

DECISIONS FOR CROSSING THE BORDER: A CASE STUDY OF MYANMAR
DISPLACED PERSONS

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ปัจจุบันในทุกมุมโลกปัญหาว่าด้วยเรื่องการพลัดถิ่นฐานในประเทศ (Internally Displaced Persons) เป็นประเด็นที่น่าจับตามองผลจากการศึกษาของ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center ในปี 2011 พบว่าจำนวนรวมของผู้ที่ถูกพลัดถิ่น (IDPs) ทั่วโลกนั้นมีมากถึง 26.4 ล้านคนโดยข้อมูลจากการศึกษาให้เหตุผลว่าการพลัดถิ่นนั้นเกิดขึ้นจากความขัดแย้งความรุนแรงและการต่อสู้ระหว่างกลุ่มต่างๆในขณะเดียวกันรัฐบาลพม่านั้นก็ไม่นับสนุนหรือให้การยอมรับแก่ผู้พลัดถิ่นโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งผู้พลัดถิ่นจากการสู้รบซึ่งทำให้สถานการณ์และความเป็นอยู่สำหรับบุคคลเหล่านี้ยากลำบากมากยิ่งขึ้น

จากเหตุผลดังกล่าวทำให้ประชาชนชาวพม่าพลัดถิ่นมาอยู่ต่างแดนเป็นจำนวนมากสืบเนื่องมาจากการต่อสู้ในแถบชายแดนตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ของประเทศพม่าประเทศไทยจึงเป็นเป้าหมายสำคัญในการอพยพของผู้พลัดถิ่นโดยในปัจจุบันประเทศไทยให้ที่พักพิงชั่วคราวแก่ IDPs ที่อพยพมาจากพม่าเป็นจำนวนประมาณ 140,000 คน

ข้าพเจ้าได้ทำการวิเคราะห์กระบวนการตัดสินใจของผู้พลัดถิ่นข้ามประเทศรวมไปถึงปัจจัยต่างๆที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจพลัดถิ่นของกลุ่มประชากรดังกล่าวโดยได้ศึกษาเพิ่มเติมว่ามีหน่วยงานอะไรบ้างที่ให้การช่วยเหลือในการตัดสินใจพลัดถิ่นข้าพเจ้ามีความประสงค์ที่จะศึกษาและวิเคราะห์ว่าบุคคลที่เป็นผู้พลัดถิ่นนั้นมีโอกาสและอิสรภาพมากน้อยแค่ไหนในการเลือกว่าจะใช้ชีวิตต่อในประเทศพม่าหรือจะอพยพมายังประเทศไทย

ผลสรุปจากการวิจัยในครั้งนี้พบว่ากลุ่มประชากรที่ศึกษานั้นมีความสมัครใจที่จะอพยพมายังประเทศไทยโดยปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อกระบวนการตัดสินใจคือปัญหาการขาดแคลนอาหารโดยในอนาคตหากสถานการณ์ในประเทศพม่านั้นมีความสงบมากยิ่งขึ้นกลุ่มประชากรดังกล่าวก็มีความประสงค์ที่จะกลับไปพักอาศัยที่ประเทศบ้านเกิด

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CAROLINA BRILL: DECISIONS FOR CROSSING THE BORDER: A
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Internal displacement issues are gaining heightened importance worldwide. The 2011 global report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center shows that for 2011 there were approximately 26.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Myanmar's continued armed conflicts still cause movements of forced migration, which makes this phenomenon a current issue.

The Myanmar government does not support or recognize IDPs by armed conflicts, which make the circumstances for these individuals even more difficult. This is one of the main reasons why many people in Myanmar have migrated to neighboring countries. As most conflicts take place in South-East Myanmar, neighboring Thailand has consequently received many thousands of displaced persons. Today, Thailand hosts approximately 140,000 displaced persons from Myanmar who are living in temporary shelters along the Thai- Myanmar border.

This thesis analysis the decision making process of displaced persons for crossing the border and if these decisions were constrained or if displaced persons had the agency and thus the opportunity to choose by themselves whether to stay in Myanmar or to migrate to Thailand. Taking the current changes in Myanmar into account, this thesis also examines how the future of these persons could change and if they would like to return.

Key findings in this conducted research show that nearly all the interviewed displaced persons were able to choose by themselves when making the decision to cross the border to Thailand. Of course the decision was to some extent influenced by the armed conflicts and other factors such as the lack of food; however it was not a constraint decision by institutions or by the whole community. When considering returning back to Myanmar in the future, about half of the interviewees want to return, nevertheless only if there are real peace agreements and no more conflicts.

Field of Study : International Development Student's Signature

Studies

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CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT (THAI).....	iv
ABSTRACT (ENGLISH).....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURE.....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem	6
1.2 Terminology	7
1.2.1 Myanmar/Burma	7
1.2.2 Constraint and Agency	7
1.2.3 Internally Displaced Persons, Refugees and Migrant Workers	9
1.2.4 Refugee/IDP camps and temporary shelters	10
1.3 Conceptual Framework	11
1.4 Research Question	15
1.4.1 Sub-questions	15
1.5 Research Objectives	15
1.6 Hypothesis	16
1.7 Research Methodology	16
1.7.1 Measuring the factors that contribute to the decisions	16
1.7.2 Measuring the reasons and causes that led to displacement	17
1.7.3 Measuring the impact of the current changes in Myanmar	17
1.8 Research Scope and Limitations	18
1.9 Significance of the Study	19
1.10 Ethical Issues	20

	Page
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	21
2.1 Myanmar	21
2.2 Typologies of displacement	23
2.3 International protection	24
2.3.1 The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees	25
2.3.2 The Guiding Principles On Internal Displacement	26
2.4 The displaced population in Myanmar	27
2.5 Thai -Myanmar Border	28
2.5.1 Mae La temporary shelter and Mae Sot region.....	28
2.6 The Myanmar Government and its policies regarding displacement	31
2.7 The Thai Government and its policies regarding displacement	31
CHAPTER III RESEARCH FINDINGS	33
3.1 The interviewed population in Mae La temporary shelter and in the Mae Sot region	33
3.2 The reasons and causes for displacement	34
3.3 Factors that contribute to the decision making process	38
3.4 The influence of the ongoing changes on the future decision-making process	43
3.5 Conclusion	45
CHAPTER IV ANALYSIS AND CHALLENGES	47
4.1 Policy and Guidelines	47
4.2 The decision level of choice: Constraint vs. Agency	50
4.3 To return or not return?	55
4.4 The future and possible options for the displaced population	62
4.4.1 The future of the displacement movements	62
4.4.2 The durable solutions for the displaced persons	64
4.5 Conclusion	67

	Page
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION	71
5.1 Conclusion and observations	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79
APPENDICES	88
APPENDIX A: Statistics of Burmese Border Displaced Persons	89
APPENDIX B: List of conducted interviews	90
APPENDIX C: Semi-structured interview questions	94
APPENDIX D: In-depth interview questions	95
APPENDIX E: Number of persons that were resettled from January 2006 to February 2012	96
APPENDIX F: Pictures of Mae La Temporary Shelter	97
BIOGRAPHY	100

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
1. List of conducted interviews: Key informants	90
2. List of conducted interviews: Target population	92

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1. Map - Camp location along the Thai-Myanmar border	5
2. Conceptual Framework	14
3. Reasons For Displacement	22
4. Map of Mae La temporary shelter	30
5. Reasons for displacement	36
6. Number of times people were displaced before crossing the border to Thailand.....	39
7. Readiness of the Myanmar Government to support the IDPs	44
8. Crossing the border to Thailand with	51
9. Constraint vs. Agency	54
10. What will need to change	60

ABBREVIATIONS

COHRE	Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
CRSR	Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Center
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RTG	Royal Thai Government
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSA-S	Shan State Army South
SWAN	Shan Women's Action Network
TBBC	Thailand Burma Border Consortium
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Internal displacement is an involuntary or forced movement that occurs within national borders. This movement is mainly caused by “armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights, and natural or human-made disasters” (OCHA, 1999, p. 5). Internal displacement issues are gaining importance worldwide. The 2011 global report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre shows that the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) by armed conflicts, human rights violations and violence has decreased from 2010 to 2011. Although this reduction is the most significant since 2005, there still are around 26.4 million IDPs worldwide and the amount of displaced persons has continued steadily growing in the last 15 years (IDMC, 2012, p. 8).

According to OCHA (2001), internally displaced persons “are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border”. Most theories which deal with the expulsion of IDPs were constructed on the basis of the theories of refugees, changing their focus towards migration within the country. However, there is an important fact that makes both forced migrants groups different. Refugees are also forced migrants, but since they migrate outside their country, they usually receive protection from the country of asylum as well as the protection of the international community (Turton, 2002, p. 21). Article 1a of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR) describes a refugee as a person, "who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (UNHCR, 2011). Although IDPs have a similar definition to refugees and even though both groups are considered forced migrants, IDPs have a different characterization of what being a refugee

entails. Aside from natural disasters, in most cases IDPs do not obtain international protection specific to their plight, since they remain in their home country and thus the country's government is accountable for them. Nevertheless many governments, especially in developing countries where the phenomenon of internal displacement is larger, are normally not able or do not have adequate resources to protect and assist IDPs. In some cases governments do not have any interest in supporting the displaced population since they are actually the cause of displacement. This is the main reason why internally displaced persons are often even more vulnerable than refugees (Weiss & Korn, 2006, p. 1).

In Southeast Asia there are several countries where displacement movements play a significant role. Myanmar's continued armed conflicts still cause movements by forced migration, which makes this phenomenon a current issue. The total number of internally displaced persons in Myanmar, including all long-term IDPs that were forced to displace in the last six decades, has gone up by several millions of persons. According to TBBC (2011, p. 18) around 450,000 IDPs are currently living in the rural areas of the southeast part of the country. Because of ongoing armed conflicts and human rights abuses in that region, between August 2010 and July 2011 more than 112,000 people had to leave their homes and were forced to displace (TBBC 2011, p. 18).

The Myanmar government does not support or even recognize the internally displaced persons by armed conflicts, which makes the circumstances for the IDPs even more difficult. This is one of the main reasons why armed conflicts have forced many Myanmar people to migrate to neighboring countries such as China, India and Thailand. China is the only neighboring country that has ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, although it still lacks domestic refugee legislation (Watchlist On Children And Armed Conflict, 2009, p. 19; Lau, 2010, p. 1). There are an unknown number of Myanmar refugees in China. Recently, after the ceasefire agreements between Myanmar's military and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) were broken in 2011, the number of displaced persons who have crossed the border to China has increased to more than 10,000 persons (OCHA, 2012; Sui-Lee Wee, 2012). According to Chinese official numbers, since 2012 there have been around 25,000 Myanmar refugees living on the Myanmar-Chinese border (Mizzima, 2012).

However, since most of the conflicts take place in Southeast Myanmar, Thailand, especially, has received in the past decades many thousands of migrants and displaced persons (forced and economic migrants). According to Watchlist on Children And Armed Conflict (2009), “Thailand has received the largest number of recognized refugees from Myanmar”. The first large numbers of cross border movements from Myanmar to Thailand started in 1984. Before temporary shelters, small numbers of displaced persons that had crossed the border were accepted by the Thai government and were therefore able to stay in the country and even obtain permission for temporary residence.

Even though the Thai policies have changed in the last two decades and the Thai Government has not yet ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, Thailand is currently hosting over 85,800 recognized displaced persons and about 67,000 unregistered asylum-seekers from Myanmar, that are living along the Thai- Myanmar border. However, only approximately 74,700 of the registered displaced persons are currently living in the temporary shelters (TBBC, 2012d). Those recognized displaced persons migrated to Thailand before the year 2005. Since 2005, the new forced migrants that have crossed the border have been considered unregistered or unrecognized. According to TBBC (2012a) today, after 28 years of migration movements, Thailand presently has almost 140,000 displaced persons in ten temporary shelters along the border, of which 45% migrated after 2005 and are therefore unregistered displaced persons; around 200,000 outside those temporary shelters, which are mostly displaced persons from the Shan State; and approximately 2,000,000 Migrant workers from Myanmar (TBBC, 2012a, pp. viii – 6).

The Karen (Kayin) state, which is located in the southeast part of Myanmar, is one of the most affected states by armed conflicts and related displacement movements. The border side along the Karen state in Myanmar is the area with the biggest concentration of forced displaced persons. Approximately 30% of the rural Karen population has been displaced and many hundreds of villages have been destroyed and burned in the region over the past few years. Therefore, in the year 2002 there were more than 200,000 internally displaced persons from the Karen State (Grundy-Warr, 2004, p. 234).

This large number of IDPs is the reason why there are in total ten temporary shelters or camps along the Myanmar-Thai border that are acknowledged by TBBC (see figure 1, page 5). Although the map shows ten camps, it must be noted that the Wieng Hang camp often does not appear in other maps or figures, since it is not officially recognized as a camp by the Thai government. Six of ten of the temporary shelters border the Karen state in Myanmar, and this is the main reason why this area is still so relevant regarding the issues of displacement (Grundy-Warr, 2004, p. 234).

Many of the displaced persons that migrate to Thailand were before internally displaced persons in Myanmar. The factors that contribute to the decision of whether to stay in Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand remain unidentified by existing research. In the currently available research, there are several studies on Myanmar migrants. In particular, a lot of research has been done on Myanmar migrant workers that live in Thailand, by examining their labour conditions and related human rights violations. Moreover, the topics of internally displaced persons and displaced persons on the Thai-Myanmar border have been analyzed since the mid 80s by organizations such as TBBC and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, there is no study that examines the reasons and the decision making process by which internally displaced persons, who were already forced to leave their homes, decide to stay in Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand. This research therefore aims to understand why some forced migrants decide to stay in Myanmar and became an IDP and why others decide or are forced to cross the border to Thailand.



Figure 1: Camp locations along the Thai-Myanmar border. Source: TBBC

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study examined the decision making process of displaced persons for crossing the border. It especially focused on the case study of displaced persons living along the Thai-Myanmar border in the Karen state in Myanmar and in the Mae Sot region in the Tak province of Thailand. Moreover, it investigated the extent to which society, community, family and personal factors influence those decisions. It analyzed if these decisions were constrained or if the displaced persons had the agency and thus the opportunity to choose by themselves whether to stay in Myanmar or to migrate to Thailand. Regarding the displaced persons living in temporary camps on the Thai side, this research analyzed the IDPs' level of awareness, prior to crossing the border, regarding life circumstances in Thailand.

In order to analyze the different statuses of IDPs and displaced persons in Thailand, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as the countries' migration laws and policies, were examined.

An analysis of the conflict and violence factors in Myanmar played an important part in this research since the displaced persons that were surveyed for this study have been forced to displace by armed conflicts, and therefore by violence, thus having to leave their homes and start a new life.

In the last few years, and in the context of the 2010 and 2012 elections, the political situation in Myanmar has been undergoing different changes, especially after the recent ceasefire agreements. Therefore, this research also took the current time frame into account and focused on how the decisions of displaced persons would change if the situation in Myanmar continues changing and improving. For this aspect, Myanmar displaced persons living in the Mae La temporary shelter along the Thai-Myanmar and in the Mae Sot area were interviewed.

1.2 Terminology

This section will clarify the terms and definitions for this particular research, in order to maintain conceptual harmony throughout the thesis.

1.2.1 *Myanmar/Burma*

Since 1989 the military regime changed the name of the country from the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar. However, many citizens and especially members of the democratic opposition still use the name Burma to show resistance against the government. On one hand, in many western countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom, the name Burma is still the official name, since those governments do not recognize the change of the name by the military junta (Brees, 2008, p. 5). On the other hand, the United Nations and other international organizations use the country name of Myanmar. Other regions of the world such as the European Union as well as various organizations use both names, Burma and Myanmar (BBC News, 2007). Although both names can be used correctly, since the name of the Union of Myanmar is the current official name of the country, the country name Myanmar as well as the terms Myanmar people or persons will be used for this thesis (Steinberg, 2010, pp. xx-xxi).

1.2.2 *Constraint and Agency*

The terms constraint and agency are relevant for this study since they might influence the displaced persons while making the decisions whether to stay in Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand. To understand people's decisions, it is important to examine these terminologies.

According to Clark (2006, p. 207), "there are always constraints which limit available options and hence affect decision-making. Instead of attempting to 'measure' rationality and intentionality, my analytic focus is the dynamic interplay of agency, power and structure in *all* decision-making processes." Many persons face diverse structural constraints, for example by being part of a society or community, where there is an organized hierarchy of power led by the headman or leader of the community, who decides for the whole society or community so that their own decision making is constrained. Thus, some society or community members, in many

cases women and young people, often do not have the power to break up the hierarchy and decide by themselves and are hence forced to accept the decisions made by the headman or community leader. As such, factors as sex, age, ethnicity and class are often linked to constrain decision making (Clark, 2006, pp. 160-161).

The term agency is in contrast to constraint, it refers to one's own power or own capacity to choose when making decisions. According to Long (2001, p.16), "the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion." This describes agency as the capability that each person has when deciding on his/her way of life. Moreover, "agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity" (Kabeer, 2001, p. 21 as cited in Clark, 2006, p. 34). This means that if people have agency then they can make their own decisions and have power over their own actions.

For this study, the terms constraint and agency are linked to the decision making process of displaced persons. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the choices are often constrained by different groups or persons. In the case of Myanmar, decisions of displaced persons for crossing or not crossing the border to Thailand can be constrained either by the military army, Karen National Union (KNU) or by the whole community and community headman. This means that the decisions of the IDPs are influenced and limited or even forced by one of those groups or persons.

On the other hand, decisions under the characteristics of agency mean that the displaced persons are able or have the possibility to choose whether to stay in Myanmar as an internally displaced person or to cross the border and become a displaced person in a temporary shelter in Thailand. Nevertheless, taking action and making those decisions, by constraint or agency, is related to different factors such as geographical proximity and networks between family or community members. These factors were examined in this research in order to find out if the displaced persons' decisions were influenced more by constraint or more by agency.

1.2.3 *Internally Displaced Persons, Refugees and Migrant Workers*

For the case of Myanmar there are three types of displacement which describe the phenomenon of internal displacement and the causes for this process.

The first type is called the “armed conflict-induced displacement.” This kind of displacement refers to the direct consequence of fighting and forced relocation, as well as the effects of armed conflicts by diverse armed groups that have directly restricted access to human and food security. This type of displacement is also related to severe human rights abuses across the country (COHRE, 2007, pp. 29-30). Thereby this category is the most relevant one for this research.

The second type is the “military occupation - and ‘development’- induced (state-society conflict induced) displacement.” This type is mainly caused by post-armed conflict and by land confiscation by the different armed groups, and can also occur in the context of natural resource extraction. Other reasons for displacement are infrastructure construction or development projects (e.g. roads, bridges, airports). Although the displacement movements for this type can be characterized or seen by the use of force, it is different from the first type since the main reason for moving is not an effect of the armed conflicts (COHRE, 2007, pp. 29-30). Thus, this type should not include both forms of displacement because their causes are very much different. This is the reason why for this study only the first part, military occupation induced displacement, will be used, since it relates to forced displacement by armed conflicts.

The third and last type is the “livelihoods vulnerability-induced displacement”, which is the primary form of internal and external migration in and from Myanmar. For this type the principal reasons are “inappropriate government policies and practices, limited availability of productive land, and poor access to markets, resulting in food insecurity; lack of education and health services; plus stresses associated with transition to a cash economy” (COHRE, 2007, pp. 29-30). This last type of displacement will be not included in this research since it is not directly produced by armed conflicts. Moreover, the explanation of this type of displacement is not comprehensive given that the reasons such as unsuitable government policies or the lack of education, health services and access to markets affect almost all citizens in the country and not only IDPs.

As mentioned in the introduction to the problem, according to UNHCR (2011) refugees are persons who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, being members of a particular social group or having a particular political opinion, find themselves outside the country of their nationality and who are unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection awarded by their countries of origin.” For this study, Myanmar citizens that cross the border to Thailand looking for protection could be considered as refugees, especially by the international community, which is the reason why many international organizations working in this field use the term refugee for their reports. However, they are not completely recognized as refugees by the Royal Thai Government (RTG), since the RTG has not approved the 1951 Refugee Convention. Although the Thai government agreed to not return those persons looking for protection, which means that in some way they are supporting forced migrants, for this study the term refugee will be avoided in order to not create any misunderstanding (TBBC, 2012a, p. 9). The term displaced persons will be used when referring to Myanmar forced migrants living in Thailand in temporary shelters.

Another Myanmar migrant population group that has moved to Thailand is the migrant workers. This group has grown rapidly in the last few decades and according to TBBC (2012a, p. viii) there are currently at least 2,000,000 Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand. There is some research mentioning that many of the Myanmar migrant workers migrated to Thailand because of the same circumstances as the displaced persons living in the temporary shelters (TBBC, 2012b, p.09). However, this might be not the case for all migrant workers - economic factors could play a key role in migrating to Thailand and the factors of armed conflicts and violence may no longer stand in the foreground (TBBC, 2012a, p. 9). Nonetheless, they still are an important population group that has to be considered in the conceptual framework, taking into account that becoming a migrant worker can be the result of the decisions made by internally displaced persons before crossing the border.

1.2.4 Refugee/IDP camps and temporary shelters

Since there is no specific structure or characterization that describes the camps, refugee or IDP camps do not have a clear definition. Nevertheless, they both serve as temporary housing or settlements in order to protect vulnerable population, which

were forced to leave their homes because of different situations. Those camps are enclosed areas, restricted mainly for the target population - refugees or IDPs - and for the persons and organizations that are assisting them. Many camps are constructed in emergency circumstances and are therefore planned only as temporary (Cutts, 2000, p. 108). The big difference between refugee and IDP camps is related to the definition of both forced migrant groups. Refugee camps are humanitarian settlements that protect people that have crossed the border to another country in search of international protection. Thus the camps are located in a host country. IDP camps, on the other hand, are camps inside the country of origin of the forced migrants, given that the internally displaced population remains within the border of the home country (Cutts, 2000, pp. 108-109).

For the case of the ten camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, the terminology is quite complicated, especially after 2005, because the host government, Thailand, does not recognize the forced migrants as refugees, as they have not yet ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. Therefore the usage of the term refugee camps can be seen as incorrect. However, these camps cannot be called IDP camps since they are located outside Myanmar, which causes misunderstanding when regarding these camps. This is the reason why many international organizations working with the displaced population in Thailand still use the term refugee camps since that is the customary international term. Nonetheless, for this research, when analysing and describing the camps in Thailand, the term temporary shelters will be used, in order not to misinterpret definitions. This is also the official terminology according to the RTG.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is separated into five different segments. On page 14 the conceptual framework is displayed in figure 2 as a graphic.

The first section has the target population of Myanmar forced migrants that were forced to leave their homes either by armed conflict and or military occupation. Taking into account the different types of displacement explained above, the former group are forced migrants induced by armed conflict, citizens forced to leave because of armed conflict and severe human rights abuses. The latter group are forced migrants induced by military occupation - and 'development'- induced displacement,

who became victims of post-armed conflict and land confiscation by different armed groups such as the military or KNU (COHRE, 2007, pp. 29-30). The displaced persons that were forced to move by development induced displacement are not part of the target population in this research. These two categories of displaced persons correspond to the first and second types of displacement in Myanmar, which were detailed in section 1.2.3.

The second segment of the conceptual framework, which is also the largest one, is characterized by the factors which will influence and later lead to the IDPs decision making process. Those factors are divided in three groups: the policy and guideline factors, the levels of choice and the conflict and violence factors. The policy and guideline factors are compiled by national Myanmar's and Thailand's migration policies as well as by international guidelines such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Within the levels of choice, the institutional, societal, community, family and personal factors are the key elements. The institutional factors describe the role of the Myanmar government, military army and other armed groups such as the KNU. The societal factors correspond to the ethnic group, in this case mainly the Karen ethnic group as well as the religion of the population. The community factors are related to hierarchy and compilation of the communities, since various communities have a community leader or a headman that is in charge and therefore takes the responsibility for making the decisions. Therefore the rank in the community of the affected persons plays here an important role. The family factors address especially the networks between displaced persons and their family members or other contacts such as friends. The networks are considered a relevant factor since they transfer the information knowledge between displaced persons. The last factor in this segment is the personal factor, which is formed by the sex, age, status (single, married, etc.) of the displaced persons as well as the person's human capital.

The conflict and violence factors are divided by the magnitude, the frequency and the geographical location. Magnitude refers to greatness of the conflict or violence, such as how many persons or villages were affected and to what extent. Frequency is linked to the timeframe in which the events occurred as well as how often those

incidents happened. Lastly, the geographical location refers to the distance or proximity from the affected villages or persons to the Thai-Myanmar border.

The next section of the framework is the influence of constraint and agency before and during the decision making process. This is an analysis of the factors that impact the decision; however, it is connected to other different factors, since in the other categories each actor (institutional, society, etc.) or instrument (policies) can contribute to whether the decisions are constrained or are a free choice. This is the reason why this influence has its own section and is not located in the same section as the other three factors, but located more closely to the decisions in the framework (see figure 2, page 14).

The decision segment is a result of the different factors, in some cases a combination of several factors together, and the constraint or agency influence. Based on the examination of the various factors and the influence, this study aims at obtaining the reasons why the displaced citizens decided the way they did, which will lead to the last section of the framework.

The last section is related to the results of the decisions made by the displaced population. There are three different status choices for the target population. The first possibility is to stay in Myanmar and thus have the status of an internally displaced person. The second and third options are consequences of having decided to cross the border to Thailand. One is to be a displaced person living in a temporary shelter in Thailand and the other is to become a migrant worker outside those temporary shelters (see figure 2, page 14).

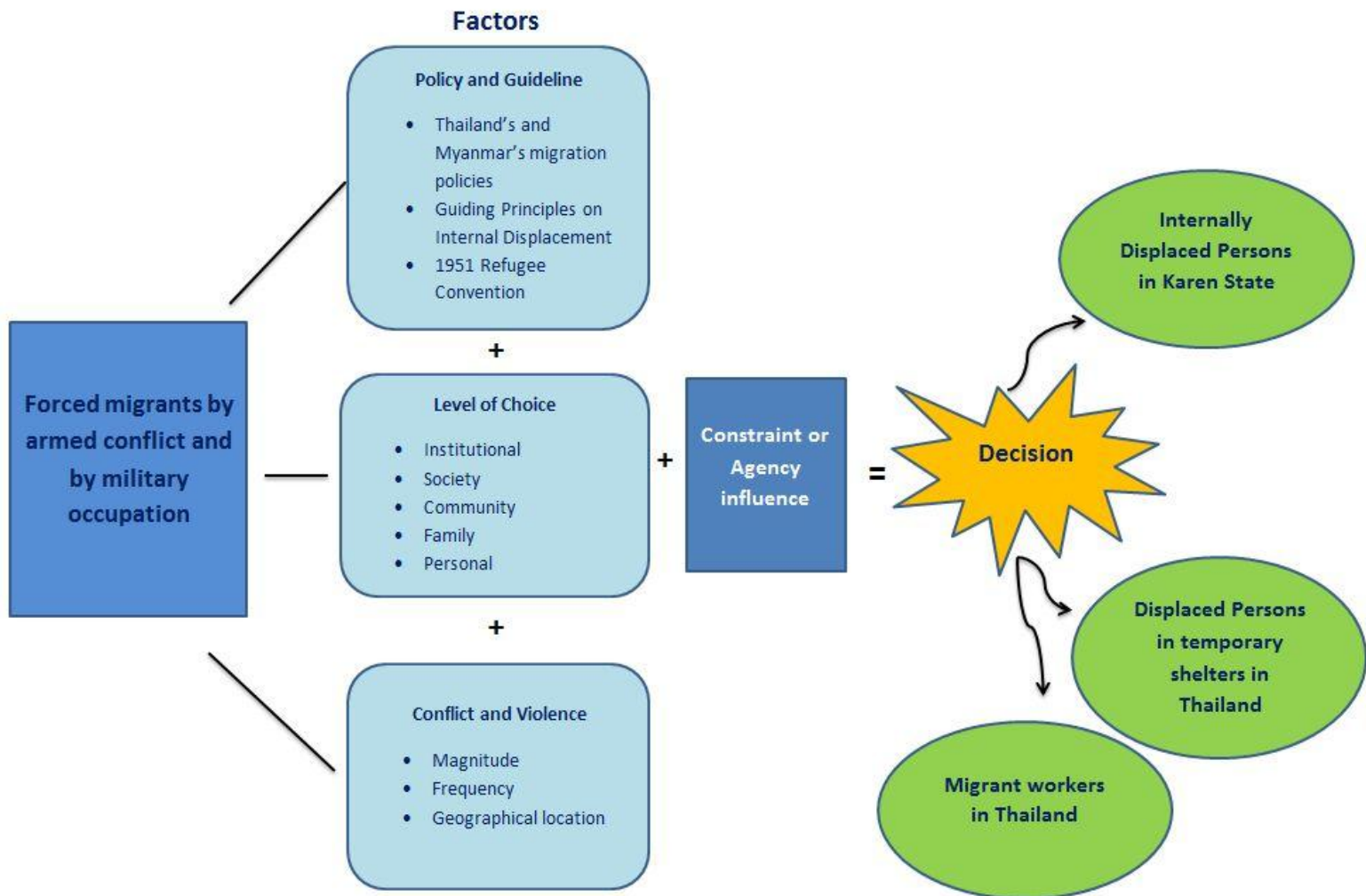


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

1.4 Research Question

This study was analyzed under the following structured research question and sub-questions.

What factors contribute to the decisions of displaced persons to stay inside Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand and in how far are the resultant decisions influenced by constraint or by agency?

1.4.1 Sub-questions

- Which are the main reasons and causes that led to the displacement?
- Are the institutional, society and community levels of choice influenced more by constraint than the family and personal levels? If so, which level has the biggest influence?
- When the decision has been made regarding crossing the border, how much information and awareness (through networks or other institutions) is available on circumstances in Thailand?
- Which are the characteristics of the displaced persons that decide to become a migrant worker and not to go to find protection in a temporary shelter in Thailand?
- How will the decisions of crossing the border to Thailand change, if the situation in Myanmar continues transforming and even improves?

1.5 Research Objectives

This study has three main objectives, which are part of the entire research. The objectives were examined through different methodological approaches.

- To examine the factors that contribute to the decision of forced migrants either to become internally displaced persons in Myanmar or displaced persons living in temporary shelters in Thailand
- To analyze the reasons and causes that led to forced migration in this context
- To appraise the current ongoing changes that have an impact on the decision making process of displaced persons to cross the border

1.6 Hypothesis

The migration decisions in some particular contexts are often constrained by others, and therefore many displaced persons do not have the ability to make their own independent decisions. Thus, the hypothesis of this research is that the Myanmar displaced persons' decisions to cross the border to Thailand or to stay in Myanmar are largely formed by political or institutional influences or actions (by the Myanmar army or KNU) rather than by family or individual choices and agency. As a result, those influences will be the main factors and causes that led to the forced displacement inside Myanmar or to crossing the border to Thailand. Through the facts in interviews and its analysis, this hypothesis will be proved or disproved in chapter V.

1.7 Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study was mainly divided in three categories. All categories were based on qualitative research and are connected to the three research objectives. It included both field research and documentary research.

1.7.1 Measuring the factors that contribute to the decisions

In order to respond to the first research objective, the first data collection method consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants. The key-informant or expert interviews had the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding on the issues of Myanmar displaced persons either in Myanmar or in Thailand. The researcher aimed to find out the factors that contribute to the decisions of staying in Myanmar or crossing the border to Thailand.

For this kind of semi-structured interviews different representatives of international organizations such as the International Rescue Committee for Thailand (IRC) and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and others were interviewed. Furthermore, diverse INGOs and NGOs such as Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), The Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), the Back Pack Worker Team, Burma Issues and a few others were also interviewed. In order to have diverse points of view for this qualitative research and to obtain sufficient data to respond to the first objective, the semi-structured interviews with key informants were likewise held both in Thailand

and in Myanmar. In total the researcher was able to conduct 23 key-informants interviews (see Appendix A) during the field research period. Some of the key informants and organizations interviewed in Yangon wanted to maintain anonymity, since mentioning the name of the organization could compromise the ability of these persons and their organizations to work effectively, which is why the researcher did not provide the real name of said organizations.

1.7.2 Measuring the reasons and causes that led to displacement

The second method involved conducting in-depth interviews with the target population that lives along the border and in the Mae Sot area. This method had the main purpose of gathering answers that are connected with the analysis of the second research objective.

The researcher undertook 11 interviews with different displaced persons inside the Mae La temporary shelter, including men, women, teenagers (older than 12 years) and elderly persons. The amount of time that people have been living in the temporary shelter, including whether the displaced persons have been living for a short (newcomers – after 2005) or long period of time in the temporary shelter, was considered.

Moreover, three displaced students that are studying in a migrant school on the border were interviewed as well. Furthermore, four migrant workers that are living in Mae Sot were also interviewed. This was relevant because the researcher aimed to find out why those people decided to become a migrant worker and why they are living outside the temporary shelters. In addition, the researcher had the opportunity to spend one day at the Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot, where 11 patients were interviewed for the study. This means that in total 29 in-depth interviews with the target population were held for this thesis.

1.7.3 Measuring the impact of the current changes in Myanmar

To understand and measure the current changes in Myanmar, that will have an impact in the future on the decision making process of displaced persons to cross the border, both semi-structured and in-depth interviews were considered. In particular, by asking the displaced persons living in temporary shelters and the migrant workers in Mae

Sot, the researcher sought to find out if these people are considering the possibility of a return to Myanmar if the situation continues improving.

In addition, a bibliographical analysis of varied secondary resources such as books, journals, textbooks, newspaper articles, theses and reports, among other sources, were included for this research. This method provides all the theoretical and academic background relevant for the study and for each objective. Likewise, actual reports and up to date articles delivered facts especially when considering the current political transformation in Myanmar. Observations during the field research in the Mae La temporary shelter in the Mae Sot area were also considered as part of the methodology.

1.8 Research Scope and Limitations

The research area of this study was the Thai-Myanmar border (see figure 1, page 5). However, since the security circumstances on the Myanmar border side are not secure enough, all interviews with the displaced persons were conducted on the Thai side of the border. This is why the research area can be considered as one significant limitation for this study. The displaced persons that partook in in-depth interviews live in the Mae La temporary shelter, close to the town Mae Sot, which is located in the Tak province in the northwest part of Thailand. Therefore, this research may not be a representative study since the results of the decision making process cannot represent all the Myanmar displaced population. However, the researcher was able to interview key informants inside Myanmar, who are experts and work closely in the field of displacement.

All interviews with the displaced persons inside Mae La took place in Zone B of the shelter. The interviewees were randomly chosen, however the sex and age of the persons as well as the year of arrival in the shelter were considered in order to have a variety of interviews and answers.

Moreover, the semi-structured key-informant interviews were undertaken in different cities. In Thailand, some organizations were interviewed in Bangkok, in Chiang Mai, and in the Mae Sot area. In Myanmar the researcher was only able to interview

organizations and experts in this field in Yangon due to the security problems in other parts of the country.

This study was in general based on qualitative field research. Since the available time for the entire research was also limited, the findings are hence bound to the time frame. The researcher started in April and May with some key-informant interviews; however, the main part of the field research was conducted in June and in the first weeks of July 2012.

Last but not least, the language(s) were also seen as a limitation of this research. For the interviews in the field area, almost three different languages (Karen, Burmese and Thai) had to be considered. This is the reason why for the field research a translator was needed. Through the translation from English into another language (Karen or Burmese), there is a possibility that information was lost in translation or was misunderstood, which must be taken into account.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The issues of migration, in this case of internal displacement, are considered as development issues. There exist many different books, journals and papers on the issue of Myanmar migrants in Thailand. Many of them are focused especially on the Myanmar migrant workers. However, there is less data and information on the issue of internal displacement in Myanmar and on the displaced population living in temporary shelters along the Thai-Myanmar border. In particular, the aspect of why some displaced persons decided to stay in Myanmar and become an IDP although they still are at risk, and others, in comparison, crossed the border to be in Thailand even though they would not be recognized as a refugee, has not been researched and analysed yet, according to presently available information. Moreover, the factors of the current transformation in Myanmar will be included with the purpose of finding out how much the issues of displacement could change in the future years. By determining how much those circumstances could change, this research will be useful for preparing and developing new strategies regarding the protection and assistance for the displaced population either in Myanmar or in Thailand. Overall, the findings of this Master's thesis hope to contribute to providing more knowledge on the subject

and answering some of the apparent information and awareness needs. The findings should thus be useful for further academic studies and for organizations' research related to this matter.

1.10 Ethical Issues

This study has certain ethical issues, since the target group of Myanmar displaced persons is considered a vulnerable group. The displaced population has undertaken and suffered under circumstances of violence and well-founded fear.

Therefore the researcher clarified the objectives and purposes of this research before the interviews, in order to not create misinterpretations and further concerns of abusing the gained data and information. For the security of the displaced persons and of the key informants, the conducted interviews are described anonymously and the names of the interviewees are omitted.

The collected information from the interviews with the displaced population as well as with international organizations and NGOs, which was utilized for this study, has only been used with the authorization of the interviewed people or organizations.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a review of different existing data on this topic, which is relevant for the entire research. It is divided into seven parts, including a short overview of Myanmar's historical and political situation, the typologies of displacement, international protection for the IDPs and the displaced population in Myanmar. Moreover, the Thai-Myanmar border, the Myanmar Government and its policies regarding displacement, as well as the RTG and its policies regarding displacement were also considered in this thesis and thus are part of this literature review.

2.1 Myanmar

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is the largest of the mainland Southeast Asian countries and has an estimated population of around 48 million people (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011). The country is divided into seven states (Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan) and seven regions or provinces (Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagain, Tanintharyi and Yangon) (see figure 3, page 22) (Steinberg, 2010). There are numerous ethnic groups. Official numbers define 135 ethnic minorities who are also called "races", and also more than 100 indigenous languages that correspond to seven main nationalities (Bhamar, Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Mon, Shan, and Yakhine) (Phoebe, 2007, pp. 1-2).

After independence from Britain in 1948, Myanmar has been affected by civil wars and armed conflicts. Myanmar has faced diverse internal crises since a few decades ago. These different crises are the main cause of the displacement phenomenon. The most relevant crisis regarding the displacement situation are the crisis of minorities, the crisis of governance, the crisis of fear that permeates society and last but not least the socioeconomic crisis, which always is somehow involved (Steinberg, 2010, pp. 11-14).

Since 1962, after a military coup and the political takeover by General Ne Win, the ethnic minorities have been more isolated and oppressed by the government. This is the main reason for the existence of armed conflicts in the country. Even though some ethnic groups agreed with the transformation and reforms of the government and signed ceasefire agreements, many other groups continued to fight against the government. In 2012 only three significant armed groups were still fighting, The Karen National Union, The Karenni National Progressive Party and the Shan State Army-South, until they finally signed ceasefire agreements with the government. Nevertheless, although some areas are supposed to be conflict free zones, fighting continues and still forces many people to move and leave their homes (Maung & Sullivan, 2004, p. 80; Phoebe, 2007, pp. 1-2).



Figure 3: Myanmar Political Map.
Source: Maps-Asia

2.2 Typologies of displacement

Migration is, after the birth and death rates, the third factor which influences population growth significantly. According to Flanagan (2002) “even though migration contributes a little less than half to the growing numbers in most regions, the characteristics of the migrant population cause it to have an especially significant impact in urban growth.” The migration in this case represents a type of mobility, which can be done individually or in groups, which move in space, in this case, from one area to another. When a spatial movement ends by becoming a permanent change of residence, then it is a permanent migration (Gans, 2007, p. 788). In this case, the spatial dimension of migration plays an important role. There is a difference between external migration (international migration) and internal migration (internal displacement) (Bähr, 2004, p. 248).

In general, the number of internal migrants in almost all countries is significantly higher than the number of international migrants (Kermer, 2007, p. 147). Displacement is a kind of internal migration, and in this case the spatial mobility happens within a country. However, this kind of mobility can be categorized as being mainly forced, involuntary mobility, which is also known as forced migration. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the main reasons for such forced migration are armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights and natural or human-made disasters (OCHA, 1999, p. 5).

In addition to the three types of displacement for the case of Myanmar, according to Kunz (1996, p. 75), there are three main international types of displacement. The first category is "Displacement by Flight", which is when the internal migrants flee either individually or in groups or in mass in order to escape a certain situation. This type of displacement is primarily caused by sudden events such as natural disasters, which often lead to critical situations with immediate distress or shock. The second category is "Displacement by Force", which is characterized primarily by the presence of violence or coercion. Internal political power struggles, civil wars and armed conflicts of any kind are all examples of displacement under this definition.

The third category, categorized by Kunz, is "Displacement by Absence". This occurs when people leave their homes under "normal" or peaceful circumstances, because they suffer from issues such as insufficient economic opportunities or poor medical services (Kunz, 1996, p. 75). For this case another typology also plays an important role according to Robinson (2002, p. 2). Robinson talks about forced resettlement, in which the forced resettlers have migrated mainly from rural to urban areas, in the context of globalization and development projects. Development projects, which allegedly try to improve the infrastructure of some regions, such as the construction of new dams and roads, are sometimes the reason why many people are forced to resettle. Worldwide, in the past several decades, there were about 100 million people who could be described as forced resettlers.

Especially in the case of Myanmar, the numbers of forced resettlers are and will continue increasing in the coming years since many foreign countries are open to invest more in development projects in Myanmar. Although the forced resettlers are also dispersed internally, they are not among the target population for this research, since for them the economic aspects are in some cases at the forefront (Turton, 2000, p. 20; UNHCR, 1997, p. 107).

The second typology, "Displacement by Force", is relevant for this research, since the displacement in Myanmar is mainly caused by internal political conflicts between different armed groups that generate civil war conditions within the country. Those conflicts are the reason for the displacement movements and why many thousands of people have left their homes and migrated to other areas such as the Thai-Myanmar border areas.

2.3 International protection

Every state has the responsibility to protect their citizens and hence every person should be protected under international human rights laws. However, when one State is not able or unwilling to do so, the international community has to step in in order to ensure safety (Moolma, 2011, p. 17). There are two main instruments that are important for the protection of the displaced population in Myanmar and in Thailand. Although Thailand has not yet ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of

Refugees, this first instrument as an international treaty, assists the international community, such as international organizations and NGOs focused on the issues of international migration. The second instrument is the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which focus only on national migration and the IDPs involved.

2.3.1 The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

As mentioned above, refugees are persons who have “a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership or a particular social group, or political opinion” according to the United Nations’ definition (Stalker, 2008, p. 12). Typically, refugees are also forced migrants like the internally displaced persons, but since they migrate outside their country, they receive the protection of the country of asylum as well as the protection of the international community.

In 1990, when the numbers of refugees started growing in many regions of the world, the term refugee was substituted more and more by the term of ‘asylum seekers’, since many countries decided only to use the refugee term when those persons’ claims were definitively accepted (Stalker, 2008, p. 12). This created new restrictions for the vulnerable population in need, since they did not get any assistance until they were officially accepted as refugees. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is the only international legal instrument that covers the most relevant aspects of a refugee’s life. It includes articles such as Article 33, which describes the principle of non-refoulement (UNHCR, 2011, pp. 2-4).

The 1951 Refugee Convention is still very useful after more than 60 years since its inception, and though many other legal documents are based on it, there are also some points of criticism regarding the convention. One argument is that the Convention was established a long time ago with the influence of the post war period of the Second World War. Thus, the refugee definition was adjusted to that period of time and was mostly oriented to the refugees from different European countries (Haddad, 2008, pp. 30-32). Moreover, the convention excludes persons that do not meet the criteria of the refugee status and does not consider them to deserve those rights, which is partially against the concept of the Human Rights (UNHCR 2011, p. 2).

Furthermore, the so-called “refugee label” often makes it difficult to find an adequate legal definition for the refugee term. Lammers (as cited in Haddad, 2008, p. 34) argues that “far too often the label of ‘refugee’ artificially constructs and degrades people into one-dimensional, homogeneous category [yet] except for their common experience of having felt forced to migrate, they are an extremely heterogeneous category of people.”

Although some criticisms exist against it, the convention is a very significant tool that can protect and assist the refugee population after having migrated to another country. For this study, however, the Convention cannot be completely used, since Thailand has not yet ratified it. This is the reason why following the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement can be seen as more relevant for the case of the Myanmar displaced persons.

2.3.2 The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Internally displaced persons, as human beings, are always protected under human rights laws, which according to Mooney (2003, p. 161) “recognize and protect the attributes of human dignity inherent to all individuals.” The respective governments should therefore take responsibility for protecting the human rights of IDPs. If the corresponding government is unwilling or unable to provide the required protection for their citizens in need, then the international community must take responsibility to protect those persons (Weiss & Korn, 2006, p. 1-3).

To respond to a generalized need among countries of knowing how to best deal with the situation of displacement, the United Nations Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, Francis M. Deng, introduced in 1998 the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (OCHA, 1999, p. 1). The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement provide the affected people with not only protection and encouragement of their rights during their displacement, but they also are valid in the case of a return or resettlement of the IDPs (OCHA, 2001, p.1). Because they are forced to leave their homes, the internally displaced persons almost always have different difficulties after their displacement such as a loss of income, non-existent or inadequate shelter and threats to their security. For example, the lack of a sustainable livelihood is a particularly critical obstacle for IDPs, and this is the

main reason why they remain significantly poorer than the non-displaced population (IDMC, 2011a, p.74).

The Guiding Principles should furthermore increase international attention and awareness about the needs and the protection of internally displaced persons. In total, there are 30 principles which are not legally binding, but they are similar to and partially based on international human rights laws, humanitarian laws as well as the refugee laws. Governments, non-state actors such as international organizations and NGOs that assist IDPs should therefore make use of these principles while supporting and protecting the living conditions of IDPs (OCHA, 1999, p. i).

2.4 The displaced population in Myanmar

The internally displaced persons in Myanmar are from different states and provinces. However, the southern and eastern region of the country, mainly the Shan, Karenni (Kayah), Karen (Kayin), Mon and Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) states/ regions are the most affected regarding the phenomenon of displacement.

As mentioned above Myanmar is divided into more than 135 ethnic groups and many of the members of ethnic minorities are victims of armed conflicts. Many villages have been completely burned by the ongoing fighting, leaving whole communities homeless and without any personal belongings. In Myanmar over 6,200 villages have been destroyed and burned since 1996 and more than 1,500 villages alone in the Karen State (TBBC, 2006, p. 108; TBBC, 2011).

Internally displaced persons are facing many difficulties within the country. They live under political oppression since many live in displaced camps without free movement options and most of them are without citizenship cards. In 1990, after the important and large demonstrations of 1988, the government reformed the nature of citizenship cards, leaving many people stateless, or even categorized as “disappeared” persons (Maung & Sullivan, 2004, pp. 80-85; Phoebe, 2007, pp. 1-2). Another difficulty is the lack of access to food, which causes more poverty for the IDPs. Many displaced persons were farmers before the displacement and had access to land and thus to agriculture (TBBC, 2011).

2.5 Thai - Myanmar Border

Thailand and Myanmar share 2,401 kilometers of border. The phenomenon of the cross-border migration between Myanmar and Thailand started in the 1960s. At that time there were only few cases of people crossing the border, particularly from the Shan state. Those migrants were allowed to stay in Thailand and received an official Thai identification card. In general, until the late 80s, Myanmar migrants were accepted by the Royal Thai Government and were recognized by Thai policy. Those migrants had the permission to stay temporarily in Thailand (Lang, 2002).

In the early 90s, realizing that the conflicts in Myanmar were increasing, and the amount of migrants was also rising, the Royal Thai Government started to implement new policies with bigger restrictions. With these new restrictions, more arrests and deportations began and even “old” immigrants, that were living in Thailand since the 60s, were seen as irregular migrants without documents and, therefore, without rights to stay legally in the country (Grundy-Warr, 2004, pp. 243-244).

2.5.1 Mae La temporary shelter and Mae Sot region

The case study of the Thai-Myanmar border along the Karen/Kayin State in Myanmar was chosen given that this side of the border had, in 2010 and 2011, the highest concentration rates of displaced persons. Moreover, approximately 30% of the rural Karen population is displaced and, since 1996, over 1,500 villages have been destroyed and burned (TBBC, 2006, p. 108; TBBC, 2011). Although since the beginning of 2012 the government has negotiated with all border armed groups and established ceasefire agreements with them, some human rights abuses such as restrictions on movements, land confiscation, forced labour and extortion continue in this area (TBBC, 2012a, p. 11; TBBC 2011, p. 49). Because of the high number of displaced persons in this area, the side of Thailand that borders with the Karen State is highly affected by the cross border migration of those displaced persons looking to obtain more protection and assistance. Because of this, six of the ten temporary shelters in Thailand are situated bordering the Karen State.

In Tak province, and specifically in the Mae Sot region, there are three temporary shelters: Mae La, Umpiem Mai and Nu Po. The total figures of displaced persons

living in those three shelters were around 82,400 persons at the end of June 2012 (see Appendix A) (TBBC, 2012d). This amounts to more than the half of the total of displaced persons living in the ten temporary shelters in Thailand.

The Mae La shelter is especially relevant for this study since the interviews with the displaced population occurred in that shelter. This temporary shelter was established in 1984 and it is only eight kilometers from the Thai-Myanmar border and around 57 kilometers by car from Mae Sot (TBBC, 2008) (see figure 1, page 5).

At the beginning, Mae La was a small shelter and had a population of approximately 1,100 people. There were six similar small shelters along the border that were close to each other, which made it difficult for the Thai authorities to control and to protect the displaced persons. These circumstances made it easy for the Myanmar military soldiers to get access to some shelters and to “kidnap the refugee’s leaders” and to burn some parts of the shelters (Mae La Temporary Shelter Authorities, p. 2). After several attacks from the other side of the border by the military army in 1995, and in order to prevent future attacks, the Security Department and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) decided to combine the six shelters that were located close to each other in the area where Mae La is located today, creating the present shelter (Till, 2011, p. 27; Mae La Temporary Shelter Authorities, p. 2).

Today, Mae La is the biggest of the ten temporary shelters along the border and has a size of 184 hectares (TBBC, 2008) (see pictures of the Mae La temporary shelter in Appendix F). The shelter is divided into three zones: zone A, B and C, and it is also sub-divided into sections A1-A5, B1-B5, C1A, C1B, and C2 to C5 (see figure 4, page 30) (Moolma, 2011, p. 44). According to TBBC (2012d) in June 2012, 48,861 displaced persons were living in the Mae La shelter, which is more than 50% of the entire displaced population in that area, and around one third of the entire displaced population living along the border in temporary shelters.

Almost all of the displaced persons living in Mae La, around 83.9%, are from the Karen State in Myanmar and hence are of Karen ethnicity. Only 2.87% of the population is Burmese and the last 13.23% is a combination of other ethnic groups such as Chin, Kachin, Mon, etc. (TBBC, 2012c). According to recent data from TBBC (2012c), around 51% of the population is Buddhist, followed by 36% who are

Christian, almost 13% who are Muslim and lastly 2% who are Animist or have other religions.

Looking at gender characteristics in Mae La, 49.7% of the displaced persons are female and 50.3% are male. The breakdown by age shows that 54.7% of the population are older than 18 years old, 34% are between 5 and 18 years old, 10.9% are under 5 years old but older than 6 months and 0.4% are newborn to 6 months old (TBBC, 2012c). This indicates that the population in Mae La is a relatively young population, which is not unusual for populations living in temporary shelters.

This shelter acquires even more importance taking into account that it has the highest numbers of resettlements to a third country. In 2011, more than 2000 Myanmar displaced persons living in Mae La were sent to countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States in order to obtain the full protection that a refugee is entitled to, since there is an absence of that protection and of rule of law (TBBC, 2012a, p. 8). The possibility of resettlement in a third country, as a durable and sustainable solution for the displaced persons, will be explained more in detail in chapter IV.

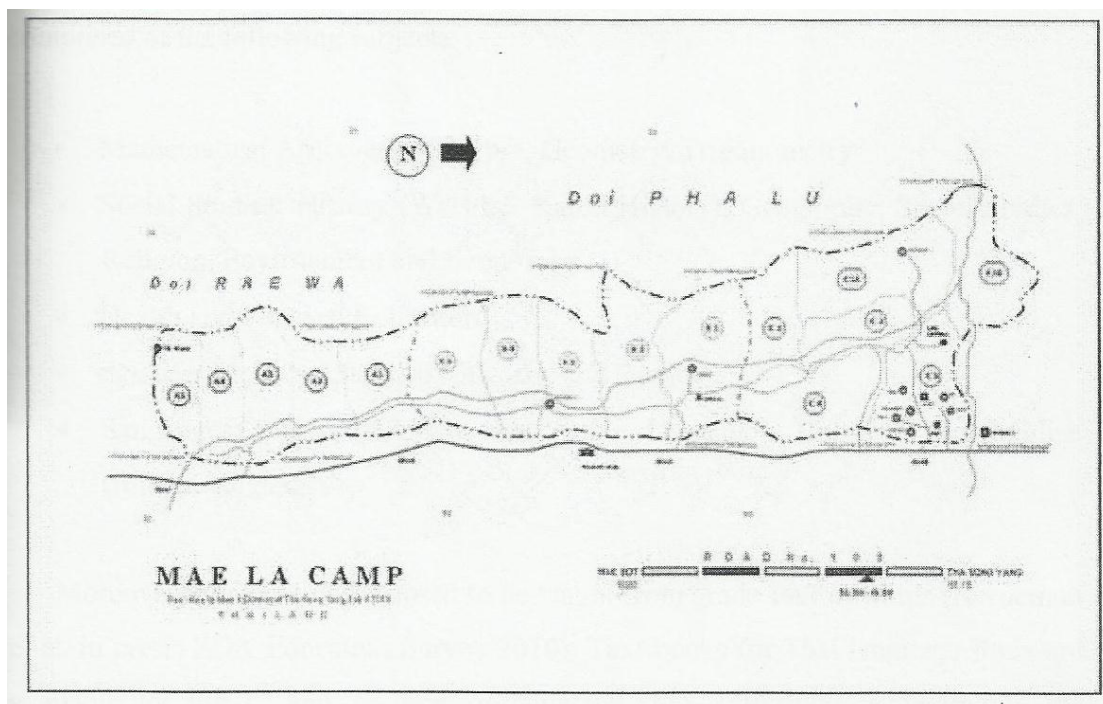


Figure 4: Map of Mae La temporary shelter. Source: Till, 2011, p. 28

2.6 The Myanmar Government and its policies regarding displacement

As mentioned above, the Myanmar government does not recognize IDPs¹ and therefore there is no support from their side in terms of providing protection or assistance to them. Even worse, for the former military regime, also called State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (today called Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)), displaced persons living in Thailand were seen as enemies of the Union of Myanmar and also as “armed insurgents or the families of armed insurgents” (Grundy-Warr, 2004, p. 247). Many of the migrants to Thailand are from a specific ethnic group but not, in all cases, fundamentally involved in the conflicts.

Nevertheless the government accuses them of being a “legal fold” that did not sign the ceasefire agreements with the regime and that therefore are against the USDP. They are also seen as suspicious helpers of the western world countries.

The Myanmar government believes that the temporary shelters on the border are used by armed groups and falsely displaced persons and they have even blamed the Thai government for “supporting” armed groups such as the Karen National Union (KNU) and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), since allegedly they would be able to stay in Thai territory while recovering and planning attacks against the government. Moreover, the Myanmar government believes that those temporary shelters were a political strategy of the Thai government to maintain pressure on the former military regime. They also presume that the Myanmar immigrants are being exploited as cheap labour workers and thus the Thai government is making profit off of them (Grundy-Warr, 2004, pp. 246- 248).

2.7 The Royal Thai Government and its policies regarding displacement

Thailand, as a middle income country and a democracy, has been a popular destination for migrants for many decades. Forced migrants from Myanmar as well as

¹ While there have been some discussions acknowledging the current displacement situation between the Myanmar government and the international community, there still has not been a change in the Myanmar legislature.

other Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam have migrated to Thailand with the hope of finding a better life and a more protected future. However, the RTG has not yet ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and therefore there are many limitations to treat and support displaced persons and asylum seekers. Nevertheless, many displaced persons do not have any other choice other than migrating to Thailand without permission, because of the situation of danger and risk in their home countries.

This is the main reason why there are ten temporary camps along the Myanmar-Thai border, although the RTG does not recognize them as refugees. With growing numbers of displaced persons, the Thai State has consequently invited and allowed support from UNHCR since 1988 in order to assist the displaced persons along the border. Nevertheless, only in 1997 did the RTG give UNHCR a real role to work on these issues. The RTG also stopped considering displaced persons in the temporary shelters as “illegal migrants” and started to recognize them under the new status of displaced persons (CCSDPT-UNHCR, 2011; Grundy-Warr, 2004, pp. 248-252). Nonetheless, the Thai immigration law continues seeing many migrants and hence displaced persons from Myanmar as irregular migrants and considers them as “people entering Thai territory illegally” (Huguet & Aphichat, 2011, p. 8). Therefore, the displaced persons living in the temporary shelters along the border can be also counted as irregular migrants, since they do not have any legal documents to enter the country.

However, since UNHCR recognizes them as displaced persons fleeing from fighting and conflicts, Article 17 of the Thai Immigration Act allows the displaced population to stay in Thailand under the immunity of the Act only as long as they stay in the temporary shelters. Thus, the displaced persons are safe from persecution and deportation by the Thai authorities, but only if they remain in the designated areas of the temporary shelters (Till, 2011, pp. 12-13). This means that those displaced persons living along the Thai-Myanmar border do not have the possibility of moving freely in Thailand and do not have to access to the “outside world” beyond the shelters.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will provide an overview on the research side of this investigation. As explained in the previous chapters, this research focused specifically on the areas of the Mae La temporary shelter and the Mae Sot town in the Tha Song Yang district, Tak province, in Thailand. Some of the research findings that were collected during the field research period will be described here. The findings will be divided in three main categories according to the three main research objectives. This includes the reasons and causes for displacement, the factors that contribute to the decision making process and the influence of the ongoing changes on the decision making process in the future.

3.1 The interviewed population in Mae La temporary shelter and in the Mae Sot region

Mae La temporary shelter is a sensitive place to do field research, since access to the shelter is limited and restricted by the Thai authorities. Therefore the researcher was not able to stay in the camps during the whole research period; taking into account that access to the shelter is only permitted during the day. Nevertheless, the researcher was able to visit the shelter for three full days, where 11 interviews with displaced persons inside the shelter were conducted, all in zone B². All interviewees came from the Karen State in Myanmar. Five of the eleven interviewees came to the shelter before the year 2005 and the remaining six arrived in Thailand after that year.

Persons interviewed in the Mae Sot region included three displaced students who are studying in a migrant school at the border. They all came to Thailand before 2005 and are also all from the Karen State. Additionally, four migrant workers that are living in Mae Sot were interviewed. All of them came from the Karen State as well, but all after 2005. Lastly, interviews were held with 11 patients of Mae Tao Clinic. The

² The answers given by the displaced persons cannot be generalized for the entire population in the temporary shelter, taking into account that all interviews were conducted in zone B.

majority of this last group came to Thailand specifically to find medical assistance in the clinic and therefore arrived only a few days prior to the interviews in Mae Sot. However, in the case of the patients, they came from all over Myanmar. Only four are from the Karen State, two are from the Mon State, two others from the Shan State, another from the Bago division, another from the Magwe division and one is from Yangon.

3.2 The reasons and causes for displacement

This sub-chapter will focus on the reasons and causes for the displacement movements inside Myanmar. The information obtained in both the in-depth interviews with the target population as well as the semi-structured interviews with the key informants will be used.

As mentioned already in the beginning of this thesis, according to OCHA the main reasons for forced migration and hence displacement are armed conflicts, violations of human rights, situations of generalized violence and natural or human-made disasters (OCHA, 1999, p. 5). For the specific case of Myanmar there are, additionally, three types of displacement: armed conflict-induced displacement, military occupation – and development-induced displacement and livelihoods vulnerability-induced displacement (COHRE, 2007, pp. 29-30). With the information gathered through the field research, the researcher was able to corroborate if the reasons stated by OCHA and other organizations can be verified for the case of displacement in Myanmar.

For the 23 key informants, the main reasons for the displacement issues in Myanmar were very similar to the reasons mentioned by different organizations.

1. The first and most important reason is the armed conflicts in the country (see figure 5, page 36). Some key informants pointed to these conflicts as being of an ethnic nature. Although there have been some changes since 2010, with the elections in November of that year and recent ceasefire agreements in 2012 between the government and almost all ethnic armed groups including the KNU, the conflicts in some parts of the country still continue (Human Rights Watch, 2012). According to Wade (2012) “ceasefire does not mean peace” which clearly expresses what is now

happening in Myanmar, since an important percentage of the population continue to suffer and are still forced to leave their villages, even though the ceasefire agreements were signed.

2. The second reason for displacement that was given by the key informants was human rights violations. This is obviously connected to the armed conflicts, taking into account that threats to security and livelihoods can be seen as human rights violations. Economic reasons³ were mentioned the same amount of times as human rights violations. Of course, many persons are forced to leave their homes because in their regions they cannot find a job or other opportunities and thus are not able to improve their lives; this line of thought, which could be categorized under the livelihoods vulnerability-induced displacement, is not relevant for this research, since it is not directly produced by armed conflicts. In this case, the affected persons probably have the agency to choose if they want to leave their home in order to find a job or not. In contrast, persons affected by the armed conflicts or by human rights abuses are forced to displacement as their only option to survive.

3. The third main cause of the displacement movements in Myanmar is the regime, particularly the government. Many persons are threatened by the government, since it “does not treat people equally in the country” (Key informant Nr.14, 27 June 2012, Yangon). According to key informant Nr. 7 (12 June 2012, Mae Sot) the government was trying to create “Burminisation”, which means to have only one nation, one culture, one religion and, thus, to exterminate the diversity of ethnic minorities. Moreover, key informant Nr. 10 stated that there is “a lack of political stability and mismanagement between the government and the ethnic groups.”

4. Another reason for displacement is the various development projects in the country, which are categorized under the type of development-induced displacement. This issue is gaining more and more importance since there are more investments entering Myanmar. Therefore, many people are concerned that this kind of displacement could increase the number of IDPs in the coming years. This issue will be examined in more detail in chapter IV, when analyzing the challenges for the future.

³ Economic reasons for displacement can often arise due to human rights violations

5. Forced relocation is an additional cause of displacement inside Myanmar. Forced relocation can have different backgrounds since this can arise by armed conflicts that have destroyed many villages, by development projects and even by the military government, which has confiscated the land of many IDPs in order to have the control and power in many regions.

6. Last but not least, there are many other reasons that forced people to displace and that were mentioned during the interviews, such as lack of food, lack of services, no citizen security, inequality and oppression by the military army. All these reasons are classified under “others” in figure 5.

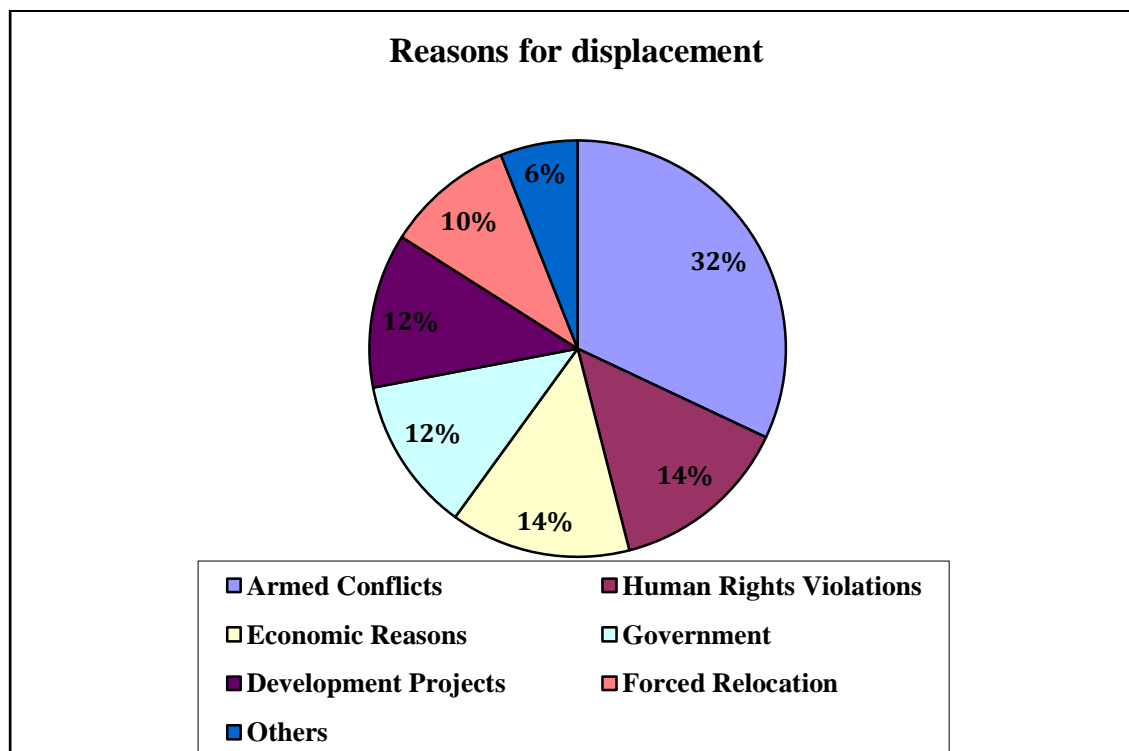


Figure 5: Reasons for displacement. Source: Key-informant interviews

When the displaced population in Mae La temporary shelter was asked why they decided to leave Myanmar, there were two reasons that were mentioned the most. The first one was to ensure their children’s education and future, and the second one was because of the lack of food in Myanmar. These two main reasons are quite different from the ones stated by the key informants. The lack of food and education inside Myanmar resulted in the people having to leave the country, while the armed

conflicts, the economic reasons and the human rights violations were not declared as a motive for the displacement by the interviewees. Of course, the lack of food and of education is connected or is even the result of the armed conflicts, human rights violations and the bad economic situation in their villages. However, those reasons were not explicitly mentioned by the interviewed displaced persons.

Further causes that forced these people to leave Myanmar were: to escape from the military oppression, that their villages were not safe enough, to escape from forced labour and fear of threat.

The target groups of migrant workers and the patients at the Mae Tao Clinic have other reasons for crossing the border to Thailand, since many of them are not affected by the armed conflicts and thus are not under the category of forced migrants or displaced persons. However, their reasons for and opinions about coming to Thailand are relevant for this thesis, in order to find out why other Myanmar migrant groups decided to cross the border. In the case of the four interviewed migrant workers, all came to Thailand only because of the economic situation in Myanmar. They all hope to find a better paid job in Thailand and hence to have an opportunity to work and save money. All 11 patients of the Mae Tao Clinic came essentially to find good medical care, since in Myanmar the medical care is very expensive and some interviewees also said that the quality of the medical service is “bad”. Three out of the eleven patients have already been living in Mae Sot for a few years, and have been working as migrant workers. In those cases, they also came to Thailand for economic reasons.

In general, there are diverse reasons and causes that led to displacement movements inside Myanmar. Of course, the armed conflicts are one of the main reasons and this is related to other causes, such as human rights violations, lack of food, forced relocation and military oppression, among others. All these factors are linked to each other and thus it is difficult to really declare the real cause. Moreover, the development projects and the economic reasons, which are not part of the concept of forced displacement in this thesis, are also significant reasons for the displacement movements in Myanmar.

3.3 Factors that contribute to the decision making process

Although the factors that contribute to the decision making process of crossing the border to Thailand can be similar as the reasons and causes of displacement within Myanmar, the key informants were explicitly asked once more which factors could have influenced the decisions of the IDPs to cross the border to Thailand. Moreover, the target population was questioned regarding how many times they were displaced in Myanmar before coming to Thailand and, if they had any networks or relatives that were already living in the Mae La temporary shelter. The aspect of how much information and awareness (through networks, other institutions or news) was available on circumstances in Thailand was questioned as well. All these factors combined aimed to respond to the second research objective.

When the interviewed displaced persons in Mae La were asked how many times they were displaced inside Myanmar before crossing the border to Thailand, initially, many of them did not remember the exact amount of times and started counting. Only two out of the 11 interviewed displaced persons were not displaced before coming to Thailand. The other nine were displaced more than once before they decided to cross the border. One woman even mentioned that she had been “displaced her whole life” (Displaced woman Nr. 17, 04 July 2012, Mae La) while she was living in Myanmar. Another man said that he and his family were displaced for over a year, moving almost every day in order to hide from the military army (Displaced man Nr. 4, 11 June 2012, Mae La). Of those that were displaced multiple times, three out of the nine persons were displaced at least four times. Two other persons were displaced three to four times and the other two were displaced two to three times (see figure 6, page 39).

“My family and I were displaced at least two to three times. We had to flee from the military army several times, since they wanted us to work for them. In order to escape and to be safe we had to go different ways. Therefore, I had to separate myself from my wife and children for a few days until the military army finally left. After being separated for those days we decided that we did not want to be without each other ever again and therefore we made the decision to cross the border to Thailand”
(Displaced man Nr. 2, 11 June 2012, Mae La).

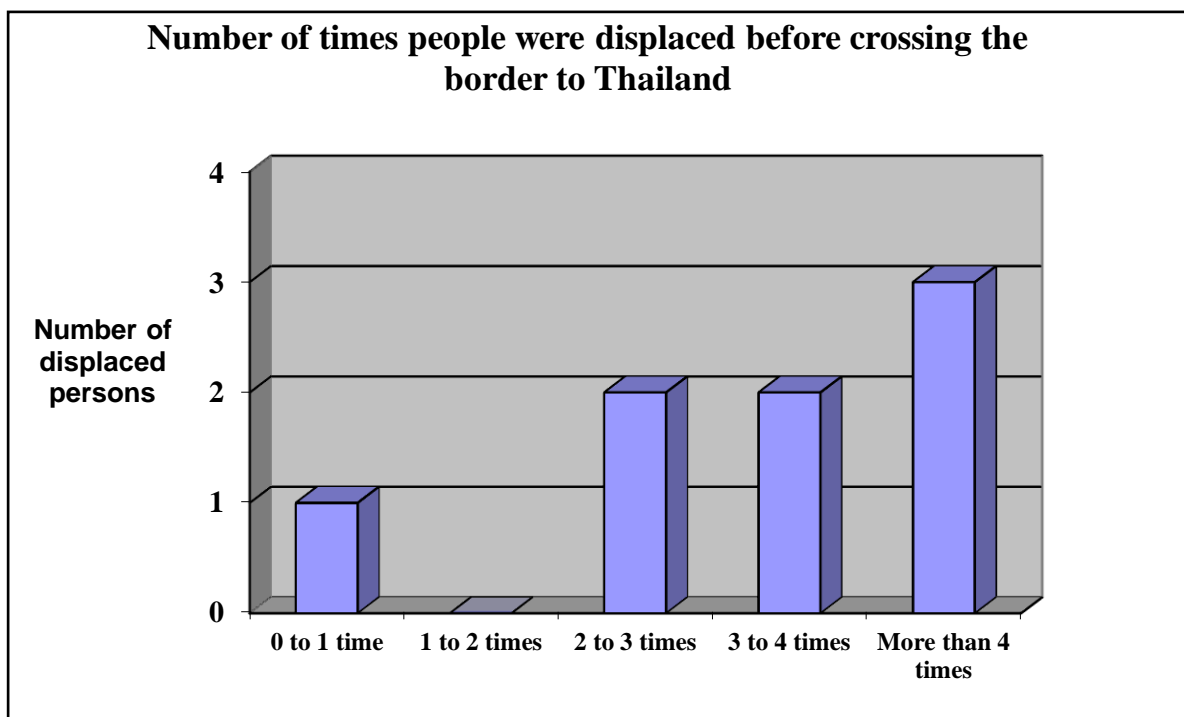


Figure 6: Number of times people were displaced before crossing the border to Thailand. Source: Interviews with displaced persons in Mae La temporary shelter

In order to find out why many IDPs have chosen to be displaced several times instead of coming directly to Thailand after their first time being displaced, the key informants were questioned on this issue.

The most common response was that for the IDPs, especially the Karen IDPs, it is very hard to leave their own country, since they are very attached to their culture and family traditions. Therefore the “Karen people would like to stay as long as possible” in Myanmar before going abroad (Key informant Nr. 9, 12 June 2012, Mae Sot).

The second answer given by the key informants was that crossing the border to Thailand is the last option or choice for the displaced population. Key informant Nr. 7 (12 June 2012, Mae Sot) stated that IDPs only decide to come to Thailand when they see that there is no more future for them in Myanmar, “since they actually do not want to leave their country at all.” It is “human nature that people want to stay in their land” and thus “nobody wants to leave their country, land and family” (Key informant Nr.14, 27 June 2012, Yangon and Key informant Nr. 22, 05 July 2012, Mae Sot). Moreover, IDPs are probably scared to be in another country that has another

language and a different culture and therefore, “they do not want to be in a strange country” (Key informant Nr. 15, 28 June 2012, Yangon and 23, 08 July 2012, Bangkok).

Only a few key informants argued that the reason for not crossing the border directly after the first displacement is because IDPs do not have enough capital (money) to migrate to Thailand.

When the displaced persons were asked if they had any friends or relatives that were already living in Mae La before they came to Thailand, only three out of the eleven confirmed having some. The remaining eight indicated that they did not know anybody in the Mae La temporary shelter before they came. This means that the factor of having or not having networks in Thailand did not really influence the IDPs’ decision to cross the border to Thailand. These results were contrary to migration pull factors theories, which indicate social networks as one of the main factors to migrate.

“My family and I did not have any friends or relatives here in Thailand before we came. Therefore when we decided to cross the border to Thailand, my son wanted to come first, alone, to Mae La to check out the situation. While he was here, he met with a Christian pastor that gave him information about the camp and how we could obtain support. After he returned to our village and we all moved together to Mae La”
(Displaced man Nr. 1, 11 June 2012, Mae La).

Nonetheless, when the question about the availability of information and awareness (through networks, other institutions or news) on circumstances in Thailand was asked, the responses were contrary to the previous question. Eight of the eleven interviewees said that they had information about the situation in Thailand before crossing the border and only three had none. Only one of the displaced persons said that he heard about “the camps on the border on the radio” (Displaced man Nr. 2, 11 June 2012, Mae La) and another one said that the KNU shared the information in her village and that they supported her family to arrange everything to travel to Thailand (Displaced woman Nr. 17, 04 July 2012, Mae La). Others obtained the information through some members of their home village and others through friends. The three

persons that had some relatives living in the Mae La temporary shelter before they came to Thailand received information through those relatives about the circumstances in the shelter.

“My nephew was here in Mae La before I came with my children. He informed me about the situation in Thailand and he said that I would be free of forced labour here and that my children could study for free. With this information I decided to cross the border. First I came alone without my children to see how safe it really was. I soon realised that I wanted to stay and live here and therefore I went back to get my children. My nephew helped me and he was very important for my decision to cross the border” (Displaced woman Nr. 5, 11 June 2012, Mae La).

According to the key-informant interviews, other factors that influenced the decision of the IDPs to cross the border to Thailand, and hence to become a displaced person living in a temporary shelter, include the fact that the situation in Myanmar is not safe enough to continue living there since the villages of the IDPs were destroyed and burned and the fact that there is a high amount of landmines in the region.

The lack of food is the second most mentioned factor that influences the IDPs' decision. Agriculture plays an important role for Myanmar and its citizens. Therefore, many persons, especially in the rural areas, depend on their own agricultural products. Nonetheless, after displacement only one-third of the population in Southeast Myanmar has access to land to do farming (IDMC, 2011a, p. 19). The land confiscation by the Myanmar army troops, which restricts the land available for agricultural cultivations and a steady increase in population, has an additional impact over the availability of food (TBBC, 2009, p. 20). Results of surveys made by TBBC show that forced labour and restrictions on movement are the most pervasive threats to livelihoods across the region (TBBC, 2009, p. 35). Moreover, because of the constant need to move and hide from the army, agricultural activity is almost impossible (IDMC, 2011a, p. 18; TBBC, 2011, pp. 30-31).

Last but not least, other key factors that impacted the decision to come to Thailand were the presence of better opportunities for education of children, more support in

the shelters, more opportunities to work and better health services. The geographical proximity of the Karen State to the Thai border is also a relevant reason for crossing the border. Seventeen out of 21 key informants agreed that the geographical proximity is absolutely significant, since “it is easier to go and cross the border from the Karen State” than from other states in Myanmar (Key informant Nr. 17, 30 June 2012, Yangon). Only four key informants disagreed with that statement.

In contrast to the displaced population living in Mae La shelter, the factor that influenced the decision of interviewed migrant workers living in Mae Sot to come to Thailand was the economic situation in Myanmar and the hope of making more money in Thailand. When these persons were asked why they decided to become a migrant worker and not to go to find protection in a temporary shelter, all of them stated that they did not know about the temporary shelters before they crossed the border. This means that none⁴ of them were aware or had information on the circumstances in Thailand, at least not information that they could obtain from the international community if they moved to the shelters. When one migrant worker was asked why she did not know about the shelter, she said that “the military junta controls the media” and therefore she did not have any information about it (Female migrant worker Nr. 10, 12 June 2012, Mae Sot).

Overall, the displaced population decided to cross the border to Thailand when they realized that they could not survive anymore in their villages, since they were burned and destroyed. Taking into account that they would prefer to remain close to their land and relatives, moving to Thailand can be seen as the last option that the IDPs have, and also why almost all the interviewed displaced persons were displaced more than one time inside Myanmar before crossing the border.

⁴ The sample of interviewed migrant workers for this research is very small in relation to the migrant worker population in Thailand. This is the reason why the results cannot be generalized since other migrant workers may have other responses

3.4 The influence of the ongoing changes on the future decision-making process

As mentioned above, in the last few years, and in the context of the 2010 and 2012 elections, the situation in Myanmar has been undergoing different changes especially after the recent ceasefire agreements. TBBC revealed in a six months report, from July to December 2011, that for the first time since 1984 “there are real hopes that there might be reconciliation in Burma/Myanmar and that the refugees may be able to return home” (2012a, p. 2). Additionally, through the ceasefire agreements, especially with the KNU and the Shan State Army South (SSA-S), the number of fights have been reduced and thus the ceasefire agreements could really transform this time into a “substantive peace process” (TBBC, 2012a, p. 2).

The key informants and the target population were asked different questions in order to find out their points of view concerning the possible future of Myanmar related to the displacement issues inside the country, as well as regarding the situation of the displaced persons living in the temporary shelters in Thailand.

Although there are many positive statements regarding the future of the country and hence the displacement situation, this research found out that many key informants and also the displaced persons can still not really picture how the situation can change in the near future, and if those changes will really be conducive to a better way of living.

First, the displaced population in Mae La was asked if the decision making process to cross the border to Thailand has changed over time, taking the possibility of resettlement in a third country and the strict Thai restrictions after 2005 into account. For the response, six out of the eleven displaced persons did not know how to answer this question. However, the remaining five interviewed persons indicated that there has not been a recent change in the decision making process. They stated that persons from Myanmar are still coming to the shelters, even though currently it can be more difficult to be recognized and to get support in the camps. One man said that, since the people inside Myanmar do not know about the situation in the camps before arriving in Thailand, the decision making process has not changed at all (Displaced Man Nr. 4, 11 June 2012, Mae La). Two other men argued that as long as there still are conflicts

in the country, people will continue to come, because Thailand is more safe than Myanmar (Displaced man Nr.6 and Nr. 15,11 June and 04 July 2012, Mae La).

Second, when the key informants were questioned to find out how ready the Myanmar government is to support the displaced population (see figure 7, page 44), 35% of the given answers were that the government is not ready yet. Some key informants mentioned that the government seems to be ready and supportive only for the media and in front of the international community, with the objective of improving their international image. Nonetheless, 25% see that there is already a change in the sense that the government is more open, and hence willing to talk with international and national organizations on the issues of displacement. Key informant Nr. 23 (08 July 2012, Bangkok) said that “there is effort from the government to end the conflicts and this is a promise to the people, but it requires an inclusive process.” Therefore the different ethnic parties should be involved in this process in order to obtain a positive change for everybody (Key informant Nr. 5, 10 June 2012, Mae Sot).

An additional answer was that the internally displaced persons are not the priority of the government. This answer is connected to the next one, which describes that the government’s focus is only to develop the country, in terms of the current and ongoing infrastructure development projects. Consequently, the government is “ignoring the population in need” and therefore the internal displacement issues are not the primary concern (Key informant Nr. 3, 26 April 2012, Mae La).

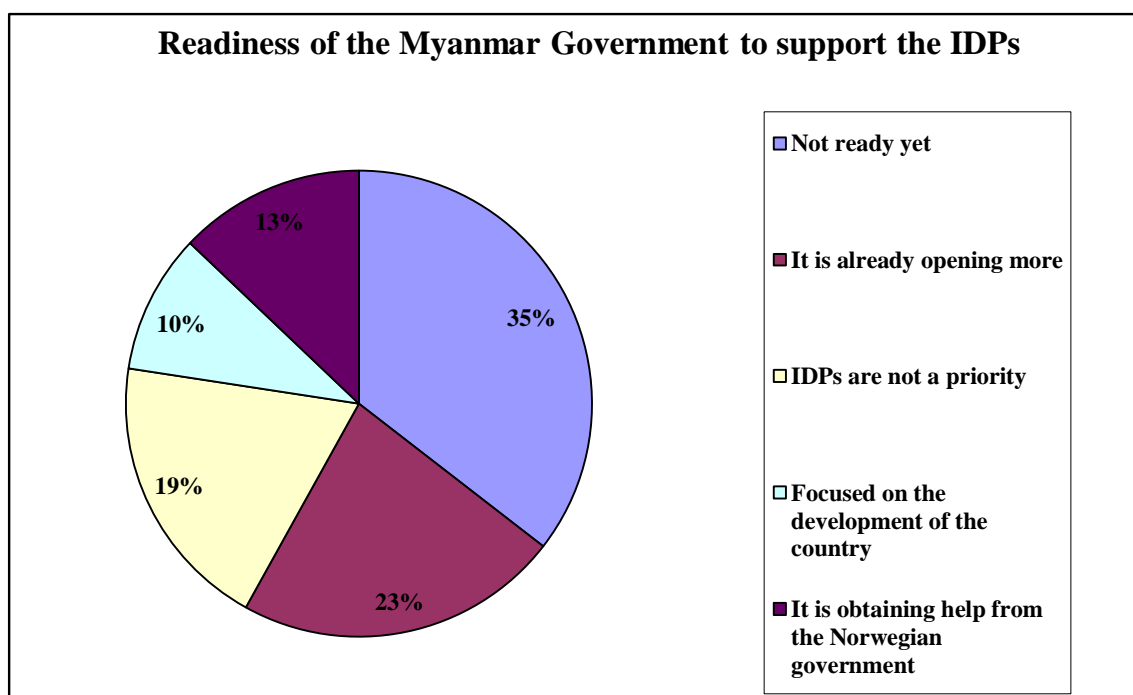


Figure 7: Readiness of the Myanmar Government to support the IDPs. Source: Key-informant interviews

The last 13% of the common answers define the help given by the Norwegian government to assist the Myanmar government with the peace processes as important. However, Key informant Nr 14, stated that the displaced population should also be addressed in the peace process in order for the IDPs to benefit from it (27 June 2012, Yangon).

Lastly, besides the readiness of the Myanmar government, the displaced persons in Mae La were asked if they wanted to return to Myanmar in the near future, assuming the situation in Myanmar will continue to change for the better. For this question the answers given by the displaced population and by the key informants were very mixed. Since returning to their home country can be seen as a voluntary repatriation, which is one of the three possible future options for the displaced population living in Thailand, this matter will be analyzed in the chapter IV, when examining the future challenges and possible options related to the displacement issues.

3.5 Conclusion

Having obtained the key informants' view on the reasons and causes for the displacement movements in Myanmar, the knowledge gained by the bibliographical research was proven to be correct. Both sources of information identified the armed conflicts, the human rights violations and the situations of generalized violence, for example by the military oppression, as the main reasons for displacement within the country. For the case of Myanmar, the bad economic situation and the increasing infrastructure development projects are also causes that forced people to leave their homes. This shows that the three types of displacement given by COHRE are also suitable, according to the interviewees' points of view.

In general, Myanmar internally displaced persons are very much attached to their land and culture and thus they try to stay close to their home region as long as possible. This is also the reason why IDPs are displaced several times, in many cases even more than four times, before they make the decision to move to Thailand. Only when these IDPs realize that they do not have any more chances to survive, since the lack of food continues worsening and the conflicts do not stop, do they decide to cross the

border to Thailand to seek more protection. Therefore, crossing the border to Thailand can be regarded as the last choice of the displaced population.

Until now, the ongoing changes inside the country have not really influenced the decision making process of the armed conflict affected population. The interviewees in the Mae La temporary shelter indicated that people continue coming to Thailand, even though the circumstances in the shelters have changed and become stricter for the new arrivals.

Some of the key informants supported the opinion that the government is already more open, and is more ready to provide support to the affected population. Others, however, disagreed with that opinion and mentioned that displacement issues are not a priority for the government, since they are only dedicated to developing the country and, hence, that the government is not ready yet to support the displaced persons.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND CHALLENGES

This chapter will provide an analysis of the collected data, obtained through the interviews, and their connection with the conceptual framework. At the beginning some of the key findings will be defined and examined, in order to be able to link them later on with the conceptual framework. Furthermore, the future and possible options for the displaced population as well as the challenges related to the displacement issues will be identified and examined.

4.1 Policy and Guidelines

As already described in chapter 1.3, the conceptual framework for this thesis has been divided into five different sections (see figure 2, page 14). In the previous chapter, the target population of Myanmar forced migrants by armed conflict and by military occupation, which is the first segment of the conceptual framework, was introduced. Additionally, some of the factors which influenced the IDPs' decision-making process (second segment of the framework) were presented, such as the reasons and causes for displacement as well as some of the conflict and violence factors. This sub-chapter will focus on the policy and guidelines factors.

Guiding Principle 1 (1) clearly states, *“Internally displaced persons shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. They shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced”* (OCHA, 2001, p. 2). Thus they, as human beings, should be always protected under the human rights laws. However, from the moment when the population is forced to leave their homes, their human rights start to be violated. The process of displacement can therefore be seen as a human rights violation. Even though since 2012 the Myanmar government started to acknowledge IDPs for the first time ever, there is no official recognition or IDP policy or law for this phenomenon, and therefore the affected persons do not receive any special protection and support and thus face further human rights violations.

In Thailand, the RTG has not signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This in turn hinders Myanmar displaced persons from obtaining the full protection they are entitled to receive. However since 1998 the RTG invited and allowed UNHCR to work and to provide protection to displaced persons at the Thai-Myanmar border. Even though these persons can live safely in the camps and get support by many international organizations and NGOs, they still face different limitations such as the limitation of movement and limitation to work (Moolma, 2011, p. 29).

In this context, the key informants were questioned as to what extent or how far the policies in Myanmar, or even in Thailand, could change and also, how helpful the international guidelines such as the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement could be.

On one hand, the results of the interviews showed that around 25% of the interviewees believe that the Myanmar government will not change or create new policies related to the issues of displacement in the near future. Key informant Nr 1 (17 April 2012, Chiang Mai) said that the “government will not change the laws or policies towards helping or providing assistance to the IDPs” and, for this informant, “this will be the last thing the government will do.” Others argued that there is as yet no rule of law in the country and that “rule of law must exist” in the future in order to be able to protect the affected population (Key informant Nr. 8, 12 June 2012, Mae Sot). The absence of rule of law in Myanmar is one big challenge for the coming years. Aung San Suu Kyi⁵ said in an interview in May 2012 that “... if we don't have a good judicial system to make sure the laws are properly applied” and “without an established rule of law, there can be no real progress” (George, 2012).

On the other hand, almost 20% of the key informants were confident in supporting the statement that if the government continues to be more open, there will be some changes related to displacement policies.

⁵ Aung San Suu Kyi is the 1991 Noble Peace Prize winner and is the current chairperson of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar (Biography, 2012)

One respondent commented that the government is now more conscious and aware of the displacement problems than before because of the pressure from the civil society (Key informant Nr.11, 25 June 2012, Yangon). Another indicated that “the government will support the international guidelines, since it is in their favor or advantage”, taking into account that they want to be part of the international community (Key informant Nr. 23, 08 July 2012, Bangkok). However, even though it is opening up more and working more closely with international organizations, according to one respondent the Myanmar government will not sign some of the international guidelines, such as the Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement (Key informant Nr. 15, 28 June 2012, Yangon).

Concerning the Royal Thai Government, most of the key informants did not see how the RTG and its position towards the displaced persons could change in the future. The answer that the RTG will not ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in the future was given by some interviewees. Only one respondent stated that the RTG wants to support and “do it right to help the displaced population to return to Myanmar” and thus that it is already assisting and making some preparations for the displaced persons living at the Thai-Myanmar border to return home (Key informant Nr. 4, 24 May 2012, Bangkok).

Moreover, the key informants see the international community, and respectively the international guidelines, as an important tool for the future of Myanmar. Around 35% mentioned that the international community has to continue to support Myanmar and that it should make sure that there is safety in the country (Key informant Nr.9, 12 June 2012, Mae Sot). In addition, one interviewee said, that it is good that the international community is working more closely with the Myanmar government, however the pressure on the government should increase.

In general many interviewees argued that the international community should further support and start capacity development processes with the government as well as with the affected population and regular citizens. This means that the international community should strengthen national institutions so that they can provide the services people need, taking the political system into account. And even if the Myanmar government does not recognize the international guidelines related to the

displacement issues, international organizations and NGOs should use them as an instrument in the future, by integrating IDPs and making them participate in their own process in order to obtain the best outcomes for the affected population (Key informant Nr. 15, 28 June 2012, Yangon).

4.2 The decision level of choice: Constraint vs. Agency

There are some studies that investigated how far people must be pushed to leave their homes when they have to displace. For example, according to TBBC (2009, p. 34) “more generally, internal displacement has resulted from a combination of coercive measures, such as forced labour, extortion and land confiscation, which drive down incomes to the point that the household incomes collapse and people have no choice but to leave their homes.” When leaving their homes, IDPs have mainly only two options, which are equally restrictive. The first option is to join the army, which means forced labour and extortion, and the second one is to run away from the military and armed groups, and hide in the forests. The results of the survey conducted by TBBC show that around half of total population in the townships in the eastern parts of the country fled to mountain areas in order to hide from the Myanmar army troops (TBBC, 2009, pp. 20-35). However, there is no research that investigates if internally displaced persons are also forced by some factors to cross the border to Thailand or if this is a free choice made by the IDPs themselves.

The next segment of the conceptual framework describes the levels of choice of the displaced population, and if people crossed the border to Thailand by themselves (alone), with their families or even with the whole community. Furthermore, the influence of constraint and agency during the decision making process will be analyzed.

Including the three displaced migrant students that are living and studying in a migrant school in Mae Sot and the eleven displaced persons in Mae La, nine out of the 14 interviewees crossed the border to Thailand with their families or with some family members. This is around 65% of the given answers (see figure 8, page 51).

In comparison, only 3 of 14 interviewed persons came alone to Thailand. Regarding these respondents, two of the three persons that answered that they crossed the border by themselves were students that were sent by their parents to obtain free and better education in Thailand. The remaining two interviewees said that they came with friends to Thailand.

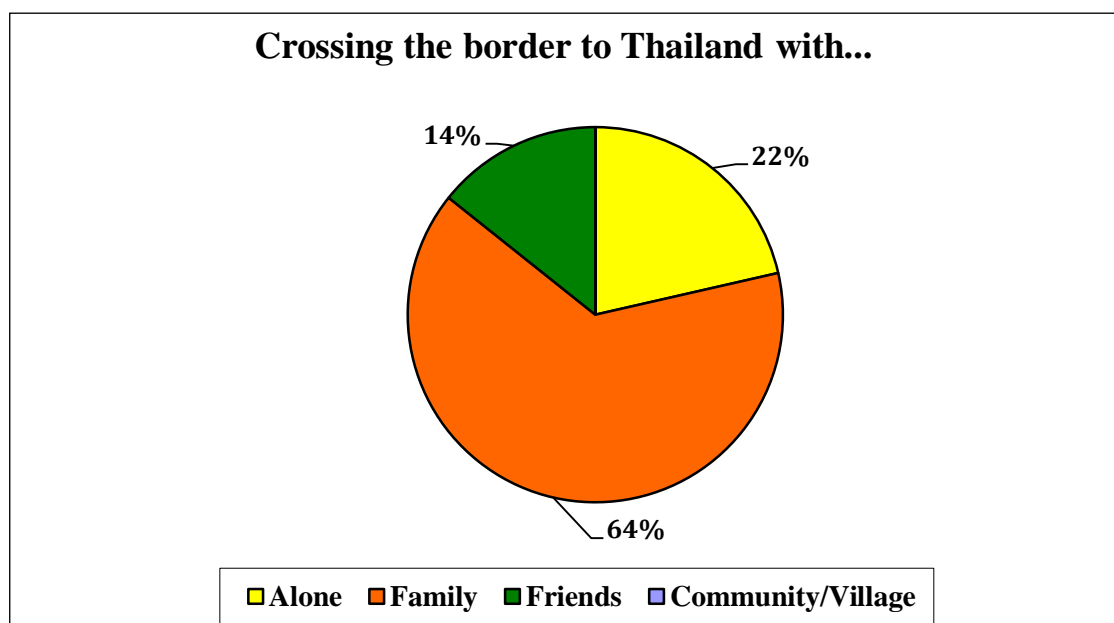


Figure 8: Crossing the border to Thailand with.... Source: Displaced Population Interviews

None of the interviewed persons mentioned that they crossed the border with their whole community or village. This aspect is shown in the legend of the diagram, even though it does not appear as one of the results, since none of the interviewed displaced persons in Mae La gave this as an answer. There is research that states that for many years, especially before 2005, whole villages and communities were forced to move and crossed the border to Thailand together.

These answers are relevant for the following question, regarding whether the displaced persons had the agency to choose to stay in Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand or, if their decisions were constrained by their community, military army or the KNU.

In this case, similarly, nine out of 14 interviewed persons indicated that the decision to cross the border to Thailand was a free choice. From these nine interviewees, five

said that it was a free decision made by the whole family. Only three mentioned that they came to Thailand by themselves but that it also was a free decision. The remaining person specified that she decided to come to Thailand with her family and that, therefore, it was a free choice; however, she mentioned that her decision was influenced in some way by the military army, since they were oppressing many people in the region (Displaced woman Nr.17, 04 July 2012, Mae La).

In contrast, five of the displaced persons acknowledged that they were forced to leave Myanmar. In all cases, the factor responsible for this constrained decision was the Myanmar army and its oppression. This is similar to a situation which TBBC stated in their report and showed in their survey results of 2009.

“My decision to come to Thailand was a forced decision by the Burmese military army since they were recruiting people for forced labour. Every day I had to wait for the military army demand and I was always hoping and praying that they did not want me or my children. After some time, we decided to leave in order to be able to stay together as a family”
(Displaced woman Nr. 3, 11 June 2012, Mae La).

Taking into account that the 14 interviewed displaced persons cannot represent all 140,000 displaced persons living at the Thai-Myanmar border, the key informants were also questioned on this subject, with the aim of obtaining more valid data. Out of 23 key informants, 15 indicated that the decision made by the displaced persons to move to Thailand was a free decision. This amounts to more than 65% of all the given answers. Key informant Nr. 9 argued that people are able to make their own decisions of whether to cross the border or not, even though they would prefer to stay in their own country (12 June 2012, Mae Sot). Again here, some respondents commented that although people are able to decide on their own, this decision was probably their last choice and even a desperate decision, since they actually do not want to give up their land (Key informant 19, 04 July 2012, Mae Sot).

“We do not want to live in another country, but we had no other choice. This is the reason why we came to Thailand. The situation here in Thailand is better, because it is safer and our children get free education. Before in Myanmar our children were displaced during school hours when the military army came to our village. This is the

reason why they did not get good or any education at all. Now here in Mae La our daughter is working as a teacher in a bible school in the camp” (Displaced couple Nr. 16, 04 July 2012, Mae La).

Furthermore, three other key informants specified that the displaced persons had the agency to decide but that this decision was influenced in some manner by factors such as the military army or, partially, by the armed conflicts between the army and other armed groups.

Another respondent acknowledged that the decision depends on where people were living before and on the magnitude of the conflicts, specifically with regards to the levels of violence (Key informants Nr 9 and 14).

Only two out of the 23 key informants stated that the decision was a constrained decision. One of the respondents claims that they were forced to make this decision, since people do not have a place to stay after their villages have been burned and destroyed (Key informant Nr. 6, 12 June 2012, Mae Sot). Another responded with the argument that it is constrained, since nobody wants to live in a strange country, which has another language and another culture. They are forced to cross the border since many have been displaced and, therefore, are moving from one location to another, hiding in the jungles or forests. Moreover, he said that the displaced persons living in the temporary shelters feel like “outsiders” in Thailand, given that they have to live in a restricted place, without having the option to work and, hence, options to improve their lives (Key informant Nr. 23, 08 July 2012, Bangkok). In this context a displaced woman living in Mae La since 1995 mentioned:

“Life as a refugee is difficult. There are many restrictions that we have to accept. We are not allowed to go or to work outside the camp. If we do so, we get arrested by the Thai police and they will detain or fine us” (Displaced woman Nr.17, 04 July 2012, Mae La).

However, in contrast to this statement another displaced women said that:

“Life in Mae La is easy. We do not have to struggle to survive, since we get the support of the organizations. We get free food. It is a good way of living for older people. Maybe it is different for the younger generations, since they probably want to work but cannot do so. But at least in my

case, I can say that the life conditions in the camp are good” (Displaced woman Nr. 18, 04 July 2012, Mae La).

Both sets of answers, related to the influence of constraint and agency during the decision making process, given by the key informants and by the displaced population are displayed in figure 8. The figure clearly shows that both interviewed groups had the same points of view by arguing that most of the decisions made by the displaced persons to cross the border to Thailand were made under the circumstances of agency and thus they were a free choice (see figure 9).

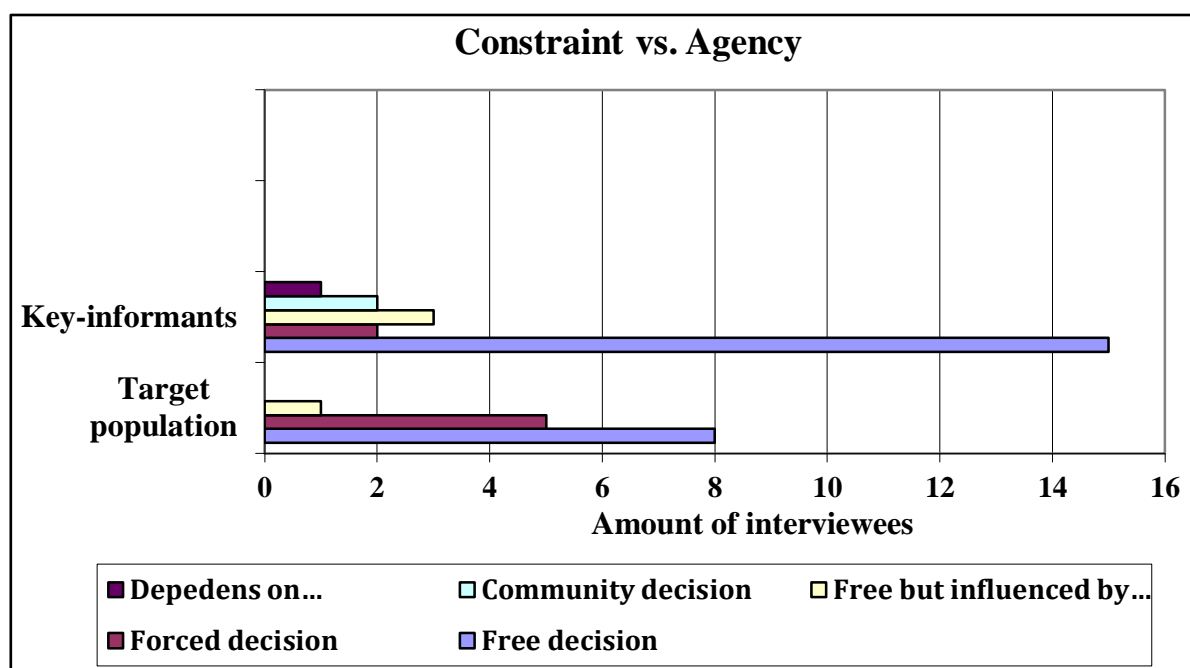


Figure 9: Constraint vs. Agency. Source: Target population and key-informants interviews.

Although the Myanmar army is part of the State, and is hence one of the institutional factors, none of the interviewed persons mentioned explicitly that their decision process was influenced by institutional or societal (ethnic groups) factors. Again here, similar to chapter 3.4 where the factors that contributed to the decision making process were described, some of the respondents commented that the KNU was not a reason for deciding to cross the border and, therefore, it is not one of the constraint factors. On the contrary, the KNU often supported the IDPs with temporary accommodation after their villages were destroyed. One person said that the KNU represents the local people of the Karen State and thus the KNU tried to help the Karen displaced persons as much as possible (Key informants Nr. 3 and 7).

Only two key informants expressed in their answers that the decision might be a community decision, depending on the magnitude of the conflicts since when a whole village is destroyed they will probably decide to move together. Besides that, the decision could be considered a community decision when people want to follow other community members and their relatives (Key informant Nr. 8 and 15). However, these are only the points of view of a few key informants, and are not congruous with statements that other displaced persons have given.

Overall, according to the interviewed displaced population, the decision making process is done in a personal way or with the whole family, but not under the influence of institutional, societal or even community factors. This indicates that both questions concerning the levels of choice (if people crossed the border to Thailand by themselves, with their families or even with the whole community and, if that decision was influenced by constraint or agency) are connected to each other. In general most of the displaced persons crossed the border to Thailand alone or with their families and thus their decision making process was only influenced by themselves or by their families.

4.3 To return or not return?

Many organizations in Thailand and in Myanmar are expecting that, because of the current transformations in Myanmar, many of the displaced persons living at the Thai-Myanmar border will soon want to return to Myanmar.

In order to find out if the displaced population would want to return, they were questioned on this issue. The migrant workers and the displaced students living in Mae Sot were also interviewed on this matter. Moreover, the key informants were also asked if they agree that the displaced persons would want to return in the near future to Myanmar and how long could this process take.

The key informants' opinions were very diverse. In total there were 38 responses given by the interviewees. From those 38 answers, 13 were positive answers arguing that the displaced persons living in temporary shelters in Thailand want to and will return to Myanmar. This is around 35% of all given responses. Some respondents

mentioned that some family members of the displaced persons that are living in Thailand are already returning to verify the current situation and to find out how stable it really is, how the government has changed and how it could support them (Key informant Nr. 5, 10 June 2012, Mae Sot). However this return process could take some years. According to key informant Nr. 15, the government will focus on and assist the internally displaced population first, and will focus after on the displaced persons that are living in the temporary shelters in Thailand (28 June 2012, Yangon).

An anonymous source reported that the Thai authorities were conducting a survey on the return options of the displaced persons in the different temporary shelters at the border. The results indicated that for the Mae La shelter around 37% of the surveyed people answered that they want to stay in Thailand. The majority of the population interviewed, over 60%, argued that they want to be resettled in a third country. And, according to the survey, only 0.7% of the surveyed persons want to return to Myanmar. However, this source of information also commented that the survey might be not reliable, since apparently the Thai authorities filled out the surveys by themselves and did not really survey the indicated number of people in the shelter. Thus, these results are not valid and hence people cannot believe this is a realistic survey.

This is even more obvious when taking the answers of one key informant from the Mae La shelter into account. This person stated that around 15% to 20% of the population living in Mae La wants to return, especially people that have been living a long time in the shelter. This is a much higher amount than the one obtained by the survey. Nonetheless, this respondent also argued that people who are registered by UNHCR and who, therefore, can apply for resettlement, would probably prefer to go to a third country. On the other hand, people not registered would want to go back to Myanmar (Key informant Nr. 3, 26 April 2012, Mae La).

Another person answered that the desire to return depends on the “generations” living in Mae La. This person said that the younger generation wants to resettle in a third country if possible, while for the “middle” generation it depends on their families and

the situation in Myanmar, and that the old generation is the one that wants to return to Myanmar the most (Key informant Nr. 13, 26 June 2012, Yangon).

Returning to the responses of the key informants, almost 29% of the total respondents argued against the return of the displaced persons, since in their opinion it is still not safe enough to return. Key informant Nr. 1 said that right now the changes are only in the parliament and in central Myanmar, but that the army troops continue to be stationed in the same areas as before and, hence, the abuse of the human rights of the villagers continue. As long as there is no rule of law in the country, these human rights abuses will continue (17 April 2012, Chiang Mai).

Overall, many of the key informants commented that the process of the return of the displaced persons will take many years. Four respondents said that the process will take at least two to three years. Another four respondents even expected a period of five to ten years. One interviewee mentioned that displaced persons living in Thailand might wait until the next elections in 2015 to see what will happen and how much the country has transformed at that time. The respondent also indicated that the government will try to accelerate this process, since Myanmar will be the chair of ASEAN⁶ in 2014 and hence they want people to return before that (Key informant Nr. 19, 04 July 2012, Mae Sot). This indicates that the government will try to do as much as possible to bring people back to their region or even back to the country. If they are able to do so, the government will have a better image in front of the international community and media, which will hence increase the attractiveness of the country.

Only 10% of the given answers stated that the displaced persons would want to stay in Thailand, if the RTG allows them to stay. In this context, one person mentioned that the young generations especially should first stay in Thailand and get a free and good quality of education before they decide to return to Myanmar. Another person described that it would be hard for the young generations to return to their original villages, especially in the rural areas of the Karen State, since many of them lived their whole lives in a temporary shelter in Thailand and are, therefore, used to

⁶ ASEAN is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

“modernity”, which includes access to the internet and having a cell phone, etc. (Key informant Nr. 19, 04 July 2012, Mae Sot).

The remaining 26% of responses given by the key informants is divided into diverse answers such as that there is no rule of law and therefore people should not return, or that their return depends on different factors and on the peace processes, or that people want to be resettled and therefore they will not return to Myanmar.

The responses of the displaced persons are, in comparison to the responses given by the key informants, more precise since they only replied if they wanted to return or not. From the 14 interviewed displaced persons⁷, eight persons (57%) indicated that they wanted to return to Myanmar but all under the condition that the armed conflicts must be over and real peace must exist. Only one respondent answered that she wants to return without mentioning any conditions for her return.

“I want to return to Myanmar in the future but only if the KNU signs peace agreements with the military army and also if the KNU continues supporting and protecting us. We need to have security in our own village as well as health and education services. Also the army has to clear the landmines. This will take some years but we need to be able to move without being scared of a landmine accident. All these factors are very important but if we can get them all, my family and I will return”
(Displaced man Nr. 04, 11 June 2012, Mae La).

The remaining five interviewees, around 35%, mentioned that they do not want to return to Myanmar. The main reasons for their statement are the possibility to resettle in a third country, the better work possibilities in Thailand and, also, the fact that they do not have any place to go or to live in Myanmar. In addition, some persons commented that they do not trust the government and never will be able to trust it again and, therefore, they are too scared to return since they do not believe in the current political changes. One respondent even mentioned that even if the Thai government tries to force them to return, this person will somehow find a way to stay

⁷ Eleven displaced persons from Mae La and three displaced students from Mae Sot

in Thailand since in this person's case, there is no desire to return (Displaced woman Nr.05, 11 June 2012, Mae La).

“I have no place to live and to do agriculture. I have lost everything I had. Now I do not have anything left in Myanmar and therefore I have no reasons for going back. I cannot trust the Myanmar government that the conflicts will end soon, since our country has been in conflict for over 50 years. This is the reason why I would like to stay in Thailand or to be resettled to a third country” (Displaced man Nr. 02, 11 June 2012, Mae La).

Additionally, the displaced persons were asked what will need to change in Myanmar so that they will want to return. Seven main factors were identified that will need to change in order for these persons to make the decision to return to their country. All factors are shown in the following graph (see figure 10, page 60).

The first and most common factor is peace and the finalization of armed conflicts. People will return to Myanmar if there are no more conflicts between the army and the armed groups such as the KNU. The ceasefire agreements must thus be stable and peace in the Karen State has to exist. Related to this, one respondent added that the Myanmar army should leave the Karen area.

The second factor, with a proportion of 17%, is access to education. In general, through conflict and abuse, women and children are often more at risk to indirect consequences related to survival, and therefore children only have limited access to education (TBBC, 2009, p. 9). As a result, only a little more than 50% of school-age children are able to go to school (IDMC, 2011, p. 19). Moreover, according to the interviewees there is a significant lack of teachers in the Karen State, since many were also forced to displace and now are too afraid to return to teach in the area.

Third, four different factors were mentioned the same number of times and thus all of them have a proportion of 14%. These factors are a better security situation, political change to democracy, access to health services and more job opportunities.

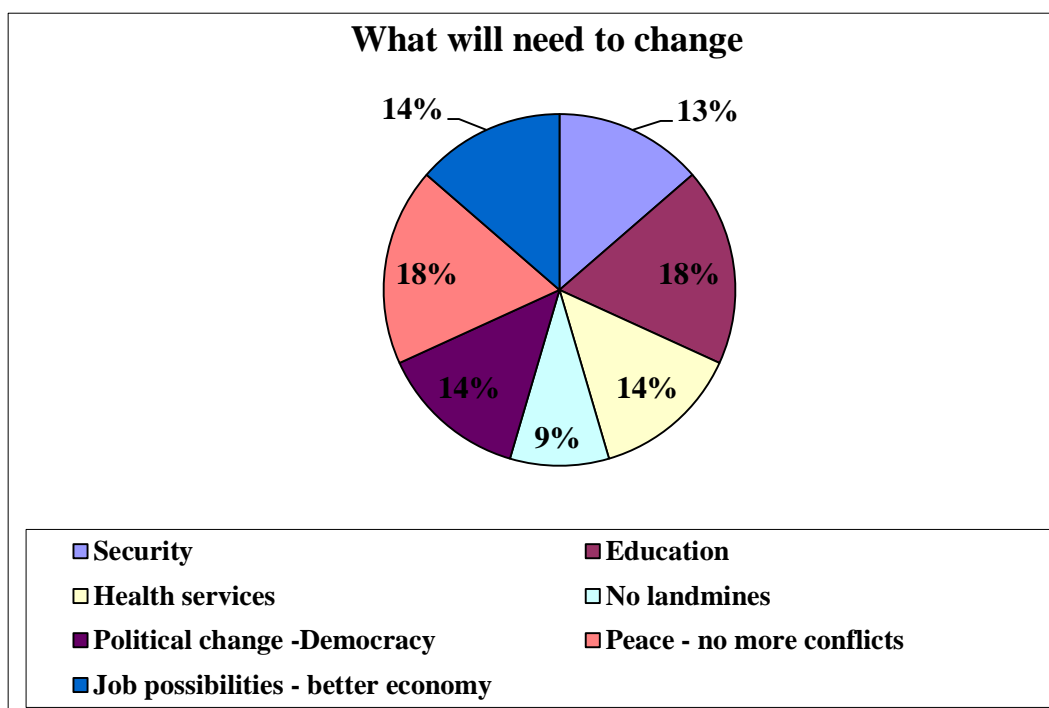


Figure 10: What will need to change. Source: Target population interviews

Political change to democracy would mean that all the ethnicities have the same rights and are treated equally. This will consequently bring more security in the region, since some social conflicts arising from this inequality would be reduced. The factor of access to health services has the same challenges as the factor of access to education, since many doctors were forced to leave the region because of the conflicts and therefore, presently, there are not enough doctors per person nor are there enough doctors in the hospitals.

Currently, almost two-thirds of the households in rural areas of the Karen State are not able to meet their basic needs, which include safe drinking water, access to sanitation, adequate shelter, food security and indebtedness. This goes also against Guiding Principle 18 (1 and 2) which indicates that *“all internally displaced persons have the right to an adequate standard of living, at the minimum, regardless of the circumstances, and without discrimination, competent authorities shall provide internally displaced persons with an ensure safe access to: (a) essential food and potable water; (b) basic shelter and housing; (c) appropriate clothing and (d) essential medical services and sanitation”* (OCHA, 2001, pp. 9-10). This is the reason why the fourth factor of more job opportunities and a better economy is so relevant for the displaced persons living in Thailand. People that want to return want to be able

to work and to be able to be self-reliant after having lost everything due to the conflicts and displacement.

Furthermore, the limitation of movement caused by the amount of landmines in some IDP villages creates a limitation of access to agriculture and markets, which increases the food insecurity. This goes against the principles of human rights and against the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, taking into account article 22 (1b) which states that IDPs have a “*right to seek freely opportunities for employment and to participate in economic activities*” (IDMC, 2011, p. 19). Therefore, the presence of landmines is also a factor that has to change in order for displaced persons to desire to return home.

Apart from the key informants and the displaced persons, the migrant workers were also questioned. Their answers were more homogeneous in comparison to the other interviewed groups. The reason for this could be that the number of migrant workers interviewed is much smaller than the other two groups. Nonetheless, it is interesting that all four migrant workers answered along the same line of thinking. They all stated that they want to return to Myanmar in the future. Nevertheless, they all also argued that they would want to return only if they could find a good job that has a similar salary to the jobs in Thailand. They want to be able to earn enough money for themselves and for their families. Moreover, they know that they will feel more secure in their own country, since in Thailand they are afraid of the Thai police (Migrant worker Nr. 8 to 11, 12 June 2012, Mae Sot). Once again, these answers show that for the migrant workers the economic factors are the most important ones related to their future and the possibility to return.

To conclude, the expectations regarding the future of the displaced persons living in Thailand and their return to Myanmar are still very mixed. On one hand, both interviewed groups agreed to some extent that displaced persons (or they themselves) will return in near future to Myanmar, if the situation continues improving. However, this answer was always mentioned under the conditions of other factors, such as no more conflicts, peace, democracy, better access to services, etc. On the other hand, a significant number of persons indicated that the situation is still not safe enough for

people to return, and that this process will take at least two to three years, if not longer.

Moreover, the displaced population inside Myanmar, as well as the persons living in Thailand, only want to return to their traditional villages. This is, in many cases, impossible since their land was taken by the military. Furthermore, the high number of landmines in the region continues to be a barrier for them to return. Thus, if the government does not find some strategies to support the affected population and to define a place where they can live safely and satisfactorily, the return process will take many years.

Therefore, international and national organizations working in Thailand and in Myanmar should continue planning and preparing for the return of many displaced persons. However, they face the challenge of responding to these factors of change mentioned by the interviewed. They have to ensure that the situation is truly safe enough, and that people will be able to survive by themselves, with the caveat that they will require some assistance in the first months of their return. Organizations will have to work closely together with the government in order to obtain the best outcomes.

4.4 The future and possible options for the displaced population

4.4.1 The future of the displacement movements

Until now, nobody is able to know or to predict how the situation in Myanmar will change exactly in the following years. According to Manoj Vohra, “the whole world is watching Myanmar at the moment, with the central question being whether meaningful political reform will follow the liberalising gestures we have already witnessed” (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). This is the reason why there are already some possible scenarios that could occur in Myanmar concerning the country’s economic growth. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2012) published a report where three possible scenarios for the next eight years (until 2020) were formulated. Even though these scenarios are focused more on the economic growth of the country, they are connected to the displacement issues in the country, since they could affect the displacement movements either in a positive or negative way.

The first one is the *Core scenario*, which has a 60% probability, and describes that the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) will continue in power and will continue arranging new economy reforms so that the GDP can grow to an average of 7.7% per year (up from 4.4% in 2011) between 2016 and 2020 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). The second scenario is called the *Golden era* and estimates that democratization and economic reforms, with the help of multilateral financial institutions, will arise creating an even higher GDP growth rate of 8.5% per year for the same time period of 2016 to 2020. This scenario only has a probability of 25%. Lastly, the third scenario called the *Dark forces*, with a 15% of probability of occurring, describes economic growth slowing down in the next several years if the military regime returns to power, thus reducing economic growth to an average rate of 4.4% during the specified time period (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012).

These possible scenarios have a connection with the displacement issues, since the displaced persons inside Myanmar and at the Thai-Myanmar border are dependent on what happens in the country in economic terms, in order to be able to determine their future. Certainly, each of the above scenarios would affect the displaced persons in some way.

On one hand, a higher GDP, political stability and democracy would, of course, favor the displaced population. This would mean that the conflicts would stop and people would live with more security, having equal rights regardless of the region where they are from. Further, with more investments by the multilateral financial institutions in resources sectors, such as “agri-business, tourism, construction, telecommunications, retail, low-cost manufacturing, healthcare and regional transport infrastructure”, displaced persons will have a higher chance of finding a new job (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012).

On the other hand, all these new investments will create more development projects, which will displace more people within or even outside the country, since those projects will be built in the areas where the natural resources are, which are also areas where villages exist.

In this context, once again, the key informants were questioned on whether or not, in the future, there will be more displacement because of the development projects than because of those issues generated by conflicts. Only nine of the key informants answered this question. However, six of them agreed that in the future the development projects will cause more displacement movements than the armed conflicts. One respondent even argued that this is already happening and that nowadays there are more people movements by development-induced displacement than by armed conflict-induced displacement (Key informant Nr. 23, 08 July 2012, Bangkok). Another interviewee answered that this depends on the political situation in the country. If there is real democracy, the development projects will not cause more displacement, since ideally the government will foresee and manage this issue (Key informant Nr. 19, 04 July 2012, Mae Sot). The last two respondents said that since the government is more open, all the projects are now more transparent than before and, therefore, people will not be forced to move. Nevertheless, almost all indicated that, for the future, the government has to include the local population when planning a new project and be transparent about the purposes of it. The villagers have to be empowered to express their thoughts and the government should listen to them. Besides, the government has to be more aware of the effects that a development project can bring and has to work closer with national and international organizations on this, in order to prevent other conflicts. In case people still have to be relocated, they should obtain fair compensation and a good relocation site.

These different points of view regarding the future of Myanmar and its displacement issues show once again that, for the meantime, the horizon is uncertain, and it depends on how certain situations unravel. All the scenarios depend on the political changes and political stability, and on the peace processes between the government and the ethnic groups.

4.4.2 The durable solutions for the displaced persons

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are three main durable solutions for the displaced persons living outside their home country (UNHCR, 2009, p. 22).

1. The first one is a safe and voluntary repatriation. This first solution is seen as the preferred long-term solution for the affected persons, either internally displaced persons or refugees. Normally, most of the people that were forced to leave their home country or home region would like to return home as soon as the circumstances allow it, for example when the armed conflicts have ended and peace has emerged. In this situation, international organizations and NGOs encourage their return, since this solution is regarded as the most appropriate and adequate one for the affected persons. In the last few decades, over 11.4 million refugees have voluntarily repatriated to their homes (Moolma, 2011, p. 18; UNHCR, 2009, p. 22). The refugees or IDPs have to return voluntarily, safely and with dignity to their homes. This can sometimes be very difficult, since many people have lost everything because of the conflicts and, therefore, are scared to return home. Some of the displaced persons living in the Mae La temporary shelter who do not want to return to Myanmar in the future indicated this as a reason why they preferred to stay in Thailand.

2. The second solution is a local integration into the country of asylum. This is a viable and reasonable solution for the refugees or displaced persons, taking into account that they are already in a host country, where many have lived for more than one decade. Unfortunately, there are only a few countries in the world that offer this option to the affected persons, and Thailand is not among them (UNHCR, 2009, p. 23).

Since the time period of the Indochinese refugees that came to Thailand in the 70s and 80s, the RTG has not approved of the concept of local integration. The reason for this could be that the RTG feared to approve the concept, believing it could become a stronger pull factor that would attract more people to migrate to Thailand, taking into account that Thailand is surrounded by least developed countries⁸ and countries that have conflicts. Today, these circumstances continue, making it challenging for Myanmar displaced persons to stay and live in Thailand in the future (Moolma, 2011, pp. 19-25).

⁸ According to UN-OHRLLS, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia are considered to be least developed countries

3. Last but not least, the third possible durable solution according to UNHCR is resettlement to a third country. This, however, will prove to be a challenge, taking into account that only ten out of the total UN member states⁹ “establish annual resettlement quotas over and above their acceptance of persons arriving spontaneously at their own borders” (UNHCR, 2001, p. 16).

Since 2005, displaced persons living in the temporary shelters at the Thai-Myanmar border have had the opportunity to seek resettlement in a third country, considering that in Thailand they do not obtain the full protection that a refugee is entitled to receive. As a result, ever since this possibility was created, many of the displaced persons living in the shelters who were registered by UNHCR have been applying for resettlement.

This has decreased the total population in the temporary shelters, since according to numbers given by the International Organization for Migration (2012) around 95,600 persons were resettled between 2004 and 2011. More recent data produced by TBBC indicates that in 2011 alone over 9,000 displaced persons living in the temporary shelters resettled to a third country (TBBC, 2012a, pp. 2-3). More than 77,600 persons out of the 95,600 resettled persons were from Myanmar (IOM, 2012). This is the reason why according to UNHCR (2009, p. 24) “in 2007, refugees from Myanmar were the largest group to benefit from resettlement (...) starting a new life outside their first asylum countries.”

As mentioned in Chapter III, Mae La temporary shelter has the highest number of persons who have been resettled. From January 2006 to February 2012, 31,503 displaced persons were resettled into a third country (see appendix E). The United States of America received 28,482, which is the highest number of persons. The second country was Australia with almost 2,500 persons, followed by Norway with 154 displaced persons (Mae La Temporary Shelter Authorities, p. 13). Other countries that received Myanmar displaced persons include the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the figures mentioned above make it

⁹ Information from 2001, when the United Nations had 185 member states. Today there are 193 UN member states (United Nations, 2012).

obvious that the United States is the country which is available for the most displaced persons.

In general, according to UNHCR (2008b, p. 35), “Voluntary repatriation is the durable solution which has historically benefited the largest number of refugees. Resettlement is a key protection tool and a significant burden and responsibility-sharing mechanism. Local integration is a complex and gradual process and comprises distinct but interrelated legal, economic and socio-cultural dimensions.” Perhaps, in the case of Myanmar displaced persons in Thailand, the best durable solutions are the voluntary repatriation and the resettlement to a third country, although local integration would always be preferred to resettlement. However, this solution is not conceivable in Thailand. At the moment, the resettlement option is still the preferred one by the persons living in the temporary shelters. However, if in the future the situation in Myanmar continues changing, this also might change, taking into account that many people might want to return to their homes and thus they might start to choose the option of a voluntary repatriation more and more.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the collected data by going through the different segments of the conceptual framework. In Chapter III, section number one and some parts of the second segment were already analysed. In this chapter the remaining parts of the conceptual framework were considered, including the data obtained through the interviews and through some of the bibliographical resources.

The main findings related to the policy and guideline segment are that although the Myanmar government is more open than before, and hence more willing to stop the conflicts and to support the affected population, many of the interviewees still do not agree that it will assist the displaced population sufficiently and effectively. Moreover, they argued that the government will not create any legal or policy framework to ensure that they will support those displaced persons.

Thailand’s migration policies concerning the 140,000 persons that are currently living at the Thai-Myanmar border will not really change, according to the interviewed key

informants. Nevertheless, some respondents mentioned that the RTG is willing to support the return of the displaced persons and that they want to do it in a sustainable way, without forcing people to leave and with the support of the Thai authorities and international and national organizations.

To support this and the objectives of the Myanmar government, even if this last actor will not sign the international treaties, the international community and the international guidelines have to continue supporting the displacement issues and serve as a tool for the affected people. The most important aspect in this context is that the target population of IDPs or displaced persons living in Thailand have to be a part of the process in order to obtain the best outcomes.

For the section concerning the level of choice, the most relevant findings are that internally displaced persons cross the border to Thailand mostly with their entire families, with some family members or by themselves. As the results indicated, 65% of the interviewed persons came to Thailand with their families. Around 21% of the interviewees came alone to Thailand. The remaining percentage crossed the border with friends; however, none of the interviewees mentioned having come to Thailand with their whole community or village. This is probably related to their year of arrival in Thailand, taking into account that before 2005, it was more common for villages and communities to cross the border together as a whole, as opposed to after 2005.

In relation to the above, the next segment of the conceptual framework focused on the influence of constraint or agency during the decision making process. The results and influence level of this factor are very similar to the results from the level of choice factor, since in this case 65% of interviewed persons also indicated that their decision to cross the border to Thailand was a decision influenced by agency and thus a relatively free choice. The other 35% of the displaced persons acknowledged that their decisions were constrained. The reason for this was the oppression of the Myanmar army.

The key informants were also asked about this subject and although their answers were more diverse, the majority of them supported the fact that the decisions made by the displaced persons to move to Thailand are made under the circumstances of

agency. Nevertheless, some of them added to their answers that the decision to cross the border is almost always the last choice of the people since normally they do not want to leave their country.

When discussing the future options for the displaced population, and if they would return in the near future to Myanmar, the answers were mixed. Eight out of 14 interviewed displaced persons affirmed that they want to return to Myanmar if the conflicts end and if peace agreements are signed. The remaining persons do not want to return, taking into account that they have lost everything in their home regions and are still too scared of the situation, including the high number of landmines throughout the region and their lack of trust in the government.

A third of the key informants indicated that displaced persons living along the border will return to home to Myanmar. On the other hand, 29% of the answers opposed this view, and stated that displaced persons will not return in the near future since it is still not safe enough.

The last two segments of the conceptual framework are the decision segment and the results of the decisions made by the displaced population. The analyzed data for these segments indicated that people are largely able to choose by themselves whether to stay in Myanmar and be an internally displaced person, or to cross the border to Thailand and thus become a displaced person in the temporary shelters or a migrant worker outside those shelters.

Internally displaced persons in the Karen State want to stay as long as possible in their home region, since they are much attached to their land, culture and traditions. Therefore, they only decide to cross the border to Thailand when they notice that they cannot continue living in Myanmar since the lack of food is critical, or because they have to continue hiding in the jungle or forest for fear of being captured by the Myanmar army. This is the reason why becoming a displaced person living in a temporary shelter in Thailand is the last option that IDPs have. Nevertheless, many decided to come, since they do not want to put their families and children in danger, and preferred to live a safe life in Thailand.

Moreover, migrant workers were asked why they decided to come to Thailand and why they did not want to be a displaced person living in a temporary shelter. The main reason for this, in the case of the interviewed migrant workers, is the economic situation in Myanmar. They crossed the border with the hope of finding a better paid job. They did not decide to become a displaced person in the shelters, especially considering the fact that most of them stated they did not know about the temporary shelters before they crossed the border. This indicates that people in Myanmar do not have enough information on the circumstances in Thailand before they cross the border.

To conclude, all sections of the conceptual framework were examined through the analysis of the collected data in Chapters III and IV. In the following chapter, a conclusion of the entire research, as well as some recommendations related to the issues of displacement in Myanmar, will be provided.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter will first give a short summary of the most relevant research findings that were examined in the previous chapters of this thesis, including both the bibliographical review and the interview data. This has the purpose of responding to the research sub-questions and main research question. Moreover, the hypothesis that was set up in chapter 1.6, which argues that the Myanmar displaced persons' decisions to cross the border to Thailand or to stay in Myanmar are largely formed by political or institutional influences or actions rather than by family or individual choices and agency, will be proven either right or wrong. At the end, some recommendations concerning the Myanmar displacement issues will be provided.

5.1 Conclusions and observations

The phenomenon of displacement in Myanmar has changed the lives of many millions of citizens in the whole country. This research focused more on the Southeast part of Myanmar, especially on the Karen State, since the Karen population has suffered the effects of armed conflicts between the army and other armed groups for many decades, making this region one of the most affected by the displacement movements in the country. This is the reason why in the past years, around 30% of the Karen rural population has been displaced and many hundreds of villages have been destroyed and burned. As a result, there are around 106,800 IDPs from the Karen State (TBBC, 2011, p. 19).

Even though IDPs as human beings should always be protected under human rights laws, in Myanmar they face diverse human right violations, taking into account that the country's government does not support or even recognize those affected persons as internally displaced persons, which makes their lives more vulnerable and unsafe. There are many other aspects that worsen the lives of the affected population after the displacement movements such as limitation to health services, education and security.

When people are forced to resort to displacement, the biggest changes, which are unfortunately negative, are the deterioration of the livelihoods and the increase of poverty. The Karen population depends on agricultural activity and on their own agricultural products in order to have enough food resources. However, after displacement occurs, only one-third of the population in Southeast Myanmar has access to land to do farming and hence to cover their minimum of food needs (TBBC, 2009, p. 20). These are some of the main reasons and causes mentioned by the interviewees that led to the displacement inside Myanmar. Besides the armed conflicts, lack of food and human rights violations, the interviewed displaced persons also indicated that forced relocation and military oppression were factors that forced them to leave their homes and villages.

Furthermore, new infrastructure development projects and the bad economic situation in the country are also considered as reasons for the displacement movements in Myanmar. Development projects, mostly planned and implemented by the government, continue to cause and extend further human rights violations, since people are forced to resettle and to start a new life in a new area. In addition, this can generate more conflicts between the affected population and the government, since people are not willing to displace. This clearly shows that in Myanmar, displacement, development projects, human rights abuses and conflicts are all linked together.

When surviving in Myanmar becomes a challenge, taking into account the factors mentioned above, people decide to cross the border to Thailand, even though Karen people are very connected to their land, culture and family traditions, and normally try to stay in Myanmar as long as they can. They have the hope of finding security and assistance in one of the ten temporary shelters that are located along the 2,401 kilometers of the Thai-Myanmar border (Lang, 2002). Considering that Karen IDPs would prefer to stay close to their home and relatives, the decision to come to Thailand can be seen as the last choice that they have. This is clearly reflected in almost all the interviews in Mae La, where the interviewees stated that they were displaced more than one time inside the country before they decided to cross the border.

Taking into account that leaving their country and going to Thailand is the IDPs' last option, this thesis aimed to find out to what extent the decisions to cross the border to Thailand made by the displaced population were made by themselves, or if those decisions were constrained by other factors and hence were forced decisions. The factors that could have influenced the decision were categorized into the following levels of choice: (i) institutional, (ii) societal, (iii) community, (iv) family and (v) personal. While questioning the displaced population in the Mae La temporary shelter and displaced students that live in Mae Sot, it was very obvious that most of the interviewed people, over 65%, that had crossed the border to Thailand came with their families. Others came alone to Thailand, and the remaining interviewees with some friends. None of them specified having to cross the border with their whole community or village, which shows that this was not a key factor, at least for the interviewed persons.

Moreover, displaced persons indicated that the decision making process is done in a personal way or with family, and therefore it is a "free" decision under the circumstances of agency. The influence of the institutional, societal or community factors is thus not significant enough, which indicates that most of the decisions made by the interviewees were not solely determined by constraint. Displaced persons live in an incredibly restricted environment, because of the armed conflicts, military occupation and oppression, and although it was their "free" choice to cross the border to Thailand the decision was often influenced by some of those factors. However, the level of influence of agency for the decision making process was higher than anticipated. This means, that even though the displaced persons moved to Thailand under circumstances of forced migration, the respondents were able to make their own choices.

These findings answered the research question of which factors contribute to the decisions of displaced persons to stay inside Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand and how much the resultant decisions are influenced by constraint or by agency.

Through the testimonies from interviews and their analysis, the hypothesis that was set up for this research has been proven wrong since according to the main findings

the Myanmar displaced persons' decisions to cross the border to Thailand are family or personal decisions, and not decisions formed by political or institutional influences, or actors such as the Myanmar army or KNU.

However, in contrast to the hypothesis, the three research objectives and the conceptual framework which were analyzed in chapter III and IV have been proven to be suitable for the entire research. Chapter III was divided into three research objectives which were examined through diverse methodological approaches. The conceptual framework shaped the entire chapter IV by analyzing its different components against the collected data and findings.

Another interesting finding indicated that only a minority of the interviewed displaced persons had some relatives, or any networks living in Thailand before they arrived. However, the majority of them had information about the situation in Thailand before crossing the border, which means that having or not having networks does not influence the availability of information. They obtained the information and awareness on circumstances in Thailand through friends, members of their village or even through the KNU. One respondent commented that he received the information from the radio, probably not from the official media but from exile broadcasts, since people consider information from the official media to be unreliable, because the military junta normally controls it. The few persons that had some relatives living in the temporary shelter got information through those relatives. Nevertheless, the findings illustrated that the networks do not play an important role, which is the opposite of what was expected and contrary to some migration theories that describe the networks as one of the most important pull factors for people to migrate to another region or country.

In contrast, the migrant workers living in Mae Sot decided to come to Thailand primarily because of economic reasons. None of the interviewed migrant workers mentioned armed conflict or displacement as motives for their migration. This is one of the reasons why they decide to become a migrant worker and not a displaced person in one of the temporary shelters. A bigger sample of migrant workers might have given other statements and answers and maybe argued that they crossed the border because of the same reasons as the displaced persons. In addition, all of them

indicated that they did not know that the temporary shelters existed before they were in Thailand, which means that these migrant workers did not have access to information on the circumstances and support system in Thailand.

Finally, this thesis considered how the decisions of crossing the border to Thailand could change, if the situation in Myanmar continues transforming and improves. The findings related to this question showed mixed results. On one hand some of the key informants expressed positive answers by arguing that the government is more open and is therefore ready to recognize and support the displaced population. Some of the key informants that argued in favor of the government are persons working in Myanmar. The reason for this could be that those persons working on migration and displacement issues inside the country work closely with the government officials in Central Myanmar and therefore they might not know the points of view or opinions of the displaced population in the affected areas. These persons or organizations have to promote what they are doing, which is to support the government to assist the displaced population, and thus they have, to some extent, to defend the government's improvements.

On the other hand, other key informants stated that the circumstances in Myanmar are still not safe enough for people to return. Even though some of them agreed that the government is more open, they stated that the displacement issues are not a priority and that, therefore, the return process of the displaced persons living in Thailand could take many years. This clearly shows that there is a polarization of the points of view of interviewed persons and organizations, which is maybe related to the statement above, that some of the people or organizations that are working inside the country and might feel obligated to agree with the government's actions and strategies.

In general, there is still no guarantee for the displaced population either inside Myanmar or in Thailand, that they will be safe if they return to their homes. Although there have been some changes by the Myanmar government regarding the displacement issues in recent months, until now the government has not yet provided any legal documents or agreements to ensure that they will support the affected population in the future or once they return to their regions. They have also not

announced any future measures such as the creation of a law or policy related to the displacement issues. This is the reason why only eight out of 14 interviewed displaced persons argued that they want to return to Myanmar, all of them under the conditions that the armed conflicts are over first, and that real ceasefire and peace agreements have to be signed and implemented. The remaining persons acknowledged that they do not want to return. These persons commented that they do not trust the government or the political changes, and never will.

Furthermore, organizations and local people are aware that in the future there might be more development-induced displacement, which could cause more displacement movements than the armed conflicts-induced displacement currently cause. Thus, some displaced persons would at present prefer to be resettled in another country or to be able to stay in Thailand.

As a result, the first solution out of three durable solutions, which is a voluntary repatriation, is currently not the preferred option for the displaced persons. This will continue to represent a big challenge for the future, since displaced persons only want to return to their own land. Since the repatriation has to be voluntary, safe and with dignity, people cannot be forced to be relocated to another area that they do not want to be moved to, and is difficult taking into account the number of landmines and the military occupation in some parts of the country. Therefore, as an observation, displaced persons inside Myanmar and in Thailand should not rush to return to their homes, since it could still be dangerous. Hence, the RTG and the Myanmar government should not force people to go back, since this would be an involuntary repatriation, which is the opposite of the main objective.

The third solution, which is local integration in Thailand, and which is the desire of some of the interviewed displaced persons, is still not feasible given that the RTG has not signed the 1951 Convention Related to the Status of Refugees and hence does not support this durable solution. Local integration in Thailand is not an option for the Myanmar displaced persons and although displaced persons hope to be able to be able to stay in Thailand or to return home, the resettlement to a third country, which is the second solution, is still the best and only solution at present for those persons living in the temporary shelters.

At the moment it is too early to make a conclusion concerning the future possible solutions for the displaced persons. This research was conducted in June and July 2012 and since then there have been many ongoing changes in Myanmar, which could benefit the displaced persons in the future. However, through the end of the research period, there still hasn't been any guarantee for the affected persons and hence voluntary repatriation is still not the recommended solution, since displaced persons inside Myanmar and in Thailand continue to be afraid and uncertain of returning home and therefore the repatriation would not be voluntary. For the future, it is important to ask the displaced population, both in Thailand and in Myanmar, what they are planning for their future and which durable solution they would prefer. It is also important to involve them and their opinions when planning the return programs or projects.

To conclude, if the armed conflicts between the army and the armed groups do not end in the near future, the displaced population will continue to suffer and face human rights violations and humanitarian assistance will be required. Nevertheless, if the conflicts end and if there are real peace and ceasefire agreements and rule of law that people can trust, the Myanmar government has to start recognizing those persons as displaced persons in a legislative way, and is obligated to provide them with special assistance by creating new policies that protect their vulnerable lives. This process will obviously take time, but at least the return of the displaced persons can be planned and organized, and projects to achieve the return process can be designed and implemented.

Since many IDPs have been displaced several times, the issues of dignity and identity should be included in further negotiations considering and respecting the different ethnicities. There must be reconciliation and sustainable peace-building dialogues, where the different ethnic minorities are integrated into the process in order to stop the oppression and discrimination of the diverse ethnic groups.

By establishing credible policies and creating rule of law in Myanmar, IDPs and displaced persons living in Thailand can finally return to their homes and start living without confronting danger, food scarcity and other human rights violations.

At the moment, the country is in a transitional period, where many things are changing, transforming and improving. Nevertheless, nobody knows if this period or these changes will be permanent and hence bring the country forward, or if this is only a transitory period.

This is the reason why there should be further studies on the issues of displacement and human rights violations in Myanmar, in order to find out if the current changes did benefit the local and affected population or not.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Statistics of the Burmese Border Displaced Persons

Burmese Border Displaced Persons: June 2012



Province/Camp	TBBC			Feeding ² Figure	MOI/ UNHCR Population ³ Total
	Female	Male	Total		
Chiangmai					
Wiang Heng (Ethnic Shan)	297	287	584	584	
Mae Hong Son					
Ban Mai Nai Soi ⁴	6,637	7,196	13,833	13,528	10,680
Ban Mae Surin	1,821	1,847	3,668	3,493	1,906
Mae La Oon	7,257	7,413	14,670	14,156	9,925
Mae Ra Ma Luang	8,229	8,205	16,434	15,904	9,886
Subtotal:	23,944	24,661	48,605	47,081	32,397
Tak					
Mae La	24,441	24,420	48,861	45,987	27,027
Umpiem Mai	8,656	9,131	17,787	16,811	10,762
Nu Po	7,895	7,870	15,765	14,943	8,708
Subtotal:	40,993	41,421	82,414	77,741	46,497
Kanchanaburi					
Ban Don Yang	1,987	1,846	3,833	3,637	2,724
Ratchaburi					
Tham Hin	3,794	3,548	7,342	6,576	4,258
Total:	71,015	71,763	142,778	135,619	85,876

IDP camps ⁵	Female	Male	Total	Ethnicity ⁶
Loi Kaw Wan	1,537	1,466	3,003	78.8% Karen
Loi Sam Sip	192	250	442	9.5% Karenni
Loi Lam	136	134	270	3.9% Burman
Loi Tai Lang	1,163	1,409	2,572	1.0% Mon
Ee Tu Hta	1,978	1,966	3,944	0.5% Shan
Halockhanti	1,836	1,794	3,630	0.4% Rakhine
Bee Ree	1,767	1,816	3,583	0.4% Chin
Total:	8,609	8,835	17,444	0.3% Kachin 5.2% Other

Notes:

1. The Verified caseload includes all persons verified as living in the camps and eligible for rations, registered or not (including students). It excludes all previously verified residents now permanently out of camp.
2. Rations are provided only to those personally attending distributions. The Feeding Figure is the actual number of beneficiaries recorded as having collected food rations this month.
3. MOI/UNHCR figures are registered refugees. Most new arrivals since 2005 are not registered. UNHCR records an additional 248 people who have been submitted to the Provincial Admission Boards (PABs).
4. Includes Kayah.
5. Population figures for IDP camps are derived from camp committees on a monthly or quarterly basis depending on accessibility.
6. From TBBC Population Database of verified caseload; IDP camps excluded.

Source: TBBC, 2012d. <http://www.tbtc.org/camps/2012-06-jun-map-tbbc-unhcr.pdf>

APPENDIX B

List of conducted interviews

Key-informant Interviews					
Nr. Of Interview	Date	Location	Interviewee	Translat or (Yes/No)	Research Method used
1	17.04.2012	Chiang Mai	Founder of Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN)	No	Semi-structured interview
2	17.04.2012	Chiang Mai	Emergency Relief Coordinator for the Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC)	No	Semi-structured interview
3	26.04.2012	Mae La	Mae La camp committee member	Yes	Semi-structured interview
4	24.05.2012	Bangkok	Regional Communication Advocacy Officer for <i>Jesuit Refugee Service</i> (JRS)	No	Semi-structured interview
5	10.06.2012	Mae Sot	Senior health coordinator for International Rescue Committee (Thailand) (IRS)	No	Semi-structured interview
6	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Researcher at the Mae Tao Clinic	No	Semi-structured interview
7	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Burma Issues	No	Semi-structured interview
8	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)	No	Semi-structured interview
9	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Director of the Hsar Thu Lay School / Migrant school	No	Semi-structured interview
10	13.06.2012	Mae Sot	Director of the Backpack Doctors	Yes	Semi-structured interview
11	25.06.2012	Yangon	Person working on migration and	No	Semi-structured interview

			displacement issues		
12	25.06.2012	Yangon	Person working on migration and displacement issues	No	Semi-structured interview
13	26.06.2012	Yangon	Person working on migration and displacement issues	No	Semi-structured interview
14	27.06.2012	Yangon	Person working on migration and displacement issues	No	Semi-structured interview
15	28.06.2012	Yangon	Person working on migration and displacement issues	No	Semi-structured interview
16	29.06.2012	Yangon	Karen Women's Action Group (KWAG)	No	Semi-structured interview
17	30.06.2012	Yangon	Migration Researcher	No	Semi-structured interview
18	03.07.2012	Mae Sot	CIDKP	No	Semi-structured interview
19	04.07.2012	Mae Sot	TBBC	No	Semi-structured interview
20	05.07.2012	Mae Sot	Doctor - Mae Tao Clinic	No	Semi-structured interview
21	05.07.2012	Mae Sot	Staff member I- Mae Tao Clinic	No	Semi-structured interview
22	05.07.2012	Mae Sot	Staff member II- Mae Tao Clinic	No	Semi-structured interview
23	08.07.2012	Bangkok	Advisor for a Refugee and IDP organization in Myanmar	No	Semi-structured interview

Target population interviews					
Nr. Of Interview	Date	Location	Interviewee	Translat or (Yes/No)	Research Method used
1	11.06.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced woman-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
2	11.06.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced man-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
3	11.06.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced woman-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
4	11.06.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced man-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
5	11.06.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced woman-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
6	11.06.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced man-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
7	11.06.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced woman-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
8	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Female migrant worker	Yes	In-depth interview
9	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Female migrant worker	Yes	In-depth interview
10	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Female migrant worker	Yes	In-depth interview
11	12.06.2012	Mae Sot	Male migrant worker	Yes	In-depth interview
12	13.06.2012	Mae Sot - Migrant school	Male migrant student	No	In-depth interview
13	13.06.2012	Mae Sot - Migrant school	Female migrant student	No	In-depth interview
14	13.06.2012	Mae Sot - Migrant school	Female migrant student	No	In-depth interview
15	04.07.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced couple - resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview

16	04.07.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced man-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
17	04.07.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced woman-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
18	04.07.2012	Mae La shelter	Displaced woman-resident of the shelter	Yes	In-depth interview
19	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Male patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
20	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Male patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
21	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Male patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
22	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Male patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
23	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Female patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
24	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Female patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
25	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Female patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
26	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Female patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
27	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Female patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
28	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Female patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview
29	05.07.2012	Mae Tao Clinic- Mae Sot	Female patient of the clinic	Yes	In-depth interview

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured interview questions

- ❖ What, in your opinion, are the main reasons for displacement in Myanmar?
- ❖ Do IDPs have the option to choose whether to stay in Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand or are they forced by their communities or families or army (KNU) to make this decision?
- ❖ What are the main reasons why IDPs decided to cross the border to Thailand?
- ❖ Why do some IDPs decide to stay in Myanmar and face several displacements before deciding to cross the border to Thailand?
- ❖ Which factors influence the decision of crossing the border?
- ❖ Do you think that the geographical proximity of the Karen state plays an important role when deciding to cross the border to Thailand, especially to the Mae Sot area?
- ❖ What are the opportunities for the displaced persons that move to the temporary shelters in Thailand in comparison to the opportunities of staying in Myanmar?
- ❖ Where do you think conditions of livelihoods are better, in the temporary shelters in Thailand or in the IDP camps in Myanmar? What are the major differences?
- ❖ In general, do you think if the situation in Myanmar continues to improve, that many displaced persons living in the temporary shelters will return? Please explain your answer. How long/ how many years do you think the “return” process of the displaced persons in Thailand to Myanmar will take?
- ❖ In your opinion is the Myanmar Government ready to support the displaced population, and if yes how?
- ❖ How could the policies change (in Myanmar and in Thailand) and how helpful could the international guidelines such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the 1951 Refugee Convention be?

APPENDIX D

In-depth interview questions

- ❖ When did you arrive in Mae La/ Mae Sot? From where/ which village are you originally in Myanmar??
- ❖ Did you come alone or with your family or community to Mae La/ Mae Sot?
- ❖ How many times have you been displaced in Myanmar before coming to Thailand?
- ❖ Why did you leave from country? Why did you decide to come to Mae La/ Mae Sot?
- ❖ Were you able to choose whether to stay in Myanmar or to cross the border to Thailand or were your decisions controlled/ constrained by your community/family or by the army (KNU)?
- ❖ Did you have friends or relatives that were already living here in Mae La/ Mae Sot before you came? How important were the networks with family/friends for your decision to cross the border to Thailand?
- ❖ What information about the situation in Thailand did you have?
- ❖ How important a role does your Karen ethnic group, community or village play in the decision to come to Mae La/ Mae Sot?
- ❖ Do you think the decision making process has changed over time (for example in the last years with the possibility of resettlement in a third country and after 2005 with the Thai restrictions)?
- ❖ Are you planning to return to your country in the near future and why?
- ❖ What would need to change for you in order to take the decision to go back to your country?

In-depth interviews with migrant workers

- ❖ When did you arrive here in Mae Sot?
- ❖ Did you live in a temporary shelter before becoming a migrant worker?
- ❖ If not: Why did you choose to become a migrant worker here in Mae Sot and not a displaced person living in a temporary shelter?
- ❖ Do you think if the situation in your country continues to improve and if there are more jobs opportunities you will return? Please explain.
- ❖ What would need to change for you in order to make the decision to go back to your country?

APPENDIX E

Number of persons that were resettled from January 2006 to February 2012

<u>List of Resettlement from Mae La Camp</u> <u>From January 2006 to February 2012</u>			
NO.	Host Countries	No.of Resettled Refugees	Remark
1	USA	28,482	
2	AUSTRALIA	2,461	
3	NORWAY	154	
4	UK	73	
5	NEW ZEALAND	124	
6	CANADA	82	
7	NETHERLANDS	33	
8	SWEDEN	46	
9	JAPAN	45	
10	FINLAND	1	
11	BELGIUM	1	
12	IRELAND	1	
TOTAL		31,503	

Source: Mae La Temporary Shelter Authorities, 2012, p. 13

APPENDIX F

Pictures of Mae La Temporary Shelter



Source: Carolina Brill. Mae La, April 2012



Source: Carolina Brill. Mae La, July 2012



Source: Carolina Brill. Mae La, July 2012



Source: Carolina Brill. Mae La, June 2012



Source: Carolina Brill, Mae La, April 2012



Source: Carolina Brill, Mae La, April 2012

BIOGRAPHY

Miss Carolina Brill was born in Bogotá, Colombia. In 1999 she moved with her family to Frankfurt, Germany, where she finished her high school studies. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Geography from the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. During her studies she had the opportunity to do different internships in organizations such as UNOSAT, UNDP and GIZ. During her Bachelor's thesis, Ms. Brill started showing interest in the issues of migration and therefore she focused on the topic of Internal Displacement in Colombia. After graduation, she moved to Panama to do an internship with IOM, where she was able to visit the refugee areas at the Panama-Colombian border. After three months of the internship she was hired as a project assistant to provide technical support and advice to Colombian migrants. In September 2011, she was accepted to do her Master's degree in International Development Studies at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok and she will be graduating with a Master of Arts degree in September 2012.