

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

Htwe Ko¹ & Nutthathirataa Withitwinyuchon²

Abstract

This research objects to propose the solutions for improving the quality of life of legal Myanmar migrant labors from Mae Tao community in Mae Sot, Thailand. Many researchers have been studied on international migration with different focuses, nevertheless, the quality of life of migrants has not much represented, especially for the country like Myanmar. Therefore, this study explores the current state of quality of life among legal Myanmar migrant labors in Mae Sot, Thailand. Twelve legal Myanmar migrant workers were interviewed by employing semi-structured designed questions followed by open discussion and follow-up questions upon how the interviewees led to the points. This study focused on aspects such as material wealth, physical and mental health, legal protection and work-life balance of those legal Myanmar migrant labors from Mae Tao Community in Mae Sot, Tak

¹ [0009-0005-6596-9263], The Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies, Rangsit University, Thailand

² [ORCID], Corresponding author, email: nutthathirataa.w@rsu.ac.th

© The Author(s) 2024. Published by Inya Economics. All rights reserved. For Permissions, please email: inyaeconomicjournal@gmail.com
Inya Economic Journal (2024), Vol.3 (No.1), 116-157.

Province of Thailand. The findings reveal that legal Myanmar migrant labors' objective wellbeing is poor but subjective wellbeing is high. It also seems comparatively connected to the background and environment they originally came from when migrating for better living.

Keywords: Quality of Life, Legal Myanmar Migrant Workers, Mae Sot, Thailand

1 Introduction and Background of the study

Many researchers define the quality of life with a number of terms such as social indicators, standard of well-being, way of life and so on. In short, the quality of life determines to what extent individual's life satisfaction is upon his or her needs and wants (Kerce, 1992). Objective approaches contemplate the quality of life based on objectively favorable conditions, consequences and activities in an individual's life. In contrast, subjective of quality-of-life approaches is a set of beliefs in one's life which is why it seems like the subjective approach enables each and individuals to define the quality of life themselves. In other words, the government agencies prefer the objective approaches even though independent organizations might adopt subjective approaches (Kerce, 1992). Researcher, Campbell (1981) who in favor of subjective approach also

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

stated that the feeling about a life is supposed to be individual living that life while asking for direct source of information.

The scale of changes in migration is much related with global social and economic transformations. The globalization is a fact that the numbers of international migrants are increasing over time. There were about 272 million people migrating one country to another or across the borders in 2019; it is equal to 3.5 percent of world population (IOM, 2020). By this number, it will be 1 in every 30 people while 272 million international migrants' ratio of world population by 7.7 billion. Most people migrate internationally to work and study intentionally. It could have different reasons of leaving their home countries. For example, some people leave their homes and countries to run away from political conflict, natural disaster as well as persecution. In such a case, these people would become refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). Additionally, IDPs families and refugees are often in need of support and assistance, especially food to eat and shelter to live in. According to United Nations on international migrant stock 2019 by destination and origin, Asia hosted 84 million of international migrants while Europe hosted 82 million of international migrants. Meanwhile, nearly 59 million international migrants were hosted in North America.

People from less developed move to richer countries, referring as international migrants play a significant role in economic development with three affects roughly. Migrants themselves enjoy higher income through migration from rural areas into a new economic sector followed by destination countries' structural change of the economy as well as impacting positively on origin countries despite the loss of human capital. In general, for being an important channel of material improvement, international migration affects inclusive growth for both individuals and their offspring (IMF, 2021, p.4). On the other hand, a study from International Labor Organization (ILO) stated that it has worsen the free flow of goods and capital in terms of income inequalities on labor markets (Stalker, 2000). The study has revealed that there is also negative side of migration. For instance, it causes the loss of farm labors which leads to collapsing local agricultural economy. People from neighboring countries, particularly Myanmar, migrate to Thailand because of wage differences solely. Besides, Thailand is the country which has been sustaining a higher level of economic growth lately compared to most ASEAN countries.

For Myanmar migrant labors to Thailand, the main reason for those migrants have been associated with political conflicts in Myanmar. The civil war between Myanmar

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

central military and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) has long been in the country which continue causing stagnated conditions of economic growth and social development for decades in the country. Myanmar was about to be one great of shining country among its neighbor countries after independence from British Empire in 1948. But then, 25 years later, general Ne Win adopted “the Burmese Way to Socialism” and imposed “the Burmanization” along his policy (Promphakping, et al., 2019). It resulted Myanmar became one of the world’s least developed countries designated by the United Nations in 1987. The numbers of Myanmar migrant labors have been increasingly drawn into Thailand to seek the quality of life. Seeking jobs and better quality of life are the present to Myanmar migrant labors in Thailand, and it shall still be due to the resuming of military rule in Myanmar since 1st of February, 2021 after its military rule lasted from 1962 to 2011. Asia Foundation reported that nearly 76 percent of Myanmar population live under poverty line and about 70 percent of them come from rural areas, particularly from the agriculture sectors (Carr, 2018). Plus, a poverty report of Myanmar Living Conditions Survey (MLCS) 2017 said that 24.8 percent of the population in rural areas live under poverty line (1,590 kyat or lower), this is an issue of concerning with agriculture-based earning and

lower education level. As a result, one out of four people is living in poverty (UNDP and World Bank, 2019).

As well-reported earlier, there have been too many research and studies on international migration on this issue. Nonetheless, most research mainly focused on the reasons of migrating and challenges of international migrants as well as on economic aspects. With all respect to Myanmar migrant labors in Thailand, Myanmar received the estimate amount of 367.235 million in 2005 and 300 million dollars in 2007 from Thailand (Huguet & Punpuing, 2005). Meanwhile, Myanmar received only 284 million dollars from Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in early 2022 which is the year of the study, also. However, the wellbeing and quality of life of legal migrant labors at their works in Thailand are underrepresented. It perhaps may be because of inaccessible to particular overseas migrants when addressing the quality of life.

Plentiful employment opportunities in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore bring the flows of Myanmar migrants increasingly for decades in labour market of Southeast Asia. Still, sharing the long land border between Myanmar and Thailand records a larger number of Myanmar Migrant Labours despite the fact that Singapore and Malaysia have higher per capital GPA than Thailand. It is assumed to could have better results when reporting anything

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

concerned with those Myanmar migrant labors in Thailand. Approximately, 1.3 million Myanmar migrant workers are legally employed in Thailand, and mainly in industries such as construction, fishery, and service-related (Chantavanich, S. & Vungsiriphisal, P., 2012, p. 241). The lowest number of Myanmar migrant labors in Thailand are employed in factors like INGOs and NGOs, and this has rarely been represented to the public how the wellbeing of those and etc. This research study aims to explore and assess the living conditions of Myanmar legal migrant labors in Mae Sot, Tak province of Thailand through conducting semi- interview questions covering four main dimensions: material wealth, physical and mental health, legal protection and work-life balance. The focus of analysis is placed on objective wellbeing and subjective wellbeing of legal Myanmar migrant workers at Mae Tao community (whereas, INGOs and NGOs Myanmar migrant workers are legally employed) to understand their state of quality of life. Previous studies have publicized those migrant workers pursue economic opportunities. However, the extent of this study is beyond economic growth but to assess quality of life by examining the gap between what they achieve and what they want more.

1.1 Overview of Mae Tao Community

Mae Tao community is located in Mae Sot, Tak province of Thailand. Many people know that shares a border with Myanmar, and it is known for its increasing population of Burmese migrants and refugees overtime. Migrant labors working in Mae Tao community can be divided into three different groups; first group is volunteer in respective organization, second group is that those who work there for permanent (paid employees), and third group is professional for particular subject. Three of these are main migrant workers groups working in Mae Sot.

Myanmar migrant labors have been residing in this area because of several wars in Myanmar and borderline to Thailand. So, people eventually call Mae Sot as little Burma. A group of partnered non-profit organizations are existing today in Mae Tao community namely Mae Tao clinic (MTC), Children Development Centre (CDC), Suwannimit Foundation, Committee for Protection and Promotion of Child's Right (CPPCR), Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF), Cotton on Foundation, Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC), Burma Medical Association (BMA), Ethnic Health System Strengthening Group (EHSSG), Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT), and Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW). Dr. Cynthia Maung, Gwangju Prize for

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

Human Rights 2022, is chairperson for all those partnered organizations in Mae Tao community, whereas, about three to five hundred of legal migrants are working and servicing for Burmese refugees and migrant population in Western Thailand. Among those partnered organizations, Mae Tao Clinic has founded and begun giving services since 1989. Nearly 10,000 or more are living in and relying to these community-based organizations for their livelihood opportunities and better living standards. Most of them are Karenni ethnic from all parts of Myanmar. Some other ethnics would include Burmese, Mon, Shan, Rakhine and a very few others aged between 20 to 35 years old. This seems to be related with opportunities and working experiences at young ages while they can also give services to community development. And also, a significant number of children who were born in Thailand can be found in this community as well. However, illegal migrants in Mae Sot are way higher than legal migrants and it should have been reporting the life of those in particular.

Plus, author found out that mostly young people work at Mae Tao community for two major reasons, first is to seek for working experience and second is to maximize their educational opportunities because they can continue higher education like going to university with financial aids after working there for a few times. Precisely, working at Mae Tao community have a chance to winning scholarships from one of

those; Cotton on Foundation, Girls Rising, Prospect Burma, and Child's Dream to continue their college or university education.

1.2 Objective and Subjective of Quality-of-Life Approaches

The individual's objective needs satisfaction in relation with one's subjective perspective of his/her well-being can define Quality of Life (Daniel, 2011). It can be assumed that there are two different approaches to evaluation of Quality of life (QOL). In which, the objective approach evaluates QOL through economic indicators while the subjective approach analyses QOL through individual's perspective or actions.

There have been long enough that people started doing research on living standard by using different social indicators in developing world, and it helped educating people around the world. For example, people begun to see the fact that the improvement of material wealth can determine how good living and working conditions of those in general. However, those studies somehow proved that the measurement of quality of life is not appropriately approached in theory as a whole or either the use of one of two QOL approaches. It is obvious that neither QOL objective approach nor QOL subjective approach is widely

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

accepted alone to apply in most cases of quality- of-life evaluation, but use both objective and subjective indicators because of a strong interdependence between those two (Daniel, 2011, p. 56). Notedly, Quality of Life is unmeasurable directly and required the dimensions of social indicators to be converted (Lak, 2010, pp. 381-399).

As each of two QOL approaches has both strengths and weaknesses, it perhaps is a reason why a number of authors did not use them separately on measuring wellbeing surveys. Objective QOL approach alone is incomplete statistical registrations when subjective QOL approach is reflecting important experiences of individual. Likewise, objective QOL can allow valid comparisons while subjective QOL approach can be lack of validity. Therefore, individual's level of satisfaction altogether with his or her living conditions should be analyzed in order to evaluate the quality of life so it shall be more accurate in results.

Since both objective and subjective quality of life have been becoming a standard life measures outcome, a good instrument is to enable the semi-questionnaires for QOL in this study. Comprising fundamental materials for a good life includes basic income, physical and mental health, legal protection and work-life balance. Besides, the state of individual's perception to his or her quality of life is another dimension. As wellbeing is believed to be comprised of

objective and subjective aspects, this study will also conduct two dimensions both the state of quality of life of legal Myanmar migrants and the state of perception to their living standards.

2 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research, using both primary and secondary sources of data to support and validate the findings when exploring the quality of life of legal Myanmar Migrant Workers in Mae Sot, Thailand. The direct data source received from interviews with Myanmar legal migrant labors at Mae Tao community which were not enough to illustrate whole thing. Thus, secondary source of data which is existing data from written articles by scholars, recent academic thesis written by senior graduates in relative fields, and journal articles by several researchers has been used in the support of this research. Secondary sources would bring strong facts about historical background and issues in the research area. In short, this study sees wellbeing of Myanmar Legal Migrant labors from Mae Tao Community with comprised of two dimensions; both the state of quality of life and their perception state of quality of life. Due to limitation of access to an appropriate number of participants for conducting a survey, the WHO QOL

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

assessment instrument (WHOQOL Group, 1998) could not be included in this study to validate the findings.

However, semi-structured interviews were used in this study by allowing participants and interviewees to engage more with researcher for in- depth interviews. Mae Tao community was chosen for two major reasons. First, this community partnered with many other associated NGOs at which a large number of legal Myanmar migrant workers are actively working and volunteering. So, researcher believed that would be a good source of accurate information reflecting on the wellbeing of those legal migrant workers. Second reason was that this community was not emerged last year or a year before last year but over two decades which is why it would really be appropriate to do a study research about the quality of life of legal Myanmar migrant labors. In respect of qualitative approach, the researcher collected primary data from twelve interviewees who work legally at Mae Tao community in Mae Sot, Tak province of Thailand. The interviews were conducted through several online channels including Facebook Messenger, Google Meet and direct phone call. These interviews were held with twelve legal Myanmar migrant workers from Mae Tao Community in Mae Sot, Tak Province of Thailand. Primary data in this research were also be supplemented with secondary data secondhanded from new articles, reports, and books.

Because primarily source alone could not fully cover while doing a research on living conditions of migrant labors working in special area like Mae Tao community from Mae Sot, Thailand. Author has had to contact those people from that community for the interview several times before booking for actual interview appointment date. The duration of interviews started from late August 2022 until early November 2022, including the period of time author contacting Mae Tao's partnered organizations for interviewees.

The interviews concerned the material wealth, physical and mental health as well as legal protection and work-life balance of legal Myanmar migrant workers from Mae Tao community. The researcher arranged individual interviews and contacted interviewees in advance with an explanation of interviewing purpose. For the advantage of all interviewees, the researcher also offered flexible schedules to make appointments for their contribution to this study. The interviews were recorded to transcribe thereafter for summarizing.

Interviewees were invited regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion and political views to participate in this research study. The selection criteria for interviewees are simple; as long as they shall recently worked or be working

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

at any organization in Mae Tao community legally, and be willing to participate.

3 The findings of the results

Table 3.1 accumulates the list of interviewees that shows participants' gender, age, ethnicity, organization and also working status/position. In this way, that surely would help the readers to evaluate the living standards of those who represent their own specific organization.

Table 3.1. List of Interviewees from Mae Tao Community

No.	Participants	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Organization	Worker's Status
1	Participant A	Male	22	Karen	Mae Tao Clinic (MTC)	Volunteer
2	Participant B	Male	24	Kachin	Mae Tao Clinic (MTC)	Permanent Staff
3	Participant C	Female	22	Burmese	Children Development Centre (CDC)	Volunteer
4	Participant D	Female	21	Karen	Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC)	Volunteer
5	Participant E	Female	22	Karen	Committee for Protection and Promotion of Child's Rights (CPPCR)	Permanent Staff
6	Participant F	Male	27	Kachin	Ethnic Health System Strengthening Group (EHSSG)	Permanent Staff
7	Participant G	Female	27	Karen	Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF)	Permanent Staff
8	Participant H	Male	23	Karen	Suwannimit Foundation (SF)	Permanent Staff
9	Participant I	Male	24	Burmese	Cotton on Foundation (COF)	Permanent Staff
10	Participant J	Female	23	Karen	Burma Medical Association (BMA)	Permanent Staff
11	Participant K	Male	42	Burmese	Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT)	Professional

12	Participant M	Female	28	Karen	Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW)	Professional
----	---------------	--------	----	-------	---	--------------

Mae Tao community is located in Mae Sot, Tak province of Thailand. Many people know that shares a border with Myanmar, and it is known for its increasing population of Burmese migrants and refugees overtime. Migrant labors working in Mae Tao community can be divided into three different groups; first group is volunteer in respective organization, second group is that those who work there for permanent (paid employees), and third group is professional for particular subject. Three of these are main migrant workers groups working in Mae Sot.

Myanmar migrant labors have been residing in this area because of several wars in Myanmar and borderline to Thailand. So, people eventually call Mae Sot as little Burma. A group of partnered non-profit organizations are existing today in Mae Tao community namely Mae Tao clinic (MTC), Children Development Centre (CDC), Suwannimit Foundation, Committee for Protection and Promotion of Child’s Right (CPPCR), Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF), Cotton on Foundation, Burmese Migrant Workers’ Education Committee (BMWEC), Burma Medical Association (BMA), Ethnic Health System Strengthening Group (EHSSG), Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT), and Karen Department of Health and

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

Welfare (KDHW). Dr. Cynthia Maung, Gwangju Prize for Human Rights 2022, is chairperson for all those partnered organizations in Mae Tao community, whereas, about three to five hundred of legal migrants are working and servicing for Burmese refugees and migrant population in Western Thailand. Among those partnered organizations, Mae Tao Clinic has founded and begun giving services since 1989. Nearly 10,000 or more are living in and relying to these community-based organizations for their livelihood opportunities and better living standards. Most of them are Karenni ethnic from all parts of Myanmar. Some other ethnics would include Burmese, Mon, Shan, Rakhine and a very few others aged between 20 to 35 years old. This seems to be related with opportunities and working experiences at young ages while they can also give services to community development. And also, a significant number of children who were born in Thailand can be found in this community as well. However, illegal migrants in Mae Sot are way higher than legal migrants and it should have been reporting the life of those in particular.

Furthermore, the researcher found out that mostly young people work at Mae Tao community for two major reasons, first is to seek for working experience and second is to maximize their educational opportunities because they can continue higher education like going to university with financial aids after working there for a few times. Precisely, working at

Mae Tao community have a chance to winning scholarships from one of those; Cotton on Foundation, Girls Rising, Prospect Burma, and Child's Dream to continue their college or university education. In the following, the different terms of social indicators shall be reported with both texts and tables of which results be assumed to assessing the wellbeing of those legal Myanmar migrant workers at Mae Tao community.

Material Wealth

Most participants in this conducted semi-structured interviews are neither materially rich nor legally procession upon direction-finding of shelter and diet, education and employment, and income and expenditure. As a result, almost all legal Myanmar migrants' material wealth is considerably low, and most of them often face lack of money to do things they wish. Two interview participants from Mae Tao clinic organization and Burmese Migrant Worker's Education Committee responded and addressed to their income and expenditure as frequent lack of money.

Although most participants in this study research have a proper education status, it seems very challenging for them to get employed by big company. Participant C said that, "new comer who migrate to Mae Sot shall not get a job with a proper salary in Mae Tao community," (Participant C,

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

personal communication, October 16, 2022). Thus, this is more likely they would end up working at factories where human rights violation exists. Surprisingly, there is no difference income rate between men and women at Mae Tao community. However, when asking interviewees about their income and cost of living, almost all of them shared the dissatisfaction on the increase of salary because the cost of daily basis is getting higher year by year. It seems the amount of increasing salary is not that much.

Based on interviews, volunteer get paid about 2,500-baht monthly stipends, permanent staff get paid between 6,000-to-11,000-baht monthly salary except for professionals because most of them work for charity but professional participants in this study do not want to share how much they earn. Participant M from Karen Department of Health and Welfare said that, “monthly expenses are costing 2/3 from monthly salary and it is very difficult for us to support our kids and parents,” (Participant M, personal communication, October 26, 2022). On the other hand, most participants answered that those legal Myanmar migrant workers can have three quality meals per day and can afford for proper shelter such as 10 x 15 feet wide room for living with the stipends or salary they receive. This study found that all households’ activities like sleeping, cooking and resting are supposed to get done in that same rented rooms.

Table 3.2. Material Wealth of Legal Myanmar migrant workers at Mae Tao community

Item	Intervi ewees	Yes	No	Percentage
Nutrition Affordability	12	12/12	0/12	100
Being able to buy Vehicle(s)	12	2/12	10/12	16.67
Being able to buy House (s)	12	0/12	12/12	0
Assessing to Electricity and Water	12	12/12	0/12	100
Being able to use Telecommunication	12	12/12	0/12	100
Savings	12	2/12	10/12	16.67

Health (Physical and Mental)

From the interview answers, it could perceive those legal migrants in Mae Sot region receive free of charge for physical and mental health by one of the partnered organizations of Mae Tao community known Mae Tao Clinic. Researcher noted same answers from all participants that the initiatives of Mae Tao Clinic are effective and beneficial not only for those legal Myanmar migrants but also everyone living in Mae Sot, Thailand. Hence, one main source of health services those workers obtained can be considered is Mae Tao Clinic as it is free of charge and none of those can afford high costs at private clinic nor public hospital. In fact, participant I, Suwannimit Foundation said

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

that, “all Myanmar migrant workers living in Mae Sot region access to free health care from Mae Tao Clinic (MTC),” (Participant I, personal communication, October 31, 2022). Hence, Myanmar migrants’ health conditions in Mae Tao community are relatively high while they all are entitled to health care services with nearly at zero cost. Which is saying that low-income migrant workers hardly face difficulties to access to health care services because they do not need to go to private clinic or public health center as long as they are a part of Mae Tao community. In addition, migrant workers at Mae Tao community does not feel like going to public health center or hospital either due to language barrier with Thai medical staff and etc. This reveals that it is difficult for those migrant workers to receive health services from public hospital as long as local language adaption is required. Besides, low income causes the fact that those workers are prevented from having access to medical services so they ended going to Mae Tao Clinic for free.

Table 3.3. Health of Legal Myanmar migrant workers at Mae
Tao community

Item	Interviewees	Yes	No	Percentage
Being able to afford health expenditure	12	12/12	0/12	100

Assessing to physical and mental health services <i>24/7</i>	12	12/12	0/12	100
---	----	-------	------	-----

Legal Protection

The legal protection is a primary concern once people live and work in another country. While half of interviewees stated that legal protection for Myanmar migrants is good in the respective area of this study, some participants are unhappy about it. For those who answered negative, they believe relevant agencies should be continually incorporated with local authorities since migrant legal policy is always changed without notices. Participant F, Ethnic Health System Strengthening Group additionally mentioned that “legal protection is too weak for Myanmar people migrating to Mae Sot compared to another region of Thailand like Bangkok, capital city of Thailand,” (Participant F, personal communication, October 17, 2022). Unlikely, two interview participants said that, “we receive full legal protection and feel better living and working at Mae Tao community than where we originally came from,” (Participant G & H, personal communication, October 31, 2022). As a result, participant H, Suwannimit Foundation added, “Myanmar high school graduates would not get a job that can broaden our opportunities and networking in Myanmar but in it does

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

while working here,” (Participant H, personal communication, October 31, 2022). This seems worse when Myanmar itself holds Civil War so that it is obvious. Thus, legal protection at minimum can be well for them unless they migrate to work at Mae Tao community for other reasons.

Table 3.4. Legal Protection for Legal Myanmar migrant workers at Mae Tao community

Item	Interviewees	Yes	No	Percentage
Fully protected at work	12	12/12	0/12	100
Legally protected by the host organization when traveling within Thailand	12	6/12	6/12	50

Work-life Balance

For this aspect, most participants do not demand more than working schedule and condition at present. As a matter of fact, participant A to M except participant C reacted positive to their work-life balance. Participant K from Back Pack Health Worker Team said, “my working time is from 9:00 AM to 17:00 PM only,” (Participant K, personal communication, November 2, 2022). They have lunch break in the afternoon from 12 PM to 13:00 PM so total working hours is 7. This is normal working hours for most people. Three interview participants said, “we also have day off in

the weekend and public holidays.” Besides, nearly all of them answered that their jobs do not demand the greater amount of time than what it should be once participants are asked about their work-life balance. For example, migrant workers at Mae Tao community need not to work strictly with their time and schedule but take day-off or leave the office early in case personal events happen to them. “Working hours is flexible since they can eventually head off part-time job while working in their respective job or office”, (Participant B, personal communication, October 26, 2022), (Participant C, personal communication, October 16, 2022), and (Participant G and I, personal communication, October 31, 2022). Not only these five interview participants knocked they have work-life balance, but the other remaining seven interview participants also agreed that work-life balance in Mae Tao community is good.

Table 3.5. Work Life Balance of Legal Myanmar migrant workers at Mae Tao community

Item	Intervie wees	Satisfa ction	Unsatisfa ction	Perce ntage
Weekly Working Hours (35 hours per week)	12	12/12	0/12	100
Being able to pursue a hobby	12	12/12	0/12	100
Being able to take days off for sickness or personal events	12	12/12	0/12	100

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

Subjective Quality of life

In order to achieve the average percentage of the subjective quality of life of legal Myanmar migrant workers from Mae Tao’s partnered organizations, researcher tabled it down based on the interviewees’ responds to how the state of perceptive to their quality of life.

Table 3.6. Subjective Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar migrant workers

Item	Intervie wees	Satisfacti on	Unsatisfacti on	Percenta ge
Having quality food to eat	12	12/12	0/12	100
Being able to save money	12	4/12	8/12	33.33
Assessing to educational opportunities or having education	12	10/12	2/12	83.33
Having both good physical and mentalhealth	12	12/12	0/12	100
Being able to support parents or kids	12	2/12	10/12	16.67
Being able to return homeland	12	4/12	8/12	33.33
Being able to buy new apartment or house	12	2/12	2/12	16.67

Being able to enjoy personal events	12	9/12	3/12	75
-------------------------------------	----	------	------	----

Table 3.6 shows the overall percentage of subjective quality of life of legal Myanmar migrant workers at Mae Tao community based on the interviewees' answers. Every individual participant said, "I am satisfied working at Mae Tao community despite low salary." As these organizations' objectives and goals are clear working on community development and people living within, this is obvious that people feel happy working there while they are also contributing back to the community. You can imagine how proud they shall be when being a part of organization which contributes the community development, especially volunteers. "We feel so secure and being protected living here rather than homeland", added some participants. This is much related with their places they originally came from. For example, some of them might have lived where civil war exists or remote areas with very low-socio economic backgrounds before. Six interview participants stated, "we are satisfied because vocational trainings are provided to those who work at Mae Tao partnered organizations, eventually educational fund for college students". "There are many young people who already got educational assistance after working there for a while," said participant F from Ethnic Health System Strengthening Group (EHSSG),

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

(Participant F, personal communication, October 17, 2022). Participant I said, “my neighbors and colleagues are very kind and supportive so that I feel like a second home,” (Participant I, personal communication, October 31, 2022). All interviewees rated 9 out of 10 to their physical and mental health conditions when working at Mae Tao community. They all added, “we are free to practice our faith with any hindrances, and rarely miss any of their personal events due to working schedule”.

Their responses resulted that there are four lower items existing to improve the living standards of those migrant workers; being able to save money, being able to support parents and kids, being able to buy new apartment or house and being able to return to homeland. Oppositely, the higher achievements are having quality foods, having education or educational opportunities, having good health physically and mentally, and being able to enjoy personal events. It is also evident that those migrant workers have good health and foods as well as education thus their subjective quality of life is considerably high. However, the objective quality of life of those migrant workers is yet not above average.

Previous research studies are primarily concerned about the challenges and violation of migrant labour rights, and suggest to improve the social security for them in order

to develop living standards. Legal protection or social security seems to be ranked as one of the highest importance because number of previous studies report how poor their social security related aspects are. One of the previous studies written briefly earlier has been used sampling methods to access the Quality of Life of Myanmar migrant workers in another province of Thailand known as Samut Sakorn. And, it revealed that there is a strong association between Buddhist temple and those Myanmar migrant workers, and also researchers suggest that the role of that Buddhist temple shall be increased to improve QOL of those migrant labors (Promphakping, et al., 2019, pp.39 – 40). In Thailand's labor migration aspect, the number of NGOs and INGOs is the lowest compared to factors such as construction, fishery and service-related areas. Not only that, the reports concerned with the wellbeing of those migrant labors is underrepresented as well. Therefore, this study explored to the quality of life of legal Myanmar migrants working in INGOs and IGOs sector by taken Mae Tao community for primary data resources.

In this study, QOL objective and QOL subjective approaches are so as to evaluate overview of quality of life of those legal Myanmar migrant labors due to the interconnection between those two social indicators. As described above upon conducted semi-structured interviews

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

in terms of material wealth, physical and mental health, legal protection and work-life balance, the objective quality of life of legal Myanmar migrant labors at Mae Tao community is relatively low despite a good range of education opportunities and health care services they received. Based on their answers, researcher could note that those migrants would not be going back to homeland in a short period time of working because they are unable to save money for extra. Plus, they appreciate their working life at Mae Tao community until reaching to age of 60 or when Myanmar is no longer fighting for civil war. It also proves that Myanmar people migrating to Thailand for better living is pretty much related to Civil War in homeland. From interviews, those labors prioritized three importance to improve or achieve; better apartment or house, being able to save money and support parents and kids as well as being able to return to homeland. Table 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 also demonstrate how the present quality of life of those legal Myanmar migrant workers in terms of material wealth, physical and mental health, legal protection and work-life balance.

The subjective quality of life of legal Myanmar migrant labors at Mae Tao community is considerably high (see Table 3.2 above). All interviewees in this research said that they are happy and satisfied working here rather than living and working in homeland. In fact, legal Myanmar

migrant workers kind of feel safer and better living compared to where they originally came from. Participant E and F answered that they really enjoy working within Mae Tao community while benefiting the safety of working environment, free health care services and educational opportunities such as financial aids if they apply to higher education in the future, except for low income and unable to support families (Participant E, personal communication, October 16, 2022), (Participant F, personal communication, October 17, 2022). Participant D from Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee organization suggested that, "legal protection should be improved across Mae Sot region for Myanmar migrant workers," (Participant D, personal communication, October 16, 2022). And she witnesses that some people are being abused by local authority. Furthermore, she said that one out of five new migrant comers from Myanmar get discriminated in Mae Sot, Tak province of Thailand. This is why she believes it could have been much better for living and working in case migrant policies shall be abolished or these people will be protected by not only host organization and but also local government.

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

In this research paper, author has explored how the quality of life of Legal Myanmar migrant workers in that particular area to report by using both semi-structured interviews for primary sources and secondary sources from journal articles, previous researches and books. And then, it has been able to describe the conditions of legal Myanmar migrant labors in terms of material wealth, health, legal protection and work-life balance as well as propose some ways to improve the prioritized aspect of living standards by those labors. This study found out that the objective quality of life is noticeably poor, and it could be considerably average or high once three importance prioritized by those migrant workers will be improved including material wealth and legal protection.

For subjective quality of life, it is considerably high. Perhaps, it could be because of the backgrounds where they originally came from like Myanmar migrants have almost no choice but continue working there. For another perspective is that some type of legal Myanmar migrant is quite happy that we can do something about it while they can give their hands to those in need. As mentioned in chapter 1 previously that Myanmar people migrate to Thailand for better livings and avoid suffering from civil wars. Thus, they would feel much better working there unless they are illegal and arrested. It

shall except some people since some legal Myanmar migrant workers are working there for their volunteerism and loving-kindness (Metta) toward refugees and migrant children at Thailand-Myanmar border camps. Subsequently, the chapter 4 findings and interview answers submit the high satisfaction of Myanmar migrant workers to their working life.

Overall, the results from findings in this study reveals that legal Myanmar migrant labors' objective wellbeing is poor but subjective wellbeing is high at Mae Tao community. It also seems comparatively connected to the background and environment they originally came from when migrating for better living. In the following paragraph, the recommends of this study shall be advantageous for all concerning agencies and eventually migrant workers themselves.

Regarding recommendations, researcher would recommend some sights on how the quality of life of legal Myanmar migrant labors can be improved whilst living and working in foreign countries. It is also frustrating to just convince which relevant agencies would do to advance the quality of life for Myanmar Migrant Workers. However, the analysis of findings in this research proposes four solutions to improve both the objective and subjective quality of life of

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot, Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

Legal Myanmar migrant workers in this area based on the analysis of used data and information.

First solution is requesting the local government to provide the standard dormitories for foreign workers, not just in this community alone but also across Thailand. In this way, it can reduce the abuse from private landlords and agencies so that legal migrants can access to quality of life by ensuring that they are safe and secured to live and work while the physical standard are being upgraded. It also protects national security somehow.

Second solution is encouraging those legal migrant workers to look for self-employment opportunities by local agencies. It surely will provide more economic independence and subtract health inequality among workers with same status, education background, income, and social integration.

Third solution is working a part-time job, earning extra money so that they can support their parents or kids or eventually returning homeland.

Fourth solution is adapting to minimalism practices by themselves, which will help them satisfy despite low income. For example, limiting the amount of spending on unnecessary items and cut the meaningless expenses. By doing it, they will be able to save some of it for the emergency fund in case.

References

1. Bozalek, V. (2010). Relationship between objective and subjective of life measures quality of life measures. *In Akinpelu, A. & Gbiri (Eds.),* Editorial on blended learning (pp. 41–47). Bellville: University of the Western Cape.
2. Camfield, L., McGregor, J. A., & Woodcock, A. (2007). *Needs, Wants, and Wellbeing: perceived needs in Northeast and South Thailand*. Retrieved on April 17, 2022, from https://www.happysociety.org/ppdoconference/session_papers/session2/C.Laura-Needs%20Wants%20WB-perceived%20needs%20in%20Thai.pdf
3. Cummins, R. A. (2000). Objective and Subjective Quality of Life: An Interactive Model. *Social Indicators Research, 52*(1), pp.55–72.
4. Carr, T. (2018). Supporting the transition: understanding Aid to Myanmar since 2011. Retrieved on April 10, 2022 from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Supporting-the-Transition-Understanding-Aid-to-Myanmar-since-2011_ENG.pdf

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

5. Chamrathirong, A. (2007). Research on Internal Migration in Thailand: The State of Knowledge. *Journal of Population and Social Studies*, 16(1), pp.4-8.
6. Chantavanich, S., & Vungsiriphisal, P. (2012). Myanmar migrants to Thailand: Economic analysis and implications for Myanmar development. In Lim, H., & Yamada, Y. (Eds.), *Economic Reforms in Myanmar: Pathways and Prospects (BRC Research Report No.10)*. Bangkok: Bangkok Research Center, IDE-JETRO.
7. Daniel, M. (2011). *Comparative analysis between the objective and the subjective quality of life approach – Strengths and Weaknesses*. Annals of the University of Oradea: Economic Science, University of Oradea.
8. Equipe, M. (2021). *What is Marxism's take on international migration?* Retrieved on April 12, 2022, from <https://migramundo.com/what-is-marxisms-take-on-international-migration/>
9. de Haas, H. (2008). *Migration and development; a theoretical perspective*. University of Oxford: International Migration Institute.
10. Hashmi, et al. (2019). Feeding practices and risk factors for chronic infant undernutrition among refugees and migrants along the Thailand-Myanmar border: a mixed-

- methods study. *Maternal and Infant Nutrition*, 19(1), 3-16.
11. Hnuploy, K., Laohasiriwong, W., Sornlorm, K., & Nutrawong, T. (2020). Influence of mental health and social relationships on quality of life among Myanmar migrant workers in the South of Thailand. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, 11(4), pp.707-712.
 12. Hofmann, M., Jolivel, A., Huss, D., & Ambiaux, C. (2020). *International migration: drivers, factors and megatrends; a geopolitical outlook*. Australia: International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).
 13. Huguet, J. W., & Punpuing, S. (2005). Child migrants and children of migrants in Thailand. *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 20(3), pp.123-143.
 14. IMF. (2020). *World Economic Outlook: The Great Lockdown*. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.
 15. IOM. (2012). *Migrant Information*. Retrieved from <http://th.iom.int/index.php/migration-resources/facilitating-migration/migration-information-notes/Migration-Information-Note-17-OCT12-ENG/>

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

16. Kerce, E. W. (1992). *Quality of life: meaning, measurement, and models*. San Diego: Delbert M. Nebeker.
17. King, T., & Camfield, L. (2006). *Wellbeing in Developing Countries: Quality of life*. Retrieved on April 17, 2022, from doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/6081/mrdoc/pdf/6081userguide.pdf
18. Koczan, Z., Peri, G., Pinat, M., & Rozhkov, D. (2021). *The impact of International Migration on inclusive growth*. Institute for Capacity Development: Valerie Cerra.
19. Kook, L. S. (2011). Borderland dynamics in Mae Sot, Thailand and the pursuit of the Bangkok dream and resettlement. *Journal of Asian and Pacific Migration*, 20(1), pp.23-35.
20. Mon, M. (2010). Burmese labour migration into Thailand: governance of migration and labour rights. *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, 15(1), pp.33-44. doi: 10.1080/13547860903488211Lam, C.L.K. (2010). Subjective Quality of Life Measures-General Principles and Concepts. In: Preedy, V.R., Watson, R.R. (eds.). *Handbook of Disease Burdens and Quality of Life*

Measures. Springer, New York, NY. Doi: 10.1007/978-0-387-78665-0_21

21. Lee, S. K. (2008). State in a State: Administration and Governance in a Thailand–Burma Border Town, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 36(2), pp.187-233.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/156853108X298707>
22. Pholphirul, P. (2012). Labour migration and the economic sustainability in Thailand. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 31(3), pp. 59-83.
23. Promphakping, N., Promphakping., Somaboot, P., Rot, S., & Weeranakin, P. (2019) Quality of life of Myanmar Migrant Labours in Samutsakorn Thailand. *KKU International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9(3), pp.22-40.
24. Sakulsri, T. (2020). Challenges of labor migrants to Thailand: Issues of bilateral agreements for the employment of workers in the greater Mekong subregion (GMS). *Journal of population and social studies (JPSS)*. Doi: 10.25133/JPSSspecial2020.003.
25. Saltsman, A. (2015). *Surviving dispossession: Burmese migrants in Thailand's border economic zones* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from EBSCO

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

Information Services and the Congregational Library
and Archives. (862B63F93E9D1B58.)

26. Sarapirom, K. & Muensakda, P. (2018). Existence of quality of life among Myanmar migrantworkers under Thai socio-cultural context in Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand. *Journal of Thai Interdisciplinary Research*, 13(5), p.11. Doi: 10.14456/jtir.2018.44
27. Sarapirom, K and Muensakda, P. (2018). Existence of quality of life among Myanmar migrantworkers under Thai socio-cultural context in Samut Sakhon province, Thailand. *Journal of Thai Interdisciplinary Research*, 13(5), pp.11-18.
28. Stalker, P. (2000). *Workers without frontiers: The impact of globalisation on international migration*. JLO, Lynne Reiner Publishers: USA.
29. Schneider, M. (1976). The “Quality of Life” and Social Indicators Research. *Public Administration Review*, 36(3), pp.297–305. Doi: 10.2307/974587
30. The WHOQOL Group. (1993). Study protocol for the World Health Organisation Project to develop a Quality of Life Assessment Instrument (WHOQOL) in quality of life research, pp. 153 – 159.

31. The Investopedia Team. (2021). *Marxism: theory, effects, and examples*. Retrieved on April 12, 2022 from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marxism.asp>
32. The Asia Foundation. (2017). *The contested areas of Myanmar: subnational conflict, aid and development*. Retrieved on April 11, 2022 from <https://asiafoundation.org/2017/10/17/asia-foundation-releases-new-report-armed-conflict-aid-development-myanmar/>
33. UN. (2019). *Population division, international migration*. Retrieved on April 6, 2022 from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>
34. UNDP., and World Bank. (2019). Myanmar living conditions survey 2017: poverty report (3). Central for statistical organisation of ministry of planning and finance. Retrieved on April 11, 2022 from <https://www.mm.undp.org/content/myanmar/en/home/library/poverty/mlcs-2017-poverty-report.html>
35. Winrock International. (2020). *LABOR ABUSE COMPLAINT MECHANISMS IN THAILAND (Research Report)*. Retrieved from <https://winrock.org/wp->

The Quality of Life of Legal Myanmar Migrant Labors in Mae Sot,
Thailand: The Case of Mae Tao Community

[content/uploads/2020/05/Thailand-CTIP-Assessment-
of-Complaint-Mechanisms.pdf](#)

36. Woodcock et al. (2008). Validation of the WeDQoL-
goals-Thailand measure: Culture-specific individualized
quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*, 94(1),
pp.135-171.

This page left intentionally blank