young migrant women to move towards better paid and more decent jobs.

4.1.4 Concluding Discussion

To satisfy the gender role and gender norm expectations, girls and young women drop out of school before completing secondary education and give up the option of pursuing higher education. This affects their income, exposure and reduces their life options drastically. This not only affects their self-esteem, but reinforces the culture of devaluing the economic rights and potential of girls and young women. Once they come to work in the fishing industry, they define themselves as supporters of men who go on to the boat to fish. Below, we highlight the four main aspects of young women's lives that impact on their access to education, training and decent work opportunities.

(i) Girls and young women are expected to help with household chores, care for younger siblings before marriage and take care of their own children after marriage.

Women are valued for caregiving roles, and also denied access to childcare services due to this social expectation (section 2.3). As a result, young girls are deprived of an education when they drop out to care for younger siblings.

(ii) Girls and young women are expected to support their parents and husband.

This gender norm expects young women and girls to be follower/supporters, not leaders. They are not expected to hold an independent position in society as decision-makers and skilled workers. As a result, young women are not encouraged to seek their own career, and whatever they earn is supposed to be for the family they support. Hence, they do not have control over their income, and do not have a voice in how the family savings is spent (section 3.7).

(iii) Girls and young women are expected to be chaste, and mobility is curtailed to ensure chastity. Lack of mobility is extremely detrimental to young women's access to education, vocational training and decent work opportunities (section 2.4). However,

er, norms of chastity do not stop young women from migrating in search of jobs (section 2.5). This variable enforcement of gender norms place women in a weaker position economically, and leave little control over their life choices (section 3.2.2).

(iv) Girls and young women are expected to financially support the family.

Despite the norms that devalue women's work and capacity as well as expect women to be at home and care for family members, there is also a strong gender norm that women should support the family financially, pushing them to drop out of school and migrate to earn money. While this presents a contradiction to gender norms, it is normalized by making women's work and income secondary to men's, and emphasizing women as physically and psychologically weak and suitable for supportive roles, rather than leadership roles in the family.

4.2 Recommendations

In order to expand life choices for young Cambodian women migrant workers in the seafood sector, the following recommendations for action are made for civil society, including organisations such as Plan International:



Fishing boats at the harbour, Rayong

Review laws and regulations to delink migrants' stay permit from employment permit

Migrant workers legal status in Thailand should be a way of protecting workers and families and reducing their vulnerability. At present, the only way migrants can obtain the correct legal status is for Thai employers to register individuals and obtain a work permit on their behalf. This dependence on employers for legal status can easily turn into an exploitative relationship by debt bondage. Migrants also face difficulty in negotiating conditions with employers or choosing to pursue better jobs, since their legal status is tied to their current employer. Regulations tying stay permit to work permit requirements should be delinked, enabling migrant workers to register on their own and be given sufficient opportunities to look for and/or change employers.

The registration of migrants needs to be affordable and require fewer documentation in order to allow migrants to register by themselves at the local government, without fear and with ease. Reduced bureaucracy and costs in registration will encourage migrants to register and be eligible for formal employment. Formalising employment for migrant workers is extremely important, especially for migrant young women targeted in this study. They are invisible and extremely vulnerable because their employment remains informal. This is further explored in the next recommendation.

The Way Forward:

There are many organisations working on migration issues advocating for easier and more independent registration for migrant workers in Thailand. However, there is a need for Plan International and these organisations to work collectively in lobbying the Thai government, to delink stay permits from employment permits and allow migrant workers to register by themselves.

Formalise employment for migrant workers

There are many organisations working on migration issues advocating for easier and more independent registration for migrant workers in Thailand. However, there is a need for Plan International and these organisations to work collectively in lobbying the Thai government, to delink stay permits from employment permits and allow migrant workers to register by themselves.

On the opposite spectrum, men's income is paid in lump sum. This difference in the payment process strengthens the visibility of men's contribution to the household, as opposed to the daily/weekly salaries paid to women. This practice reinforces the gender stereotype that men control large sums of money, while women only control small amounts related to household and care related daily expenses. Therefore, to make women's economic contributions more significant, stable, and visible, it is important that young migrant women's employment is formalised and workers receive a regular monthly wage along with social security.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Raise awareness among employers about the importance and impact of formalising employment for women migrant workers. Employers are aware of the difficulties in hiring workers as well as the government policy enforcing registration of migrant workers. Therefore, it is beneficial to employers to formalise contracts and retain workers.
- (2) Train women migrant workers on labour rights to empower them to negotiate with employers in formalising their contracts.
- (3) Publish job and remuneration information of different employers in the area. Transparency of this information will allow migrants to seek better payment and employment conditions, creating pressure for employers to improve contracts and working conditions. This information can be provided either through SNS, or through regular migrant peer-to-peer channels and meetings.
- (4) Support organising migrant peer groups for exchanging information among women migrant workers. This will enable them to share information about better paying employers among their communities, as well as mutual support in negotiating with employers.
- (5) Build capacity and agency among young women migrant workers, so if the Thai government legislates in favour of migrant worker unions, these unions can engage effectively with young women. This allows them to be well-prepared to actively participate in collective and constructive decision-making.

Reduce barriers for migrant children to study at Thai schools

A crucial concern for young migrant women is that they are unable to continue any form of education upon arrival to Thailand with their parents. Facilities are needed for migrant children to continue education in Thailand, especially for young girls, who are primarily brought over to look after the house and younger siblings.

A bridging program to introduce Cambodian children to Thai education system, including language support, could be established in schools in areas where there are many migrants. Additionally, there is a need to reach out and encourage migrant parents to send children to school in order to continue their education, focusing on girls. Flexible education and learning modalities and remedial education services are required to boost skills and knowledge needed for formal education among girls and young women who migrate.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Support Thai schools near Cambodian migrant communities in Thailand to prepare these institutions to accept migrant children. This includes not only translators, but teacher training in transitioning Cambodian students to a Thai school system.
- (2) Support transition classes, where older children can get Thai language training support to integrate in the age-appropriate grade to minimise differences with their classmates. Older Cambodian students often feel shy to study with younger Thai students.
- (3) Reach out to migrant parents to encourage them to send children to school for further education.
- (4) Provide childcare support to families, so young women and girls are not home-bound to care for smaller siblings whilst parents work. Childcare is further explored in the next recommendation.

Childcare support for migrant workers in Thailand

The main reason why migrant women opt for home-based work and not take better paying jobs is primarily responsibility for childcare. Their husbands or male relatives are often at sea, so if there

are no other family members, women migrants are the ones taking the sole responsibility of childcare. Providing childcare support would allow migrant women to seek jobs and relieve young girls from caring for younger siblings.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Organise a community-based childcare support centre, that can be funded by either contribution from parents themselves, local government and/or employers.
- (2) Advocate with employers about the importance and benefit of providing childcare support for their workers, and demand support for childcare centre.
- (3) Provide childcare training to volunteers and care givers at the childcare centre. Care givers should include both women and men to dispel gender stereotyping.
- (4) Childcare centres can be open to both Cambodian and Thai children. Organising meetings with local Thai communities on the need for childcare centres and organising a joint childcare support system. Childcare centres for Thai workers do not exist either, therefore this is an opportunity for both Thai and Cambodian communities to come together to create a joint support network.

Create a savings scheme and empower young women migrants in financial management

At present, young migrants' earnings are either taken away and managed by their parents or are used up by their family in Thailand or in Cambodia, limiting young women's possibility to make investments, take risks and seek other gainful employment. A savings mechanism for young migrants needs to be established so that young migrants can save part of their earnings, which they can use either as a seed money for small business or invest on vocational or skills training. If the savings can be made in groups, these savings groups could provide additional support such as mentorship, soft skills training, rights awareness and mechanisms to educate migrants and safeguard them against potential financial abuse.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Provide training for women migrant workers on financial management, with a focus on saving for future investment.
- (2) Provide training for husbands and other relatives on the importance of women managing their own finance, their involvement in the joint management of household finances and how that contributes to the overall household management.
- (3) Provide accessible and secure savings facilities for migrant workers. Bank deposits may not be suitable for migrants residing far from banks and are intimidated by or unaware of Thai banking services.

Skills training for migrant workers

Women migrants are currently tied to fishing communities because they are reliant on their male relatives' income from working on boats. Cases do exist where women get better paying jobs moving out of fishing communities and often taking their male relatives with them. Vocational training would widen the options that women migrants currently have. Core skills include: Thai, English and Chinese language, numeracy, professional house-keeping (in homes or hotels), construction skills, communication and more. Access to job pools or hands-on training need to be incorporated within the vocational training to help the women progress on to different jobs.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Conduct research on employers' needs for skills from their employees.
- (2) Develop an information system where employers can put up job adverts.
- (3) Organise skills training and link to potential employers.
- (4) Employers who hire the trained workers pay a small service fee to an information system, so that the service can be financially supported.
- (5) Provide gender-awareness training to change perceptions on gender stereotypes.

Ensure decent work for migrant workers

It is important to note that Thai labour law treats both Thai workers and legally employed international migrant workers equally. An enforcement mechanism is needed to ensure minimum wage and decent working conditions for migrant workers are and remain equal to Thai workers. The protection and enforcement of decent wages for home-based workers (crab-meat pickers) and daily wage workers (such as fish sorters and net menders) is especially needed.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Work with employer associations to encourage them to provide basic social services such as sick leave, childcare support and maternity leave.
- (2) Conduct research with employers' associations on the gender wage gap and the impact of improved wages and benefits to the retention rate of migrant workers.

Disseminate information on safe migration in Cambodia

Information on safe migration is well disseminated in Cambodia, but migrants pursue informal routes of migration in distrust of the formal system, or because it is expensive and time consuming. Migrants prefer to follow advice from their friends and relatives. It is important that migrants are aware of where and who to contact should they encounter any trouble in Thailand. Handbooks and leaflets listing places to contact exist, as well as apps developed to share information on risks. Despite the existence of these tools, disseminating information needs to continue, especially in different forms of communication.

The Way Forward:

Disseminate information on safe migration using existing materials in project villages in Cambodia, incorporating different gender related concerns.

Develop a support system for children and young adults of migrating parents, so that children and young adults can continue their education in Cambodia.

Children left behind by migrating parents are unlikely to continue education, mostly due to financial or psychological reasons and preference to migrate with parents. Parents prefer to bring their children with them, especially without a support network in their home villages, depriving children of the opportunity to continue their education. A support system is needed where children not migrating with parents are cared for and allow them to continue their education without limitations.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Provide awareness and training to teachers to identify and support the needs of children left behind.
- (2) Provide in-school facilities that support girls to continue their education, such as childcare for younger siblings and counselling for children living without their parents.
- (3) Enhance school curriculum to be gender-inclusive and relevant to vocational training and the pursuit of gainful employment.
- (4) Create a system linking vocational training and job placements. Children following parents to Thailand often leave school because they don't believe investing in their education would lead them to better employment opportunities in the immediate future. It is important that schools provide life skills, career counselling and develop apprenticeship schemes for students, in order for children (and their parents) find value in continued study and plan for their future better. Expanding imaginations and opportunities for future occupation is important.

Skills training and job placement for girls in Cambodia

A reason why young women go to Thailand is because the job prospects they face in Cambodia are grim. Young women need upskilling in order for them to find better employment. There is a need to focus more on upskilling women than men, as men face very little restrictions in pursuing apprenticeships. Men often have social remittances, that is, they learn

skills in construction when migrating and return upskilled to their home country. This is not the case for women, as opportunities to learn and upskill are more limited.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Research the skills in demand that would lead to better employment for women in Cambodia.
- (2) Organise formal skills training sessions, focusing on skills that will lead to a better income and away from skills such as sewing and hand-craft to reduce reproduction gender stereotypes.
- (3) Create a job placement or apprenticeship scheme for those completing vocational skills training to be directly placed into relevant jobs.
- (4) Provide training for employers in male-dominated industries on the merit and benefits of employing women.
- (5) Run campaigns on equal wages for equal work. In addition, run campaigns highlighting the importance of career development for women.

Develop and nurture young women's' and girls' groups in Cambodia

Girls are faced with gender-based expectations to put their families' needs and interests before their own. Forming young women's and girls' groups where they can develop social networks, share their aspirations, give mutual support and provide mentorship to enhance their career development will gradually work against traditional gender-based norms and encourage the pursuit of higher education or vocational skills training.

The Way Forward:

- (1) Organise young women's groups which meet regularly to share information and experiences.
- (2) Provide career talks by various women, who can also serve as mentors for the members of the group.
- (3) Organise industry visits to learn about different forms occupations.
- (4) Engage parents, male relatives and husbands to encourage women to expand their occupation choices and have access to different careers.

4.3 Areas for Further Research

(1) Analysing labour markets in Thailand and in Cambodia and demand of skills to assess potential career pathways for girls and young women and identify skill sets required.

(2) A follow-up study on migrant children who have attended Thai schools. Did attaining further education in Thailand expand and enhance their career options?

(3) A study on children left behind in their home countries by parents migrating abroad. How does the migration of parents affect children left behind?

(4) A study on the existing campaigns and social-education methods towards encouraging young women (and their families) to allow and pursue their own career.

(5) A study on employer incentives to provide training for migrant workers to upskill.

(6) An Action-research on the use of social media and technology for self-development of skills among young women migrants.



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