

**Managing migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Regulation, extra-legal relation and extortion, written by Sai S. W. Latt, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, Vol. 34 Iss. 1, pp 40-56, 2013.**

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*Managing migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion* discusses migration flows of unskilled migrants in the Greater Mekong Subregion with a particular focus on ethnic migrants from Myanmar working in Thailand. The author argues that apart from formal processes of regularization, there are informal or extra-legal practices which constitute additional forms of exploitation of ethnic migrants and these practices enable the Thai government to easily dispose of unskilled migrant labour. Moreover, whilst the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the implementation of the Greater Mekong Subregion integration programme calls for regulating labour migration so as to prevent human trafficking, communicable diseases and the undocumented flow of people through the border, the efforts of the ADB can actually exacerbate the vulnerability of migrants, who are often undocumented, and have a negative impact on labour protection standards.

The author briefly explains the region and his research methods. His work is based on 2010-2011 data concerning ethnic migrants from Myanmar working in the Chiang Mai province in northern Thailand, as well as interviews with government officials, NGO representatives and staff members, and migrant workers. Then, he talks about ADB's programmes and points out that ADB's main focus is on security and managing the risks of migration rather than the welfare and livelihood of migrants. In other words, ADB's approach of managing migration does not deal with protecting migrants.

Furthermore, the regulations adopted by the Thai government focus on documents such as a passport and a visa as proof of legal status for migrant workers and as a result, Thai officials reaffirm the idea of undocumented migrants as being harmful and try get rid of them, rather than respecting their human rights and human dignity. The author gives several examples of different cases in which ill-treated undocumented migrants are detained and deported back to their home country rather than being protected. The author points out that state regulation allows more exploitation and consequently, state and para-state agents use extortion to get financial benefits from undocumented migrant workers.

The author presents three types of extortion - legal, semi-legal and illegal - that migrant workers have to face. Legal extortion includes various formal fees and charges to obtain registration papers, passports and visas which cost exorbitant fees for poor and vulnerable migrants. In addition to the financial constraints, the fear of meeting with authorities to obtain the correct papers, as well as long and complicated processes discourage many migrant workers from attempting to obtain legal documents and as a result, they remain undocumented. Migrants also have to pay unofficial fees for registration processes through semi-legal extortion and corrupt authorities and police officers often also illegally extort money from migrants such as through targeted raids and charging increased fines compared to Thai ID holders.

The author concludes that the Thai government is taking advantage of the regularization process of migrant workers to ensure that they can be deported easily when their labour is unnecessary and as a result, many migrant workers ended up working "illegally". Moreover, both documented and undocumented migrants are in a vulnerable position and cannot climb up the social ladder due to the financial burden of being subject to both legal and illegal extortion. The author blames the ADB for not fulfilling their role of protecting the welfare of migrants but rather exacerbating the situation by encouraging nationalization of regulation and forcing the migrants to be regulated without considering the increased risks of exploitation this may entail. The solution is not to look at the status - documented or undocumented - of migrant workers but to respect them as human beings and protect them from exploitation.