

# Migrants' Hopes for Longer Stay in Thailand: Gender and Social Space

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## **Abstract**

Thailand has been Southeast Asia's primary migration hub for the past three decades. Although government policies assume that migrants stay temporarily and only for the time they have official permission, Thai policies, and regulations do not seem to stop migrants from staying longer. This study investigates factors related to migrants' hopes to stay in Thailand longer than officially permitted by focusing on gender and social space. This study examines the hope for a more extended stay in Thailand of migrants from the three neighboring countries, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia, and the relationship between gender, social space of migrants, and expected years of stay. The results show that the hopes of migrants regarding their length of stay varied according to several factors, including gender, age, nationality, type of work, duration of stay in Thailand, and social space. Overall, the average length of stay for migrants was 5.4 years. Regarding social space, it was found that women migrants have more outstanding average social space scores than men.

**Keywords:** Migration, Social space, Temporary migration, Permanent migration, Thailand

## **Introduction**

Due to economic growth in the past three decades, Thailand has become more economically developed than neighboring countries, such as Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. At the same time, Thai labor requirements have shifted from unskilled labor to skilled labor (International Organization for Migration and Asian Research Center, 2013). Thailand has been attracting large numbers of workers from neighboring countries since the early 1990s. In 1992, Thai policy allowed registration of workers from Myanmar in ten Thai provinces along the border and has expanded to include workers in low-skilled occupations from Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic in all provinces of Thailand. (Huguet & Chamrathirong, 2014). Over the past three decades, work permits have been issued for only one or two years and the government seems not aware of the nature of migrant stays. Data on the desire of migrants to stay in Thailand, or their hopes to stay, is very limited.

“Longer stay” in this study refers to the duration that migrant workers hope to stay beyond the time when they were interviewed. This study was conducted to fill a gap in the data by examining the hope of migrants for longer stays in Thailand leading to a better understanding that could inform later policy decisions.

Labor from neighboring countries has increased dramatically in Thailand since 1996, following a 1996 cabinet resolution that enabled the registration of undocumented migrant workers (Achavanitkul, 2007, p.17-23). Regulations to manage undocumented migrant workers were implemented as various cabinet resolutions, and according to Achavanitkul (ibid.), they covered three main periods. In the first period, 1996-2000, the registration of undocumented migrant workers from Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia covered labor only and allowed workers to work only in selected provinces. They could work in Thailand for up to two years in only seven sectors (agriculture, fisheries, construction, mining, coal, transportation, and manufacturing), which were later expanded to include domestic service and other sectors. During the second period, 2001-2003, the guidelines for managing foreign workers from the three countries changed significantly. A cabinet resolution in August 2001 made the regulations more relaxed for migrant workers by allowing them to enter the country to register to work in all provinces and all categories. During the third period, 2004-2008, as a result of an April 2004 cabinet resolution, the registration of workers also included their dependents over the age of one. The migrant workers also had to report notification of death and relocation, just as Thai citizens did. Migrant worker registration included a document called Tho Ro. 38/1 and a 13-digit identification card with numbers beginning with 00. In a 2005 cabinet resolution, the government allowed migrant workers who had work permits to renew their visas for another year (the workers named in the existing Tho Ro. 38/1). Also, it allowed new migrant workers to apply for a Tho Ro. 38/1.

In 2014, the government, under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), adopted an urgent policy to solve the problem of migrant workers and human trafficking by requiring the establishment of a one-stop foreign worker registration service center to issue temporary work permits to workers of three countries, namely Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. In February 2016, the Government of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) adopted a cabinet resolution instructing the Department of Employment to allow foreign workers from these countries to arrange temporary work permits (pink cards) and provide evidence of their citizenship. The pink cards allowed migrant workers to live and work in Thailand for two years. In 2018, the government announced an increase in penalties from 400,000 to 800,000 baht per alien worker for employers who have violated the law by hiring an alien worker without a work permit (Foreign Workers Administration Office, 2018).

In September 2018, the number of registered migrants from Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia holding a passport for their country and a work permit for Thailand was 2,127,253, while the number of migrants in the country under the cabinet resolutions of 16 January 2018 and 27 March 2018 was 1,187,803, including 777,217 Myanmar migrants, 350,840 Cambodian migrants and 59,746 Lao Migrants (Department of Employment, 2018). The discrepancy between the number of migrants holding required documents (2.13 million) and the number of

migrants in the country under the cabinet resolution (1.19 million) is because some migrants have only one document type, while others hold both types. Given this discrepancy, it is almost impossible to accurately show the migrant situation in Thailand from official Thai government statistics.

Boonchalaksi et al. (2012), in a study based on two surveys among migrant workers in Thailand in 2004 and 2008, sought evidence showing the possibility that permanent settlement of migrants from neighboring countries had begun. The study showed that the mean duration of residence in Thailand among respondents in the 2008 survey was 5.7 years, an increase from 4.2 years in the 2004 survey. The mean duration of stay of all Myanmar migrants was 6.2 years in 2008 and nine years for those in Chiang Mai and Tak provinces. The study also showed that more than one-third of all female respondents in the surveys in 2008 had children, and more than one-fourth of them had a child born in Thailand. Boonchalaksi et al. (ibid) argued that Thai policies assume that low-skilled migrant workers come as individuals and stay temporary. Work permits are issued for only one or two years, which may not reflect the actual circumstances of migrant workers in the country. Harkins (2019) argued that Thai policy for migrant workers does not address critical challenges, including a lack of social cohesion. This refers to the fact that although some efforts to integrate migrants into Thai society better have been made, such as more access to public services, there are still concerns that migration policy essentially treats migrants as only a temporary source of labor.

Although the studies mentioned above showed data on the actual duration of stay of migrants, the understanding of and reflections on their hopes of staying in Thailand are limited. Most Thai governments have treated migrants as having only temporary mobility. This study examines the hope for longer stays in Thailand on the part of migrants from the three neighboring countries, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. It examines the relationship between gender, the social space of migrants and their expected length of stay.

### **The concepts of migration, mobility, gender, and social space**

Migration and mobility have become more important worldwide, reflecting the increase in people's freedom of movement from one place to another (Urry, 2011, p. 3). The concepts of migration and spatial mobility are essential in understanding the dynamics of the world. Migration (the physical movement of an individual from one political entity to another) affects and is affected by systems of relationships at various levels: family, household, community, country, and international. All these connection systems are essential influences on the flow of migration (King & Skeldon, 2010, p.1640).

The concept of migration and spatial mobility has evolved continuously. In the information technology era over the past two decades, the idea of space and place has been widely applied to migration analysis. Mobility, therefore, means the movement of people or things from one place to another and the creation of new producers and power (Cresswell, 2006) or a 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Sheller and Urry (2006) define the 'new mobilities paradigm' as an increase in various new types of mobility that have increased throughout the world, either individual physical or visual and virtual mobility. They

point out that social sciences still need to adequately examine the various spatial aspects of social life and the images and forms of communications on the move, or potentially on the move, which structure modern social life. Conlon (2011) emphasizes that the contexts of the new mobilities paradigm, which place and distribute people, ideas, and objects broadly across space and time, have become characteristic features of global society and require more attention to mobilities as discrete and relational units of analysis. Faist (2013, p. 1638), in a transnational approach, suggests social space is crucial to capture flows across boundaries, such as borders; while the network society approach focuses on global and local binary connections that are closely linked with mobility either of people, capital, goods or information.

This study focuses on gender and its significance in mobility. Some studies have pointed out that women's mobility is restricted because of women's reproductive responsibilities (Mandel, 2004; Porter, 2011). Understanding mobility and immobility is crucial in framing gender as a social and cultural construct (Cresswell & Uteng, 2008). Mobility can empower women because it is a means of access to opportunity that enables people, particularly women, to get to new places and destinations for education, health, and work (Mandel, 2004). Rigg (2007) pointed out from his findings in Lao PDR that some women migrate to escape the hard work of upland farming, realizing that agricultural work cannot provide a sustainable livelihood. A study on Myanmar women migrant workers in Mae Sot, on the border of Thailand, by Kusakabe and Pearson (2016) reveals that the border provides not only flexibility for living, and freedom to exercise agency for migrant women workers. This freedom also, ironically, comes with more robust surveillance of their behavior and weaker protection for their safety. At the border, the state cannot control migrant workers by registering them to access social services. A study on women migrant workers from Myanmar in Thailand (Khumya, 2018) shows that although migrants face many difficulties with Thai law and regulations, and with the anti-migrant prejudices of Thai people, they grow a strong sense of place toward Thailand, their workplace, and new home. This sense of place helps motivate them to stay in Thailand longer. A study on human rights violations experienced by migrants from Myanmar to Thailand (Meyer et al., 2019) showed that female migrants were at more risk of sexual violence and abuse during migration and in workplaces than men. However, experiences of workplace exploitation, such as being forced to work when sick without pay and salary withholding, were not significantly different between women and men. With its focus on gender and mobility, this study examines how gender is associated with the length of time women and men migrants hope to stay in Thailand.

Regarding social space, Lefebvre (1991) stressed that space is not just a geographic feature and is not neutral; but a battleground of various societal powers. Space is produced and reproduced in various social areas depending on the power of the creator group. Therefore, social space is diverse and is caused by the production of society and culture in each period and culture. Social space is created by interacting with nature, geography, climate, and production power through technical knowledge and production relations under historical conditions. Migration always has the potential to challenge established spatial relationships. Migration is related to the social nature of space as something created and reproduced through

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collective human agency. Social space also involves the limits imposed by societal power and existing spatial arrangements that are always susceptible to change (Rouse, 1991).

Social space, therefore, is crucial in mobility studies. Freedom in society could be a simple concern for social space and mobility. Migrants would be able to stay at their destinations longer if they hold the freedom to move, act and participate in activities of the society that they live in. Social spaces can be defined as configurations of social practices that can be defined by their density and importance in time and geographic space, such as people's everyday life (living in households, going to school or work). At the same time, social space can also refer to these phenomena on a national or civilization level. In a new environment, migrants may create their place as an essential strategic response to the alienation, isolation and uncertainty experienced by newcomers, helping to cement new identities and sustain and empower marginalized migrant communities (Phillips & Robinson, 2015).

The attention to place and social space, especially regarding freedom and limitation of stays at the destination, has appeared in some studies on migration in Southeast Asia and Thailand. Bylander (2019) analyzed data collected from Cambodian, Myanmar, Laotian and Vietnamese labor migrants who returned from Thailand and found that migrants moving through documented channels reported better pay and working conditions than those who moved through irregular channels. However, many documented migrants also reported that their working conditions and contracts did not meet legal standards. Sampson et al. (2020) interviewed 49 Cambodian workers in Thailand and found that all respondents claimed that a working permit document was the most crucial thing to make them feel safe in Thailand. With a working permit, they had more protection from the law, giving their employers the power to act unlawfully, dishonestly, and, at times, inhumanely.

Although the concept of social space is now widely accepted by social scientists, indicators for the study of social space are still quite abstract. This is in part because social space has an abstract meaning that is difficult to measure. Wiley et al. (2010) used assemblage theory to posit that four basic concepts are important in studying social space: assemblages, networks, activities and subjects. Subjects are individuals or collectives "who perceive, experience, and define reality from a particular perspective and position within relations of power". Assemblages link subjects via networks and activities to particular arrangements of things to do something. Networks are the virtual links – social, geographical, and communication – that connect subjects to assemblages. Activities are the everyday practices that the subject carries out (alone or with others) and are "actualizations of networks."

Therefore, the concept of social space used in this study refers to all the means and results of individual and collective social practice through interpersonal interaction between subjects and various networks and assemblages. This social space encompasses both freedom and the scope of life in society, all within relationships of power and the position of subjects in those relationships. The questions of social space adapted from Wiley et al. (2010) include 1) rights at work, 2) welfare from employers, 3) satisfaction with current work, 4) networking with other migrants, 5) joining activities with other migrants and with Thais, 6) Thai people's biases regarding migrants, 7) use of space, 8) relaxation, 9) sense of place that are opinions

towards Thailand compared to their home country and pride in working in Thailand, and 10) problems associated with working in Thailand.

### **Methodology**

Structured interviews were used in this study, with the interview guidelines translated into Myanmar, Lao, and Cambodian. Structured interviews are appropriate for quantitative data analysis, allowing interviewees to answer and express their feelings fully. In collecting data, Myanmar and Cambodian interviewers were hired to interview migrant workers, while Thai interviewers were employed to interview Lao migrant workers. There were difficulties in finding Lao migrant workers to interview because many Lao migrant workers are fluent in Thai and try to hide the fact that they are migrants.

The data collection was conducted from July to September 2017. Due to the difficulties accessing migrants, and the refusal of some migrants to be interviewed, the sample size (278) was not large. Still, it was acceptable based on the formula of Yamane (1967, cited in Israel, 2012). According to that formula, a population over 100,000 calls for a sample size of 277 with a 6% precision level (sampling error) and a confidence level of 95%.

The proportion from each nationality interviewed was calculated according to the proportion of workers from each country in 2015, which was 557,529 migrants: 410,460 from Myanmar, 107,843 from Cambodia and 39,226 from Lao PDR. Therefore, the numbers interviewed were 150 from Myanmar, 76 from Cambodia, and 52 from Lao PDR. The sample selection criteria were migrant workers who worked in Thailand for at least three months and currently work in Bangkok and metropolitan areas.

The samples were selected by the snowball sampling method from large workplaces, such as Mahachai Market and migrant residential places in Samut Sakhon Province (65 respondents), and Talat Tai Market and migrant residential places in Nakorn Luang District, Pathum Thani Province (118 respondents), and various other workplaces and recreation places for migrant workers in Bangkok (95 respondents), such as markets, department stores, and recruitment companies. In obtaining samples in Samut Sakhon, the study collaborated with the Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN) to contact migrant workers and support translation.

In the data collection, the research tried to balance the gender of respondents, and various occupations. However, some male migrants refused to be interviewed. Thus, the number of female migrant respondents was higher (169 female respondents, 109 male respondents). Regarding the documents for migration, about two-thirds of the respondents (196 respondents) had passports, 82 respondents did not, 210 respondents held work permits, and 68 respondents did not.

As for the obstacles and problems in collecting data, it was found that interviews with Lao migrant workers were more complex than other nationalities. Some Lao workers would not reveal that they were from Lao PDR. While collecting data on Myanmar and Cambodian workers interviewed by foreign workers, there may have been a problem with the accuracy of data since the Thai fieldwork supervisors might have needed help understanding the

interviewees. However, this research made a great effort to control the data quality as much as possible.

## Findings

### Characteristics of migrants and the hope to stay longer

Table 1 shows the characteristics of migrant workers from the survey. About 61 percent of the interviewers were female, while 39 percent were male. Due to proportional sampling based on the number of migrants in Thailand, 53.9 percent of the migrant interviewees were Myanmar nationals (Myanmar-Mon, 79 respondents, Myanmar-Burman, 45 respondents, Myanmar-Karen, 19 respondents, Myanmar-Shan, 7 respondents), followed by 27.3 percent Cambodians and 18.7 percent Laotians.

The youngest interviewee was 16 years old, and the oldest was 56. In terms of education, high school graduates were the highest proportion, 48.6 percent, followed by 32.0 percent at the primary school level, 16.2 percent with no formal education, and 2.5 percent at the undergraduate level. Most workers, 61.9 percent, were married, while 34.9 percent were single, and 3.2 percent were divorced or widowed.

Regarding current work, it was found that 41.4 percent were employed in shops, markets, or restaurants, followed by work in factories or the seafood industry, 28.1 percent, general or agricultural employment, 20.1 percent, and construction workers and housework or cleaning work accounted for 10.4 percent.

In terms of income, it was found that interviewees had an average income of 10,708 baht per month. Workers with incomes between 5,000 and 9,999 baht per month accounted for 38.8 percent of those interviewed; 42.1 percent had monthly payments between 10,000 and 14,999 baht; and 15.1 percent had payments over 15,000 baht per month.

**Table 1** Number and percentage of labor characteristics

Characteristic of labor		Number	Percent
<b>Gender</b>			
	male	109	39.2
	female	169	60.8
<b>Nationality and ethnicity</b>			
	Myanmar	150	55.9
	Cambodian	76	27.3
	Lao PDR	52	18.7
<b>Age</b>			
	16-19 year	22	7.9
	20-29 year	137	49.3
	30-39 year	79	28.4
	40-49 year	35	12.6

Characteristic of labor	Number	Percent
50-56 year Min=16 Max=56 Mean=29.2	5	1.8
<b>Education</b>		
No education	45	16.2
Primary school	89	32.0
Secondary school	135	48.6
Bachelor's degree and over	7	2.5
No answers	2	0.7
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	97	34.9
Married	172	61.9
Divorced/separated	7	2.5
Widowed	2	0.7
<b>Type of work*</b>		
Working in a shop/in a market/ restaurant	115	41.4
Working in a factory/ fishery or seafood industry	78	28.1
General labor /working in agriculture/ Construction work/ Own enterprise	56	20.1
Housework/ Cleaning work	29	10.4
<b>Monthly income</b>		
<5,000 baht	5	1.8
5,000-9,999 baht	108	38.8
10,000-14,999 baht	117	42.1
15,000 baht and over	42	15.1
No answers	6	2.2
Mean=10,708 Median=10,200		
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**\*Note:** For Myanmar, employment in factories accounted for 45.3 percent, general labor 22.0 percent, work in shops/markets 14.0 percent, and housework/cleaning 18.7 percent. For Cambodian workers, employment in shops/markets accounted for 85.5 percent, and general labor for 14.5 percent. For Lao workers, employment in shops/markets accounted for 42.3 percent, general labor 23.1 percent, work in factories 19.2 percent, and housework/cleaning 15.4 percent.

Table 2 contains data on the interviewees' current and expected lengths of stay. Those who had been in Thailand for over 10 years accounted for 29.1 percent, with the average length of stay being 7.1 years. For reasons to come to work in Thailand, almost half (47.5 percent) replied that it was easy to find jobs, followed by excellent income (36.7 percent), earning



money for family expenses or repayment of debt (5.4 percent), and persuasion by a friend or relatives (4.3 percent).

Regarding the desired length of stay of migrants in Thailand, which is the main focus of this study, about one-fourth of migrant workers planned to stay only one or two years. Almost a quarter of them has hoped to stay more than ten years and more than third expected lengths of stay between 3 and 9 years. Interestingly, over 15 percent did not plan yet how long they wanted to stay in Thailand.

**Table 2** Number and percentage of the duration of stay in Thailand, reason, and expected years of stay in Thailand

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
<b>Duration of stay in Thailand</b>		
0-4 year	108	38.8
5-9 year	89	32.0
10 year and over	81	29.1
Min = less than 1 year, Mean=7.1 years, Max =27 years		
<b>Reason for working in Thailand</b>		
Easy to find a job	132	47.5
High income	102	36.7
earning money for family expenses /for tuition fees of children/ for debt	15	5.4
Have been persuaded by friends or relatives	12	4.3
Wanted to have experiences in Thailand/want to see Thailand	9	3.2
Followed the family or sibling	5	1.8
No answers	3	1.1
<b>Duration of the expected length of stay in Thailand</b>		
1-2 year	73	26.3
3-4 year	44	15.8
5-9 year	55	19.8
Over 10 years	63	22.6
No answer	43	15.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### **Migrants' hopes for longer stay in Thailand**

Table 3 shows that the hope of migrants on length of stay varied according to several factors, including gender, age, nationality, type of work, income, how long they have already been in Thailand, and social space. Overall, the average length of stay of migrants hoped was

5.4 years, although the average valid length of stay permitted by the Royal Thai Immigration Bureau is only two years. Interestingly, female migrants planned to stay in Thailand significantly longer than male migrants: 6.2 years versus 4.1 years. Migrants over 40 tend to plan to remain for shorter periods than younger migrants. Male migrants aged 40-49 wanted to stay only 2.75 years longer, while female migrants in the same age group wanted to stay 5.06 years longer.

Nationality was significantly related to the hope of migrants to stay. Lao migrants planned to stay in Thailand for 8.3 years on average, followed by Myanmar migrants who planned to stay for 5.1 years and Cambodia migrants who planned to stay only for 3.8 years. Considering the type of work, those working in factories or fisheries planned to stay in Thailand the longest, 6.5 years, followed by working as house workers (6.2 years), while those working in shops or markets planned to stay only for 4.3 years.

Interestingly, migrants with high incomes designed to stay shorter than other migrants who earned less. Migrants who made 15,000 baht per month or more were designed to stay in Thailand for about four years, while migrants who earned the least, less than 10,000 baht per month, hoped to last 6.1 years on average, which is longer than any other income group. However, for male migrants, income seemed not to affect their hopes of the length of stay in Thailand as much as compared to female migrants. In contrast to female migrants, for example, female migrants with the lowest incomes, less than 10,000 baht per month, planned to stay Thailand for seven years on average, while male migrants in the same category planned to stay in Thailand for only three years. This might be because women tend to remit more money home than men (Deelen and Vasuprasat, 2010, p. 10), which implies that female migrants with low payments may plan to stay longer until they can gain higher incomes and have more cash to remit to their families in their home countries.

Migrants who had been in Thailand for over five years tended to hope to continue to stay longer than migrants who had arrived within the past four years. This may be because migrants who have lived in Thailand for some years are better adjusted to Thailand and have more information on how to continue living in terms of social life and legal matters. For example, in a residential area in Samut Sakhon Province, migrant workers from Myanmar lived in the same building with 30 rooms. Interviews said all knew each other and helped each other in their daily living, finding jobs and in the migrant document processes. These results clearly show that the government should consider more realistically the actual aspects of migration. Thai policy should provide more significant benefits for longer staying migrants who have developed skills in their work rather than trying to prevent them from staying longer. Longer staying migrant workers have gained more and higher-level skills than newer migrants. Most Thai policies on migration from neighboring countries, however, seem to take into account only new short-term migrants and neglect the fact that migrants tend to live in Thailand longer than two years once they become used to the Thai environment and learn how to function effectively in it.

This study used a social space score adapted from Wiley et al. (2010) as an index using 10 main factors comprised of 52 questions addressing areas mentioned above-1) rights at work,

2) welfare from employers, 3) satisfaction with current work, 4) networking with other migrants, 5) joining activities with other migrants and with Thais, 6) Thai people's biases regarding migrants, 7) use of space, 8) relaxation, 9) sense of place, which are opinions towards Thailand compared to their home country, pride in working in Thailand, and 10) problems associated with working in Thailand. Women migrants have more outstanding average social space scores than men. When analyzing the relationship of social space with hopes for a longer stay in Thailand, controlling for gender, social space was seen to be much more important for female migrants. Female migrants with high social space scores, categorized by the median, hoped to stay in Thailand for two years longer than females with low social space. By contrast, for male migrants, high social space increased the expectation to stay in Thailand by less than one year, compared to male migrants with low social space scores.

**Table 3** The average of the expected length of stay

Characteristics of migrants	Male			Female			Total		
	Mean	n	std.	Mean	n	Std.	Mean	n	std.
<b>Age</b>									
16-19	4.17	6	3.60	5.08	13	3.66	4.79	19	3.57
20-29	4.28	43	3.00	6.57	70	5.21	5.70	113	4.62
30-39	4.92	26	3.53	6.53	43	4.51	5.93	69	4.21
40-49	2.75	12	1.60	5.06	17	3.60	4.13	29	3.12
50-56	1.00	3	0.00	1.50	2	0.71	1.2	5	0.45
F-test=2.429 Sig.=0.049									
<b>Education</b>									
Uneducated	6.20	10	3.91	6.83	29	4.43	6.67	39	4.26
primary school	3.91	22	2.94	5.98	52	5.27	5.36	74	4.78
secondary school	3.98	53	3.02	5.80	61	4.06	4.96	114	3.71
Bachelor degree	3.00	4	1.41	15.00	2	7.07	7.00	6	7.04
F-test=1.842 sig.=.140									
<b>Nationalities</b>									
Myanmar	3.64	45	2.82	6.11	73	5.02	5.17	118	4.47
Cambodian	3.81	37	2.26	3.79	33	2.63	3.80	70	2.42
Lao	8.50	8	4.66	8.33	39	4.54	8.36	47	4.51
F-test=18.849 Sig.=0.000									
<b>Type of work</b>									
General labor /									
construction	4.64	14	4.25	6.04	25	3.81	5.54	39	3.98
Factory/ fisheries	5.22	23	3.23	7.17	48	5.54	6.54	71	4.97
House workers/cleaning	1.00	1	0.00	6.42	26	5.32	6.22	27	5.32
Work in shops or market	3.60	52	2.55	5.09	46	3.63	4.30	98	3.18
F-test=4.376 Sig.=0.005									
<b>The Income per month (Baht)</b>									
<10000	3.38	24	1.76	7.03	69	5.58	6.09	93	5.58

Characteristics of migrants	Male			Female			Total		
	Mean	n	std.	Mean	n	Std.	Mean	n	std.
10000-14999	4.89	37	3.71	5.55	66	3.66	5.31	103	3.67
15000 and over	3.77	26	2.69	4.50	10	3.31	3.97	36	2.84
F-test=3.303 sig.= 0.039									
<b>Duration of stay in Thailand</b>									
0-4 years	3.79	42	3.25	4.80	50	4.81	4.34	92	4.18
5-9 years	4.05	21	2.87	6.93	54	4.34	6.12	75	4.18
10 years +	4.78	27	3.03	6.88	41	4.79	6.04	68	4.28
F-test= 4.833 Sig.=0.009									
<b>Social space</b>									
Low social space	3.98	53	3.27	4.96	56	3.82	4.49	109	3.58
High social space	4.38	37	2.85	6.94	89	5.06	6.19	126	4.66
F-test=9.631 Sig.=0.002									
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.14</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>3.10</b>	<b>6.18</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>5.40</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>4.27</b>
F-test=13.24 Sig.=0.000									

**Note:** The analysis excludes those cases with no answer.

### Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for the desired length of stay in Thailand of migrants

Table 4 presents multiple linear regression analysis for the length of time that migrants plan to stay by using the Enter Method with eight independent variables. Age, education, gender, nationality, salary, type of work, number of years living in Thailand, and social space scores were continuous variables. Gender (female, male), work in a market (yes, no), and nationality (Myanmar, Cambodian, Lao) were coded as dummy variables. The correlation matrix has been checked to assess the degree of multicollinearity, with all correlation coefficients between variables being lower than 0.8, indicating no significant multicollinearity problem (Gujarati & Porter, 2009, p. 337-338).

It was found that these independent variables in the model accounted for 21.5 percent of differences in the planned length of stay of migrants, which was highly statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ). The variables most influencing the desired length of stay are nationality, years living in Thailand, and social space scores. Nationality (mainly being Lao) had the highest effect on the desired length of stay ( $\beta = .336$ ), followed by the number of years living in Thailand ( $\beta = .145$ ) and social space ( $\beta = .134$ ).

The B coefficient of 2.884 for Lao nationality means if all other independent variables are controlled, Lao migrants hope to stay in Thailand almost three years longer than migrants from Myanmar. In comparison, Cambodian migrants hope to stay in Thailand slightly less than migrants from Myanmar (-0.117 years). Because the Lao language and culture are pretty similar to the Thai language and culture, Lao migrants can probably adapt themselves more easily to Thai society. However, the number of years already living in Thailand also affects the desired further length of stay in Thailand with longer stays predicting hopes for longer desired

future lengths of stay. Lastly, the degree of social space (freedom and scope of life in society) also significantly and consistently affects the desired future length of stay.

**Table 4** Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for the length that migrants plan to stay in Thailand

Independent Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Age	-0.052	0.028	-0.126	-1.845	0.066
Education	-0.340	0.269	-0.078	-1.262	0.208
Female (female=1, male=0)	0.572	0.474	0.081	1.208	0.228
Nationality					
Cambodian	-0.117	0.687	-0.016	-0.171	0.865
Lao*	<b>2.884</b>	<b>-0.615</b>	<b>0.336</b>	<b>4.690</b>	<b>0.000</b>
(Myanmar is the reference group)					
Work in shop/market (work in shop/market=1, other=0)	-1.042	0.581	-0.151	-1.794	0.074
Salary	0.099	0.076	0.091	1.298	0.196
Number of years living in Thailand*	<b>0.092</b>	<b>0.046</b>	<b>0.145</b>	<b>2.010</b>	<b>0.046</b>
Social space*	<b>0.078</b>	<b>0.037</b>	<b>0.134</b>	<b>2.105</b>	<b>0.036</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>3.841</b>	<b>1.541</b>		<b>2.493</b>	<b>0.013</b>

N=224 (The number of cases does not include 'no answer' and extreme answer.)

**R=0.497 R<sup>2</sup> = 0.215 SEE =3.02928**

**F =7.798 P≤0.001**

**\* significant at P≤0.05**

**Note:** The analysis excludes those cases with no answer.

### Conclusion and discussions

Through the lens of gender and social space, this study identifies some essential realities of migration from neighboring countries. The average duration of stay of migrants is 7.1 years, and they hope to stay an average of 5.4 years longer, which is significantly longer than the two years that the government expects them to stay. In addition, those who have been in Thailand for a long time prefer to stay in Thailand even longer. For instance, migrants who have lived in Thailand for over 10 years hope to stay an average of six more years (Table 3). This represents a situation that could lead to permanent settlement as discussed by (Boonchalaksi et al., 2012).

This study should lead policymakers to pay more attention to long-term and permanent migration, not only short-term migration. The government should allow work permits for five years, although that is still far from the average number of years of stay and hope to stay as found in this study. The government should also concern itself with the welfare that long-term and/or permanent migrants will need, and it needs to budget for providing that welfare in the long term. Health insurance should be required for migrant workers and available at a reasonable price, paid by themselves or their employers, with a fair fee. These considerations involve human rights issues, nation's security, and future government budget constraints. In practice, the government has always limited the duration of stay to up to two years' for national security and to protect Thai citizens in terms of job opportunities, work competency, and economic status given as the reason. This study shows that the limitation of two years for migrants does not work in practice. It is only creating difficulties for migrant workers and forces them to rely on labor brokers to circumvent official rules (Khumya, 2018).

Fundamental statistical analysis using an F-test shows that the factors most related to the expectations of migrants to stay in Thailand in the future are gender, social space, nationality, type of work, income, and current duration of stay in Thailand. Gender issues remain crucial in studies on migration. Male and female migrants have different, social expectations. For instance, the findings show that female migrants with the lowest incomes hope to stay in Thailand for about seven more years, while this was only three years for male migrants in the same category. Thus, the desire of women to stay longer (to save more money to send remittances, for example (Deelen & Vasuprasat, 2010, p.10), could make them more vulnerable to workplace violence and other difficulties (Meyer et al., 2019).

However, using multiple linear regression analysis, only Lao nationality, the number of years living in Thailand, and social space statistically significantly, the expectation of the length of stay. Lao migrants are expected to stay longer than the two other nationalities. This could be because Lao migrants have fewer cultural and language barriers in adapting to Thailand. Apart from fewer language barriers, Lao migrants can perhaps build relationships with Thais more easily than migrants from other countries. They often even have many Lao friends or relatives in Thailand. Since language and culture are imperative, the government should also concern itself with these issues. For example, the migration document process and regulations must be made available in all languages for migrant workers.

Social space, defined in this study as both freedom and scope of life in society, all within relationships of power and the position of subjects in those relationships, is shown by this research to be a crucial concept in the study of migration and should be included as an integral part of future studies. For example, social space score was one of the few variables, along with Lao nationality and the number of years living in Thailand, that significantly influenced the hope of migrants to stay longer in Thailand. Migrants with higher social space scores are more likely to hope to stay in Thailand longer. Similarly, as Thongyou and Ayuwat (2005) point out, having social networks with people who have traveled to or worked in Thailand before is a significant factor in promoting a favorable migration decision and desire to stay in Thailand. Migrants who have lived longer in Thailand are more likely to hope to stay

even longer. This is because they become familiar with the environment and the difficulties of extending visas and work permits.

This research illustrates how social space, more than just social networks, is crucial in studying migration. Social space encompasses freedom and the full scope of life in society, which reflects the relationships of power and the position of migrants within those relationships. Migrants with greater social space scores are more empowered in their destination countries and are more likely to hope to stay longer.

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