

Update on Migrant Situation in Thailand 2025

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Thailand continues to be one of the main destination countries for migrant workers from neighboring nations, namely Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. These workers play a crucial role in the economy, particularly in the agricultural, construction, food processing, manufacturing, and service sectors. Migrant workers help fill labor shortages in industries where the Thai workforce is insufficient and have clearly become an integral part of the overall labor system.



According to the latest data from the Ministry of Labour and World Vision Thailand, in 2025 there were more than 4.4 million legally registered migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In addition, there are an estimated 1–2 million undocumented migrant workers, bringing the total to approximately 14–15% of the country's total workforce. Furthermore, a survey by the Migrant Population Network reported a significant increase in the number of workers registered in the system between 2024 and 2025, reaching approximately 3.65 million as a result of a new government registration round.

Workers from Myanmar remain the largest group, both among registered and unregistered migrants. They include those working under the MOU system, seasonal workers, and others entering through different channels, totaling from several hundred thousand to several million people. Migrant workers from Laos and Cambodia are also key contributors under the MOU system and continue to renew their legal documentation, although a substantial number still remain undocumented. Meanwhile, migrant workers from Vietnam are fewer in number compared to other nationalities, but they continue to be recruited and employed across various sectors.

The Main Problems Faced by Migrant Workers

Residency Status and Work Documentation: Despite an increase in the number of registered migrant workers, a large proportion remain undocumented or outside the formal system. As a result, many workers are in precarious situations, lacking labor protection and facing risks of arrest, deportation, forced return, or exclusion from legal employment.



Complexity of Documentation Systems: The process for obtaining work permits and renewing legal documents remain complicated, costly, and dependent on coordination across multiple administrative databases. These barriers leave some migrant workers in prolonged transitional status, increasing the risk of falling into undocumented or irregular employment.

Human Trafficking and Irregular Employment: A number of migrant workers are deceived by false employment contracts, coerced into forced labor, or trafficked through illegal broker networks. Exploitation occurs both during recruitment and within destination workplaces, particularly under informal and unregulated migration channels.

Insecurity Arising from Conflict Situations: Ongoing political and military conflict in Myanmar has driven continuous cross-border migration, as individuals flee forced conscription, violence, or economic instability. Many enter Thailand through irregular channels, placing them at heightened risk of exploitation, abuse, and legal vulnerability.

Challenges in Law Enforcement and Labor Protection: Many migrant workers continue to experience wage violations, excessive working hours, and inadequate occupational safety protections. Weak enforcement mechanisms and limited access to complaint and remedy systems undermine workers' health, dignity, and long-term well-being.

Current Situation and Future Trends: Migrant workers remain essential to Thailand's economy, particularly in the agricultural, industrial, and service sectors. While the government has expanded registration mechanisms to bring more workers into the formal system, persistent challenges—including administrative complexity, labor demand mismatches within the MOU framework, and ongoing instability in countries of origin—continue to hinder sustainable and inclusive labor integration over the long term.

Thailand and Cambodia Conflict:

The heightened tensions along the Thai–Cambodian border over the past year have had a significant impact on Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand, who constitute a vital workforce in the industrial, agricultural, construction, and service sectors.

Armed clashes and growing uncertainty regarding border security have led to substantial changes in cross-border mobility. A large number of Cambodian workers have returned to their home country due to concerns over personal safety and employment status. From approximately mid-2025 to the end of the year, reports indicate that more than 900,000 Cambodian workers returned to Cambodia. Of these, over 300,000 individuals have reportedly been assisted in securing employment within Cambodia, according to data from the Cambodian Ministry of Labour and relevant government agencies responsible for receiving and reintegrating returning workers.

Despite the large-scale return of workers, a considerable number of Cambodian migrant workers remain in Thailand.

Prior to the escalation of border tensions, official data indicated that more than 460,000 Cambodian workers were legally employed in Thailand, alongside a significant number of undocumented workers—bringing the total to several hundred thousand. Additional media reports suggest that by mid-2025, approximately 400,000–500,000 Cambodian workers were still working in Thailand despite ongoing border challenges.

Those who remain in Thailand have chosen to do so primarily due to higher income opportunities, the ability to remit earnings to their families, and the avoidance of immediate unemployment upon returning home.

Conversely, many returnees have faced difficulties in securing stable employment in Cambodia, with some relying on temporary or informal work, while others have opted to migrate back to Thailand. Nevertheless, there is an emerging trend indicating that despite labor shortages in several areas of Thailand, the country is likely to continue restricting the entry of Cambodian workers into Thailand.

Conflict in Myanmar:

The impacts of the war in Myanmar on violations of the rights of Myanmar children and youth:

Political conflict, particularly following the military coup on 1 February 2021, has had severe impacts on the lives of large numbers of people, with children and youth being among the most affected groups. Thailand has become one of the major destination countries for refugees from Myanmar, with approximately 100,000 refugees living along the Thai–Myanmar border and around 5,000 residing in urban areas. Nearly half of them are children. These children face multiple vulnerabilities - physical, psychological, and social - amid unstable living conditions, inadequate protection, and heightened risks of various forms of rights violations.



Escalating armed conflict in ethnic areas has forced many families to flee across the border into Thailand. However, the safety they seek is often not guaranteed. Refugees, including children, are repeatedly pushed back into conflict zones. Such practices not only endanger lives but also cause profound psychological trauma. Many children are forced to move repeatedly, living in temples, churches, or temporary shelters along the border. As a result, their education is frequently disrupted, access to healthcare and adequate nutrition is limited, and long-term mental health problems may arise.

Education:

Although Thailand has declared that all children have the right to basic education, in practice refugee children and children of migrant workers face significant barriers. These include the lack of legal documentation and national identification numbers, discrimination, and the absence of effective state protection mechanisms. Many children are afraid to attend school, remain confined within closed community settings, or drop out of the education system entirely, leading them to enter the labour force at a very young age.



Thailand continues to face challenges related to migrant child labour, particularly among children from Myanmar working in agriculture, seafood processing, and the garment industry - sectors with a high risk of the worst forms of child labour. Although statistics indicate a recent decline in such cases, the situation remains concerning, especially for adolescents aged 15–18 who are no longer in school and are compelled to work without adequate protection under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



Civil society organizations and community networks have sought to fill gaps left by the state by establishing learning

centres and childcare facilities within migrant worker communities, reaching more than 120,000 children. These initiatives aim to provide learning opportunities, skills development, and safe spaces for children. However, many of these centres lack legal recognition, receive limited state support, and are subject to inspections or closure following community complaints. As a result, many children experience interruptions in their education and lose critical opportunities to develop their full potential.

Additional: Myanmar Migrant Workers in Thailand

Myanmar migrant workers who enter Thailand legally under the MOU system are permitted to work in the country for an initial period of two years, which can be extended for an additional two years. Upon completion of this period, workers are required to return to their country of origin. To be eligible for employment, Myanmar workers must possess a “green book” or a Certificate of Identity (CI), an official document issued by the Myanmar authorities to verify the nationality of citizens working in Thailand.



The process of obtaining a CI requires endorsement from the Myanmar military government through Myanmar embassies in Thailand, including those located in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Ranong. However, securing such documentation is often challenging, as the procedures are complex, costly, and subject to daily quotas limiting the number of applicants who can be processed.

In response to these challenges, the Thai Ministry of Labour has introduced support measures. According to a Cabinet resolution dated 8 July 2025, migrant workers whose employers had submitted employment demand lists prior to 13 February 2025 are granted a temporary extension to reside and work in Thailand from 14 August 2025 to 13 February 2026. This measure allows both employers and migrant workers additional time to complete the necessary documentation without requiring certification of employment lists from the country of origin.

Furthermore, Myanmar workers under this arrangement are permitted to continue working in Thailand until 13 February 2027, with the possibility of extending their work permits for an additional two years. Despite these policy efforts, the documentation process remains complicated and burdensome. This has led to increased reliance on brokers, who often charge high service fees, creating additional financial strain on both workers and employers and opening opportunities for exploitation.

Key Challenges for Myanmar Migrants in Thailand (2025)

1. Unstable Legal Status - Many migrants do not have proper documents. This puts them at risk of arrest or deportation and makes it hard to find safe jobs.
2. Difficult and Expensive Documents - Getting work permits or ID documents is slow and costly. Many workers must rely on brokers and may be cheated or fall into debt.
3. Impact of Conflict in Myanmar - War and political problems force people to come to Thailand. Many enter without documents and face higher risks of abuse and legal problems.

4. Risk of Exploitation - Some migrants are tricked by brokers or forced to work in unfair conditions, especially in informal jobs.

5. Weak Labor Protection - Many workers receive low pay, work long hours, and have unsafe conditions. It is also hard for them to complain or get help.

6. Education Problems for Children - Migrant children often cannot go to school because they lack documents or face discrimination. Some leave school early and start working.

7. Poor Living Conditions and Stress - Many migrants live in unsafe places with limited healthcare and support. This can cause stress and mental health problems.

8. Temporary Solutions Only - Government support is often short-term. It does not solve long-term problems, so migrants continue to face uncertainty.

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