



# Low-Skilled Migrant Workers in Upper North-eastern Thailand: A Study of Human Resource Underdevelopment

Phana Dullayaphut<sup>a\*</sup>, Saratid Sakulkoo<sup>b, a,b</sup>Udonthani Rajabhat University,  
Udonthani, Thailand, Email: <sup>a\*</sup>[phana\\_bizdoc@yahoo.com](mailto:phana_bizdoc@yahoo.com)

More than four million regular and irregular migrant workers live in Thailand and play an important role in Thai economic structures. The objective of this research project is to investigate migrant workers in the Upper North-eastern area of Thailand. A qualitative approach is used to describe and interpret the respondents' perspectives. There were 23 (N=23) respondents for the purposes of this research. Notably, this study collected data from March to June 2014 and, during that time, Thai Army Chief Prayuth Chan-ocha had imposed Martial Law. Given this, many migrant workers had fled Thailand after rumours of a military crackdown on illegal labour had spread through the community. This impacted field work and data collection, especially the second round of interviewing. This study has implications for future research, especially in the areas of human resource development and career education development for migrant workers.

**Key words:** *Low-Skilled Migrant Worker, Migrant Worker, Career Development, Career Motivation, Thailand*



## Introduction

The central concern at the heart of this study is the persistency of underdevelopment. A growing consensus in recent years suggests this is because poor countries lack the institutions needed or, worse, have the wrong institutions leading and contributing to economic growth. Indeed, it is not known whether these outcomes result from good institutions or something else. Another way to address this concern is to carefully investigate low- skilled workers who contribute to the Thai economy. There are more than four million regular and irregular migrant workers who live and work in Thailand and play an important role in Thai economic structures (The Economist).

Low and unskilled workers, who have little knowledge or education, fall into the category of 'Human Resource Underdevelopment.' Most of the work undertaken is undesirable. It may be tired, dirty and potentially dangerous work: the 3Ds capture this as dangerous, dirty and difficult. Unskilled labour, as a result of a poor education, is on the rise. TDRI found that a labour market of unskilled labourers, or labourers who graduated elementary and primary school, was approximately 27 million or 72.3% of total employment. It is only 20,000-30,000 of these workers who transit to market labour. At the middle market level, 163,834 labourers who graduated from high school or vocational education seek employment but only 91,975 positions are available. Unskilled labour shortages demand greater supply (Chan, 2018; Janthori 2012; Joonlaoun, 2017; Wanninayake, 2016).

Thailand has pioneered the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) given the tremendous demands for labour. Reports from the Department of Investment identify skilled and unskilled labour markets as not meeting demand. Given this, the employment of migrant workers was necessary. In 2009, migrants working in Thailand increased by 2.2 million (TDRI, 2010). From 2006 to 2010, it was found that, on average, the number of aliens per year was 1,053,602 people. There were approximately 221,146 legal immigrants and accounted for 21.73% while illegal immigration, representing 832,456 people, or 78.27% (Department of Employment, Labour Bureau, 2012). Currently, migrants working in Thailand has increased to around 4 million (The Economist).

The whole country faces a labour shortage. To address this shortage, the country must be prepared to adopt ASEAN protection rights of migrant workers (ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers or ACMW). This includes the value of human resources, whether those workers are of any particular nationality or from a particular career field. Combinations of a person's career are include career goals, career development and career management that are constantly developed and refined (Ardyanfitri, & Wahyuningtyas, 2016; Silva & Madushani, 2017; Werner & DeSimone 2006; Werther & Davis 1993).



Currently, Udon Thani and Nongkhai provinces, in the upper north-eastern part of Thailand, experience rapid growth in economic and business investment; this is especially so in Nongkhai province and the Special Economic Zone. Increasing economic growth can be found in public transportation, logistics systems and especially Udon Thani international airport. The bridge between Thailand and Laos via Nong Khai City contributes to the rapid growth of the Udon Thani province. Banking, real estate and land prices have risen simultaneously. The commercial centre comprises several business centres such as UD Town Centre Plaza, Big C, Lotus, Land Mark and Central Plaza.

The report of Nongkhai province in the first trimester found that the number of illegal migrants sat at 2,204 people. Of this, 2,121 people (96.23%) were Laotian, 31 people (1.4%) Burmese and 52 people (2.35%) Cambodian. The fourth trimester found that legal migrant workers totalled 1,572 people: 1,505 people (95.73%) Laotian, 26 people (1.65%) Burmese, and 41 people (2.6%) Cambodian (Nongkhai Provincial Labour Office, 2015). The reports from the Provincial Labour Office in Udonthani Province (2015) found 91 people (6.94%) Burmese, 1,067 people (81.45%) Laotian and 152 people (11.60%) Cambodian (Udonthani Provincial Labour Office, 2015). From this review, it is clear that migrant numbers have increased.

For the reasons mentioned above, the research team seek to investigate the problems, demands and effect of migrant workers on socio-economic conditions in Udon Thani, Nongkhai and also Thailand. It is expected that this research will complement the knowledge and current reality concerning this important group of people. It will further add to fundamental information in order to understand problems of perspective about lifestyle.

### ***The Purpose of the Study***

This study aims to investigate life experiences of low-skilled migrant workers in the Udonthani and Nongkhai provinces of upper north-eastern of Thailand. The study seeks to:

1. investigate the reasons for Thailand as a place of work;
2. understand the basic needs of migrant workers; and
3. explore the context and limitations in promoting careers and lives in Thailand.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Thai Labor Market***

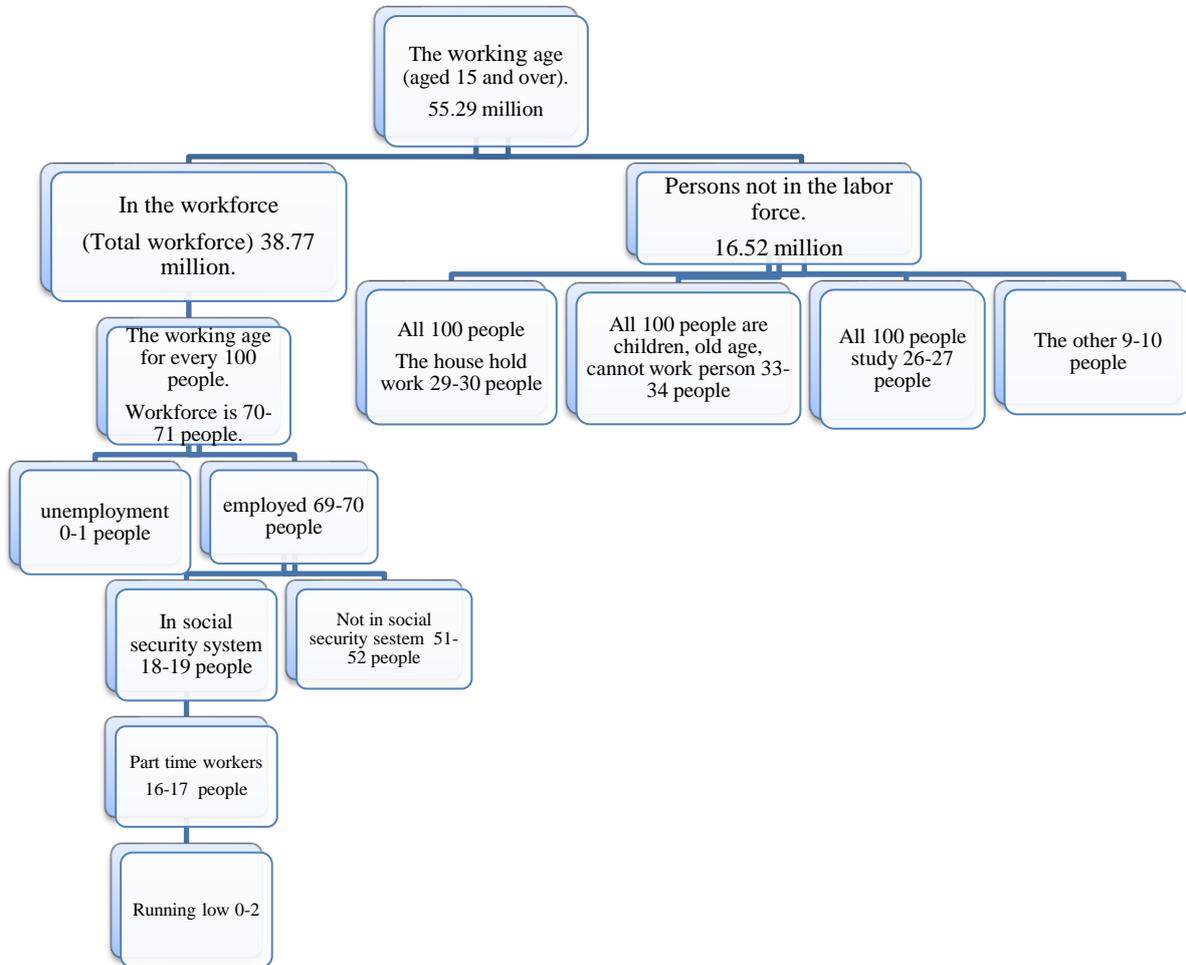
The Ministry of Labour has core responsibility for the labour market. The Ministry has ten offices that share responsibility for Thai and migrant workers. Thailand is a developing country and one of ten member countries of ASEAN. The Ministry is responsible for policy



development in human resources and education. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) sets high, quality standards to enter the labour market and, as such, Thailand faces a shortage of workers because of this Policy. It has been demonstrated above that the Thai labour force relies on foreign migrants. The Thai National Statistical Office surveyed the Labour Force for the third quarter of 2015 in order to better understand the conditions and levels of unemployment. In summary, the survey revealed that:

- i. 55.3 million people were aged 15 years and over;
- ii. 38.8 million people made up the labour force
- iii. 360,000 people were unemployed
- iv. 80,000 people were seasonal workers
- v. 16.5 million people had no role in the labour force and comprised 4.8 million people in household, 4.4 million were educated and others, such as the elderly and people with disabilities, 7.3 million
- vi. there was a decrease from 1.0 million to 500,00 workers in agriculture sector
- vii. while workers in the hospitality sector increased by 400,000 people, there were 100,000 people employed in the construction sector.
- viii. The unemployment rate is 0.9% of total labour force or 360,000 people.

**Figure 1.** The Labour Situation in the Third Trimester, 2015.



Source: National Statistical Office, 2015.

Migrant workers from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia totalled 2,344,308 people. Migrant workers were brought in to replace those who had a primary education or lower. Despite these figures, Thailand continues to face a shortage of workers. In addition, a labour increase from 89.26 % from the previous year to 100.47% is evident. This shows that Thailand workers in the labour market has increase. However, legally protected labour welfare workers was very low. At 0.99 percent, labour laws protecting workers' welfare is something that needs to be promoted more widely and evenly. Additionally, the Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation (2012) concludes, in a study of Employment in Micro and Small Enterprises in Thailand (EMSET), that 95% of registered MSEs indicate no problems in production and services. With regards to concerns, approximately 90% of MSEs worry about labour problems, especially a shortage of high-quality workers and wages.



## **Types of Migrant Workers in Thailand**

The definition of foreign workers or migrant workers generally means persons who are not of Thai nationality. It has a different meaning to both legal and technical definitions of an alien. The Working of Aliens Act BE 2551 refers to individuals who have no nationality and requires that the alien will work with the permission of the Director General of the Department of Employment (IOM, 2010). Migrant workers who come to work in Thailand are divided into two categories. There are two main types of migrant workers: regular migrant worker and irregular migrant worker.

Irregular migrant workers are immigrant groups in the labour market with no job skills. On the other hand, regular migrant workers are legal immigrant workers. There are four types of legal migrant workers: (i) lifetime migrant workers provided with a lifetime work permit; (ii) temporary migrant workers allowed to enter the Kingdom temporarily on a Non-Immigrant Visa Work Permit. Under the terms of a temporary work permit, migrants can work in Thailand for two years and; (iii) Investment (BOI) migrants are allowed to work or stay in the Kingdom under the law on promotion of investment or other laws with provisions; and (iv) those who come to work under a memorandum of understanding governing the employment of the state (MOU) from countries including Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia (IOM, 2010).

## **Research Design**

Constructivism and interpretive paradigms are employed in this study to generate theory or knowledge which is consistent with this study's goal. A qualitative research design is applied by using a case study and a grounded theory approach, since they are appropriate to explore a new body of knowledge from a real life context (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stake, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, this study focuses only on migrant workers and government officers as key respondents and; owners in Undon Thani as general respondents. Using a snowball technique to adjust a grounded theory approach, researchers collected data in Nongkhai province. Grounded theory is also applied because it is suitable for gauging respondents' views and understandings and assists in building a future concept and theory from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Ozyürek, & Ulutürk, 2016).

## ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Based on a case study strategy, an in-depth interview serves as the main data collection method with participants (Creswell, 2007). Data extracted from documents is also the primary source (Stake, 1995). The researchers played a pivotal role in collecting data. An interview guide and tape-recording were used at interview. The interview guide helped the researcher to remain focused on the direction and scope of discourse in a lengthy interview. It

also provided a comparison of data across interview cases, where possible, because all issues under investigation were covered in each interview session. With respect to preparing the questions for interview, researchers used six types of appropriate questions (Patton, 2002). With regards to Table 1 below, there were a total of 23 (N=23) respondents. Note that this study collected data from March to June 2014 and, during that time, Thai Army Chief Prayuth Chan-ocha imposed Martial Law. There were many migrant workers who had fled Thailand, after rumours spread of a military-led crackdown on illegal labour. This affected field work and data collection, especially with regards to a second round of interviewing.

**Table 1: Total number of respondents by nationality and employment**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Number</b>
Laos	LP	5
Burmese	BP	1
Vietnamese	VP	4
Pilipino	PP	1
Rohingya	RHP	1
Educators	EP	8
Public Health Officers	PHP	2
Labor Department Officers	LDP	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>23</b>

Formal policy documents and public records were also used in this study as were updated news items from relevant sources about the current situation of migrant workers in Thailand (Simons, 2009). Furthermore, electronic documents from websites, such as the Bangkok Post, The Nation, Migrant and the Asia Foundation were studied.

The data analysis adhered to the suggestions of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and entailed an ongoing process of the data collection to report writing. Within-case and cross-case analyses are the basic methods of data analysis and follows the concept of multiple case study analysis (Stake, 2006). It is an inductive system starting by within-case analysis followed with cross-case analysis (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Within each case, analysis is embedded through the development of codes and themes, as the conceptual categories and themes, which are the central ideas having importance related to its issue, modify as the research progresses (Stake, 2010). Furthermore, indirect interpretation is used, followed by patterning and a search for a correlation between two or more themes (Stake, 1995). Subsequently, thematic analysis across the cases (Creswell, 1998), by reading the report of each case and applying their findings to the research questions (Stake, 2006), is used to identify similarities and differences between cases (Stake, 1995). Finally, naturalistic generalization is also adopted (Stake, 1995).



The researcher's intent is to examine and identify real meanings, simultaneously eliciting participants' views of their world, work, and the situations they had experienced (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In order to reconstruct and understand participants' perceptions and interpretations, the researcher sought intensive and rich descriptions of cultural and topical fields, including developing an empathetic understanding of the participants' worlds (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

### **Ethical Protocol and Trustworthiness**

The researcher applied the technique of triangulation to assure credibility so as to reduce misinterpretation. This was done using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning and verify the repeatability of observation or interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Different sources of participation are used in data collection and cross-cases are used in fieldwork and analysis to check a related activity. Furthermore, multiple theories and knowledge of leadership are used in the analysis and discussion process, including an audit trail built through the researchers' journal and other centralised data described as part of the cross-case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Full descriptions are applied to ensure the applicability of the findings to another setting and to assure transferability. Identifying any researcher bias (Creswell, 2007) in the data collection, analysis, and report writing, especially for interpretation, is demonstrated by using bracketing. The researcher recorded detailed reflexive notes throughout the study and memos were adopted to ensure study credibility.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The following sections are divided into six themes: (i) Reasons to Come to Work in Thailand, (ii) Health Services for Migrant Workers, (iii) The Hope of Low-Skilled Migrant Workers; (iv) The Need of Career Motivation and Career Commitment of Unskilled Migrant Workers, (v) Educational Opportunities and Career Development for Migrant Workers; (vi) the Upper Northeastern is just a Transit Place for Moving to another Area.

It should be noted here that each story represents an individual person and is not a composite. Also, fictitious names have been created to protect the identity of the interviewees.

#### ***1. Reasons to Come to Work in Thailand***

With a growing number of migrant workers in the Thai work force, the population is bound to have greater impact. Most migrant workers in this study cite income and married life as are the reason for working in Thailand.



There were migrant workers from the Philippines and Laos working in Thailand because of their married life:

... Before, I used to work in Korea. I met my Thai girlfriend in Korea the place where we work together. When she turns back to CheingMai, her hometown, I then followed her to live together in ChiengMai. And we move to Bangkok and run our own business by sell clothing in Bangkok. After have family problems I decide to move to work here. I live in Thailand about 4 years so far... (PP7).

..I have a Thai husband. And we have 2 children together. My youngest daughter she is very good study. She got top first award for outstanding children in the Northeastern and ranked second in the country. She went to Bangkok to get a reword from the Ministry of Interior. (LP3).

Another two Irregular Migrant workers, VP4 and VP6 said:

...Why I am working in Thailand, because if I work in Vietnam, my home country my salary is not enough for living compared to work in Thailand... (VP4).

... I work as a waiter in the restaurant. Worked in Thailand for two years already before come over here I used to work as lumber worker in Vietnam. But I have to leave because of low salaries. My wife and I get pay very low salary in Vietnam about 10,000 baht per month for both of us. But in Thailand, we can make more money over 20,000 baht per month, it is a better income. (VP6).

Another three Regular Migrant workers, one from Myanmar and the other two form Laos expressed that:

At the beginning one of my friends who live in Thailand calls me to work together with her in Bangkok. I worked here for three years later moved to other towns, Yasothon, Roi- Et. So I am now in Nong Khai for 9 moths already. I have a legitimate passport, visa, visa for 1 year of registration of migrant workers. Registration fee is 1,800 baht. My career is selling Roti on the street. I used to sell Roti in Myanmar. The Roti sold every day it makes about 500-1,000 baht per day. It is better than Myanmar...(BP3).

In summary, lower wages, hard work and also with no jobs available in their home countries are the main reasons why they come to work in Thailand. Thailand provides good pay and plentiful jobs are available, especially unskilled positions such housekeeping and waiting on tables.

## ***2. Health Services for Migrant Workers***

According to Suphanchaimat (2007), a researcher of the International Health Policy Program (IHPP) stated that migrant workers increased the income of Thailand by about 60 billion baht annually and contributed to 7-10% of value in its industrial sector and 4-5% of value in its



agricultural sector. Health insurance systems for migrant workers cover only those with work permits. Only these workers can buy health insurance. His study suggested that migrant workers play important roles in Thai economic structures. Therefore, concerned parties must have the new perception that the inclusion of migrant workers in health insurance systems has nothing to do with any nationality. From the study's findings, regular migrant workers can access basic health insurance services as can Thai people.

Two of respondents, PHP19 and PHP20 who are working in the government hospital said:

....Our responsibilities are service to all patients. But the cost was based on the rights or the cover insurance of the individual patient. If the migrant workers who are legal, they can use the basic "30 bath health service card". But if it's illegal migrant workers, they must pay by themselves as no document to prove in the system..... (PHP19).

.... The Westerner who married with Thai citizen, they can also use the 30 baht health service card as they are a spouse. I heard that in their country health insurance is very expensive one compare to any health service in Thailand. It may be one of serious issue for our government to think about this..... (PHP 20).

Two Irregular Migrant workers, VP6 and VP4, put it this way:

...I used to admit Udon Thani Public Hospital for 15 days. Since I do not have any health insurance I have to pay the cost over 8,000 baht..... (VP6)

...I have a card for 30 baht treat all diseases like Thai people so that when I sick I can have this kind of beneficially in free medical care.... (VP4)

From the population and housing census in 2010, approximately 2.7 million people did not have the Thai nationality and 90% of them were migrant workers. Most came from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. Demographic researchers estimate the number of both legal and illegal migrant workers at over 4 million. Migrant workers need health services and the problem is many health facilities face financial crises as they must treat the migrant workers who do not contribute financially to Thai health systems.

To protect and safeguard Thai health systems, the Ministry of Public Health must change its development plans and policies for health by expanding coverage to migrant workers. The health system must admit that health policies should not only cover 65 million (Thai) people but also migrant workers in Thailand. Therefore, personnel and production plans must be based on these numbers.



### ***3. The Hope of Low-Skilled Migrant Workers***

Each individual aspires to do something better for their family. In this study found that most respondents expressed their hope in a different way:

....I want my kids study in the school here. It is better than study in my home town in Laos. It is a good education system and high quality. There are many activities for kids and also have lots of services such library, computer centre and a very nice and clean play ground in the school..... (LP2)

.... Why I want to work in Thailand. I was a teenager at the time, with the age of 14 years wanted to work outside the home. I work so hard and get pay less in my country (Laos). It is about 3,000-4,000 Bath per month compare to work hear I get pay more than over 6,000 Bath per month..... (LP1).

One respondents, an irregular migrant worker, VP5 expressed that:

....In Vietnam earned less. But working in Thailand has more money as many jobs available here. I can work at one place in the morning and go another place in the afternoon to do housekeeping. In the evening, I can work again in the other place in the restaurant. I can deposit money with the Vietnamese people together and send to Vietnam for buy land and build a house in Vietnam. I take about 3 years working. My new house has been completed. My headband and I go back Vietnam every year on the Vietnamese New Year..... (VP5)

### ***4. The Need for Career Motivation and Career Commitment in Unskilled Migrant Workers***

With a growing number of migrant workers, there is bound to be a greater impact at all levels. Lopes (2006) indicated that from an HRD perspective, an organization could take steps to increase levels of career motivation in order to reduce turnover as people are more motivated and happier and, this in turn, increases employee morale and productivity.

Two irregular migrant workers, PP7, VP6 and one Migrant worker LP1 shared their ideas:

..... I decide to take a training course of Thai massage. So, I can work in Oman country where my girlfriend is now working there. Here (Nong Khai city) people talk Laos and E-Sarn. I don't understand E-Sarn language. But Thai language like people talking in Bangkok is OK I can understand some. It will make more money if I can do Thai massage and working in Oman as what my girlfriend told me... .. (PP7).

..... Work as a home cleaner does not need much to communicate. But when I work as a waiter in the restaurant in the evening I need to talk with the customers. I just need to learn



how to speak Thai language in order to talk with the customer. I work in Thailand for 2 year already. It is OK now for communicate in Thai..... (VP6).

.... I want to work outside of my hometown. That is the reason why I come to work over here.

Of course, I want more skill for my good career in the future and make more income. But I really do not know where to go and how to begin..... (LP1).

From the findings, illegal workers or irregular migrant workers still want to gain more skill in order to earn more income and to become a skilled worker. The model of career motivation consists of three central domains: (i) career identity (Cid), (ii) career resilience (CR) and, (iii) career Insight (CIn) (London & Noe 1997 cited in Lopes 2006). However, career commitment is one significant difference in career motivation. Career commitment research included commitment to the organization and, so, took a wider view than career motivation. In addition, Poon (2004) studied the measure of career success such as salary level and career satisfaction and their relationship to career commitment of 180 Malaysian workers. He suggested that career commitment relates to career success.

### ***5. Career Development and Educational Opportunities for Migrant Workers***

Surprisingly, when using a snowball technique for field work, it was discovered that many training courses for career development had spread all over the village, district and city. This training was provided by the Office of Informal and Non-formal Education.

Educators suggested that:

.... We develop educational equivalent to all. Migrant workers who come to work in Thailand, we want them to study the basic language for communication. And also can use the computer and internet. So that wages will be increase to the regular wages. The new power plant here is to hire workers from Cambodia were approximately 300 Cambodian. It is very interesting for us to keep our eye on these people in order to support them in term of Non-formal education. We provide any informal or Non-formal education to all including migrants and illegal workers. For the migrants who have an identification card they can receive a certification once they finish the program. But for illegal workers, they can study and gain their knowledge and skill. They cannot get any certification as they do not any document for qualification event.....(EP11)

....the very beginning I did not dare to come, but we never get the Lao students to study, but since we started accepting ASEAN students last couple years ago. Now anyone can come to study. It is doesn't matter they are Laos, Cambodian or Burmese. In this area have Laos workers around 20-30 people. Most of them work in the rubber field. Some of my Laos workers can read Thai as they enjoy to study with me. I always give them many books to



read. They will come to ask me if they do not know what the meaning of the words or sentences..... (EP12).

....We has many careers in agricultures and food processing such vegetable farming, fruit plants..... (EP13).

....For career development, we have several careers training programs such as auto and motorcycle repair. We also train how to repair all kind of electric machines such as TV, Radio, Fan and so on. But it seems nobody like to take these programs. The demands for labor on the repair stuff not have much..... (EP14).

....in Udon Thani, we also provide career training program to Thai workers and Migrant workers as well. For illegal migrant workers will not be able to attend the training. Anyway, most of them were afraid of being caught. In this area, there are some career training programs in the private sector too..... (LDP21).

From the data, education provides a variety of career development programs but not many migrant workers are involved. Indeed, Egan, Upton and Lynham (2006) indicated that career development (CD) has long been cited as a core area associated with human resource development (HRD). When it comes to career development (CD) perspectives in the context of HRD literature, HRD scholars and practitioners appear to have paid little attention to the importance of CD. More importantly, with the statement of Swanson and Holton (2001) that 'career development (CD) is being overlooked as a contributor to HRD (p.312). It is time to take a serious action in career development, especially for migrant workers who play important roles in Thai economic structures.

## **6. The Upper Northeastern is just a Transit Place for Moving to another Area**

Regarding document reviews, the Udon Thani area shows the largest demand for labour (Labour Market Research Division, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour, 2013). Currently, Udon Thani is experiencing a rapid growth in terms of economic and business investment. Findings of this study show that Udon Thani is just a transit place for migrant workers to move to another space, especially around Bangkok and the Eastern Seaboard. It is those locations that have more facilities and jobs available with good pay and benefits.

One respondent working in the labour market shared that:

....We only cares Regular Migrant workers who are register in our system. Because it is the main responsibility and we have to make a report and notified to the government. I mean the Ministry of Labor. For any migrant workers who do not valid or not registered we need to



push away. Nor does it require them to be registered. The migrants are not having much here at Udon because they move to work at another place. Most of them work in Sumutprakarn where many jobs available and have many faculties over there. The question that you mention about illegal workers, Vietnamese, we do not know about this. We are responsible only legitimate source. The report therefore does not appear in it.... (LDP21).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings reveal that not only do HR professionals take on the challenge of creating career development for migrant workers but so too stakeholders, policy makers, and HR researchers. In light of this, there are many research questions that could be addressed to better understand how career development factors affect migrant workers and their response to development initiatives. One way to organise these questions is to think about dependent variables of career development. For example, Egan et al. (2006) summarised “Nineteen CD theories, 30 CD definitions, 93 dependent variables (DVs) and 10 DV categories” (p.472).

Firstly, career motivation and/or career commitment should also be investigated as a dependent variable. Consideration should be given to how career, organisational and training and development activities affect the career development of migrant workers and their work environment? So too for the perceived career motivation and/or career commitment of the organizations. Action research strategies are essential for success in improving all these issues and should also be considered. The ways in which HR professionals and policy effect long-lasting positive changes in management practices would lend itself nicely to ensuing research. In addition to these questions, it is clear that researchers can contribute to the creation of the career development of migrant workers by their involvement in action research. This provides greater opportunities to work with organisations to implement research-supported practices and to measure or evaluate their effects.

Secondly, the World Economic Forum (2015) sees three guiding concepts underlying the second edition of the Human Capital Index. The first is a focus on learning and employment outcomes. The second is a focus on demographics and the third is distance to the ideal. In the business world, human capital is the economic value of an employee’s set of skills. For a policy maker, human capital is the capacity of the population to drive economic growth. To others it may include tacit knowledge acquired informally through experience, non-cognitive skills, such as inter-personal skills and the physical, and emotional and mental health of individuals. As the labour supply in Thailand still does not meet demand, it is necessary to employ skilled migrant workers. Skills are derived on demand and that demand depends on policies for growth and employment creation. The findings of this study will challenge skill worker processes as they are a component of human capital investment.



### **Limitations of this study**

Several limitations were identified. It should be noted here that if there is to be transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that “the best advice to give to anyone seeking to make a transfer is to accumulate empirical evidence about contextual similarity; the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible” (p.289). Thus, study findings may be limited owing to the selection of the study subjects. The subjects who responded in the data collection were selected from a sample located in upper North-eastern Thailand. Since respondents in this study comprise several nationalities - Burmese, Vietnamese, Laos, Lohinya, Filipino and Thai - the research realised a difficulty: ‘no equivalent word in English is capable of capturing the subtle nuances of the world in the original language’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). ‘Meanings’ to quote Hoffman (1998) become ‘lost in translation’. This is identified as another limitation in this study and, according to Chen and Bates (2005), indicates that using researchers as translators may cause some type of biases during translation. However, to avoid this kind of limitation, consulting third party individuals for translation may allow objective translation to minimise researchers’ biases. Lastly, regarding Martial Law in Thailand, there were many migrant workers who had fled Thailand after rumours of a military-led crackdown on illegal labour. It affected field work and data collection, especially for the second round of interviews.



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