

Sending Money Back Home: Banking Digitalization, Myanmar Migrant Workers and Thailand-Myanmar Border Trade after Covid-19

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Abstract

The ministry of labour of Thailand reports that Thailand has accepted approximately 3 million legal migrant workers from her neighbouring countries, two-thirds of these migrant workers came from Myanmar. For decades, this huge number of migrant workers from Myanmar, directly and indirectly, benefits Thailand-Myanmar border trade in many aspects, including when Burmese workers sending money, they earned in Thailand back to their family at home.

In the past, accessing to banking and financial services in rural Myanmar where most of the migrant workers came from were limited. In the areas where no formal channel available, the workers have no other choice to send money back home. The only informal system allows them to do so. Through this channel, not only workers can send money home with a cheaper fee, Burmese and Thai traders are able to offset their trade. As there are many Burmese workers in Thailand, the money workers sent home become a significant part of the Thai-Myanmar border trade. However, the digitalization of banking and financial system has offered the migrant workers choices of remittance.

This paper studies how the development of economic activities, financial, and banking that evolved and revolved around the border trade. Field research was conducted by using a semi-structured interview of totally 32 Myanmar migrant workers whose lives and work in Samutsakorn province and 9 Thai border traders at Mae Sot. Base on the interviews, it turns out to be that the digitalization of banking is, actually, strengthening informal banking as it makes a faster and better money distribution.