Urban Migration in Myanmar: An Analysis of Migration Patterns and Migrant Well-being

City Life Survey Discussion Paper

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

In 2018 The Asia Foundation, in partnership with the Yangon School of Political Science, rolled out the City Life Survey (CLS) following a successful pilot in 2017. This multi-year, multi-city, public perception survey is a tool to understand the changes happening in Myanmar cities and the impact of these changes on people's sense of well-being.

Drastically varying levels of economic, social and political change in Myanmar has made it challenging for even the most attentive observers to track what's changing, what remains the same, how this varies across different groups, and what the implications of this all are for society and the economy. This challenge is compounded by two factors. The first is the more traditional lack of reliable comparative and longitudinal data on the diverse experiences of urban residents. The second is the rapid rise in prominence of social media as a source of information for urban leaders. While it is increasing government officials' exposure to the direct views of residents the information being exchanged on these platforms is biased in ways that, across the world, we are only just starting to understand.

The CLS is a tool to measure the many different aspects of urban living that influence the well-being of residents across five of Myanmar's largest cities, based on the latest scientific research. Well-being as a concept is broad and multi-dimensional and has no literal translation into Burmese. At its simplest, well-being is about what it means to live a good life and the CLS is designed to capture those aspects of urban life that are most important to this. The 2018 Summary Report contains headline findings, a framework for thinking about well-being, and details on the full methodology. Yet with 135 questions asked of 2,414 people from five cities, the Summary Report only represents a snapshot of the analysis that is possible from the rich CLS dataset.

To address this gap, The Asia Foundation invited research experts to take a deeper dive into the 2018 CLS, to contextualize and triangulate its findings against other sources of evidence. The three Discussion Papers apply the research experts' distinct skills, knowledge and experiences to important urban issues they have identified through their analysis. Although all Discussion Papers follow the same structure, the voice and style of the author remains.

This Discussion Paper Series focuses on three core areas of interest; gender, migration and the social contract. *Urban Migration in Myanmar: An Analysis of Migration Patterns and Migrant Well-being* discusses urban migration patterns, the characteristics of recent migrants and how they experience urban governance. *Public Finances and the Social Contract in Myanmar: Reflections from the City Life Survey* takes a more conceptual approach and looks at what theory and data can tell us about social cohesion and state-society relationships in an increasingly urbanized Myanmar. *Not Enough Time: Insight into Myanmar Women's Urban Experiences* explores prevailing social norms and presents the first robust data in Myanmar on the widely experienced phenomenon of the 'triple burden' and considers the implications for women's opportunities in cities.

These papers are intended to prompt discussion and will in places challenge some prevailing views. They aren't considered the last word on these topics, and readers are invited to join The Asia Foundation's wider efforts to contextualize these findings and to help make them relevant to Myanmar's urban leaders. We hope that these papers and further initiatives provide valuable evidence to those working to make Myanmar's cities better places to live and work and in particular to provide insight into more traditionally marginalized groups, such as women and migrants.

The views presented in these papers are of the authors and do not represent the views of The Asia Foundation.

Kim Ninh
Acting Country Representative, The Asia Foundation
Yangon, June 2020

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CLS	City Life Survey
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labor Organization
LIFT	Livelihoods and Food Security Fund
MCDC	Mandalay City Development Committee
MMK	Burmese Kyat
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
YCDC	Yangon City Development Committee

KEY TERMS

Recent migrants	people who migrated after 2011
Native poor townships	townships where a larger portion of the residents who settled before 2011 and who are less educated
Migrant poor townships	townships where a larger proportion of the residents who settle after 2011 and who have a middle school education or lower, and fewer have a college degree or higher
General townships	the townships included in the 2018 city life survey excluding native poor townships and migrant poor townships

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Migration to urban areas has been a critical dimension of urbanization in Myanmar and has been driven primarily by economic and environmental forces. Climate change has increased instances of flooding and natural disasters have created populations of environmental refugees who have moved to urban areas. The allure of economic opportunities has attracted people from rural areas, with considerable potential to accelerate Myanmar's economic development. But development is not guaranteed, and it can come at a high cost for those who live in urban areas and face increasing strain from overcrowding, high costs of living and stretched government services.[1] Life can be particularly hard for those who move to cities, Myanmar's urban migrants.

While there is a growing body of research on internal urban migration in Myanmar, studies are still limited in number and scope. Most recent quantitative studies have been conducted in rural areas, comparing the financial well-being between migrants and those that have stayed in their villages. Research into the characteristics and experiences of migrants across urban locations is primarily qualitative and focused on Yangon. The 2018 City Life Survey (CLS) dataset presents an opportunity to conduct quantitative analysis of urban migration across cities and among townships in Yangon. This Discussion Paper looks at migration trends in Yangon and Mandalay and employs different analytical tools to identify the different types of migrants in the dataset and compare their experiences.

The findings corroborate existing research and narratives around urban migration in Myanmar. The paper also presents results that, at least at first glance, appear to challenge existing conventional wisdom. For instance, analysis of 2018 CLS data suggests that the rate of migration may have slowed in four out of the five cities surveyed. In Yangon, the typical focus on the number of migrants moving into specific townships such as Hlaing Tharyar can mask shifting dynamics, with one third of respondents in Dagon Seikkan having arrived there since 2012. And while recent migrants face many challenges and lower life satisfaction, they report that it is easier to find work than less educated non-migrants. More fundamentally, 2018 CLS data illustrates the heterogeneity of migrants and cautions against generalizing about migrants' urban experiences, as data on the "average" migrant can be misleading.

THE 2018 *CITY LIFE* SURVEY CITIES
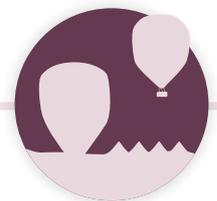
Yangon   Mandalay   Mawlamyine   Monywa   Taunggyi

BACKGROUND

DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Although international migration gets more attention in the media – both in developed and developing countries – internal migration makes up a far higher proportion of total migration in Asia, and in some countries it is a larger contributor of remittances to rural villages.[2] Migration between rural areas has been common for a long time, with less skilled workers temporarily moving to wealthier regions that have better irrigation during dry seasons. As countries in South and Southeast Asia industrialize, rural to urban migration increases as more jobs become available in cities. Notably, this new rural-urban migration stream tends to be much more gender balanced; women (especially young, single women), have many more employment options in industrializing cities than in agricultural villages. In many countries, these migrants have much less security and stability than other citizens, and have more trouble taking advantage of public services. In particular the extra expense of clean water is a common, unseen burden on many internal migrant populations in Southeast Asia.

Research on migration in the region has identified a "migration hump." The "migration hump" can be described as an increase in migration related to short-term income increases resulting in an eventual decrease in migration. Although urbanization typically increases labor demand and wages in cities, many people are still likely to move to cities even without a high wage differential. This is because cities offer work that is less affected by seasonal variations and it is easy for low-skill workers to switch between different jobs (e.g. rickshaw driver, porter, maid, security guard, etc.).

MYANMAR'S RECENT URBAN HISTORY

The population of Myanmar is still predominantly rural; according to the 2014 census only 29 percent of citizens live in cities.[3] The country is expected to be 50 percent urban by around 2040;[4] Yangon, which currently has between five and six million people, is on track to double in size in that time.[5] However, this is not the first instance of rapid urbanization in the country, between 1941 and 1965, the population of Yangon tripled.

This earlier experience established a precedent for urban expansion that is still followed today. Large cities such as Yangon and Mandalay are organized into townships, and the incorporation of outlying agricultural areas to create new townships is a common process.[6] In the 1950s the government undertook its first major slum clearance project, forcefully moving informal settlers from the inner city to three new townships created on the outskirts. In 1988 this process was repeated, although this time it was more poorly managed and political. Around 500,000 people were moved to townships created on the new edge of the city, including Hlaing Tharyar, New Dagon, and Shwepyithar, which were also the locations of new industrial zones. Despite large increases in population in these areas service provision remains poor and most of the land is still officially owned by the government, or privately by civil servants or land speculators. Most of the new townships are low-lying and near waterways, leaving them prone to constant flooding and hygiene problems.

Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing to the present, the government of Myanmar has designated specific industrial zones, which are supposed to reduce the logistical burdens of manufacturing by providing reliable shared electricity, transportation infrastructure, and administrative services.[7] These new zones were initially just located on the outskirts of Yangon but now new zones have been created in other cities, including Mandalay, Mawlamyine and Monywa, and are the target of significant foreign investment.[8] However, the quality of service varies significantly across zones, with correspondingly different levels in activity and investment.

EXISTING RESEARCH AND DATA

Table 1: Migration data sources

Data source	Sample Size	Date	Location	Focus
Census	50,279,900	2014	Country-wide	Demographic trends
IFPRI	1,102	2016	Four townships outside Yangon	Migration effects on rural areas
ILO	7,295	2015	Country-wide	Forced labor
LIFT	1,600	2016	Ayeyarwady, Magway Regions	Profile migrants and migration influences
The Asia Foundation	2,414	2018	Yangon, Mandalay, Monywa, Mawlamyine, Taunggyi	Urban well-being and public perception of government services

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

There are several sources of recent quantitative data on migration in Myanmar. The 2014 census is the largest available dataset on migration trends in Myanmar since the previous census, which was in 1983.[9] In addition to the census data, one-off surveys of over 1,000 respondents have been collected by ILO, LIFT in partnership with the World Bank, and IFPRI. These surveys all provide valuable knowledge about the profile of migrants and causes of migration, although there are some significant gaps that the 2018 CLS is well-positioned to address.

According to the census, 19.3 percent of residents have moved at least once in their lifetime, with seven percent having moved in the previous five years.[10] It is important to note that the government does not count relocation of less than six months as movement, which means that very little seasonal migration is represented in the census data. Nevertheless, it is broadly in line with patterns seen in neighboring countries.[11]

One of the most notable findings from the census is the direction of the flow of migration. From 2009 to 2014, almost half of migration was between urban areas and migration from rural areas was primarily to other rural areas.[12] Only ten percent of migration was from rural to urban. This pattern contradicts the findings from the IFRI and LIFT studies, which heavily emphasized the drastic increase in rural-urban migration since 2010.[13] However, it is backed up by the ILO study, which also interviewed people in all 14 states and regions.[14]

This disconnect can be partially explained by four things: 1) the census considered movement between townships of the same city as urban-urban migration; 2) the census discounted migration of less than six months, a fair amount of which was likely rural-rural or rural-urban; 3) the census covered the entire country, while IFRI and LIFT focused on areas closer to a major city and thus more accessible to researchers; and 4) no matter the type of migration, most people live with a relative when first arriving in a new place, which might impede rural-urban migration since most of the population is still in rural areas and less likely to have relatives in the city.

These are all plausible explanations, but also suggest that the findings identified in the census are already becoming outdated. The major study by LIFT from 2016 was con-

ducted in Ayeyarwady, which is adjacent to Yangon, and Magway in the north, and had much higher rates of rural-rural migration identified.[15] LIFT and ILO also both noted that the most important factor for rural-urban migrants was an existing social network that could connect them to job prospects in the city.[16] As more migration occurs these networks will become more comprehensive, potentially causing rural-urban migration to increase at a faster rate.

RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION

The census data showed that rural-urban migration fell as a percent of total lifetime migration between 1991 and 2014, declining steadily from 30.4 percent to less than ten percent.[17] However, IFRI found that migration increased after 2010, and accelerated after 2012 as the government liberalized; LIFT saw a large jump in migration after 2013.[18] Therefore it seems likely that the census identified a low point in rural-urban migration from a peak in the early 1990s, and it is now increasing again.

The available information from other studies on migration in Myanmar suggest rural-urban migrants typically have the following profile. They are mostly younger than the general working population and they are slightly more likely to be men than women. Rural migrant women are more likely to be working than the general population of women. Rural migrants in general are better educated than the general population, with a majority having completed middle school, although very few have completed high school. They usually find jobs through their social networks before migrating and send remittances back to their families, although low rural-urban wage differentials mean those remittances don't have a large effect on the rural economy yet. Although working in the city does not enable individuals to earn significantly more, it does increase employment security as most urban jobs are less subjected to seasonal variation and in general there are more job opportunities. The different sources disagree about what proportion end up working in manufacturing, although women from Ayeyarwady seem to have a good chance of getting a stable job in the garment industry. Those who cannot find formal employment in manufacturing usually work in low-skill jobs in the service sector, such as restaurants, construction, and hotels.

While migrants who choose to move are usually careful about waiting until they hear
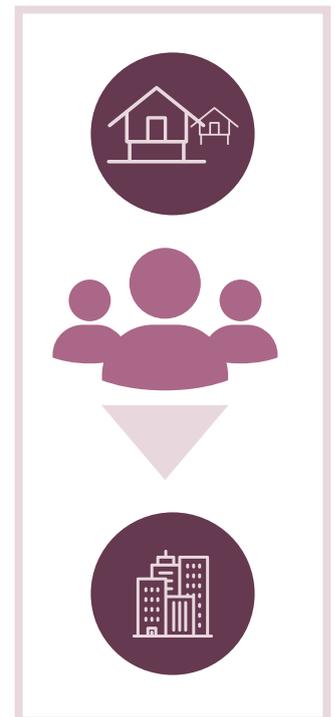
between 20 and 25 percent of migrants are forced to move suddenly because of some external shock, such as a natural disaster or family emergency

about a job prospect from their network, between 20 and 25 percent of migrants are forced to move suddenly because of some external shock, such as a natural disaster or family emergency.[19] Moving to the city is more difficult for them, as they cannot make the same preparations and usually do not have enough money. They are more likely to go somewhere else in the same region, although many go into debt to get to a large city.[20]

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

While quantitative research so far has focused on pre-migration characteristics of people who decide to move to urban areas, most of the information about their experiences after arriving is qualitative. This has primarily focused on poor migrants who move to the outlying areas of Yangon, especially Hlaing Tharyar. In fact, there has been little research engaging urban migrant populations from any cities besides Yangon, an important gap in the research given that their experiences may be significantly different from those of Yangon's recent arrivals.

Many residents of Hlaing Tharyar, and indeed Yangon, are living in informal settlements on government-owned land without formal recognition. The exact number of people living without formal recognition is, however, unclear. According to UN-Habitat, in 2016, there were 380,000 such residents living in 423 locations around Yangon and researchers from Harvard University estimated that there were 500,000 in 2012.[21] Another study estimated there were closer to 1.5 million people living "in some informal way with no tenure security".[22]

The lack of official land titling in these townships is mostly because of convoluted laws and overlapping authority around land use in Myanmar. In Yangon, five different agencies at three levels of government are involved in the land management and titling process and officials from different agencies often place blame for housing and planning issues on each other.[23] This has led to an informal and unstable system, in which local officials give de facto land rights to some individuals, who often rent or sell the land, but then other officials evict the residents of those plots for squatting. This happens not just to new migrants but also to "natives" of newer townships like Hlaing Tharyar, who were forcefully relocated there in the early 1990s from squatting in more central townships.

Outside observers were hopeful that the NLD government would have a different perspective, but in practical terms the public approach towards migrants has not changed since the 2015 election. Myanmar has yet to reach international standards of providing compensation to both legal residents and informal settlers when they are forcefully moved.

The government distinguishes between most poor migrants, who live in informal settlements because they cannot afford housing, and "professional squatters", who are new arrivals that typically do not know better and rent or buy land that technically belongs to the government from predatory landlords.[24] However, the government's policies to date have reflected the belief that the way to deal with both groups is to evict informal settlers and bulldoze their residences.[25] Established citizens and policymakers in Myanmar have tended to view informal settlers as criminals to be pushed out.[26] Local officials typically avoid providing public services to squatter communities out of fear that it will legitimize their claims or encourage more people to move there

local officials avoid providing public services to squatter communities out of fear that it will encourage more people to move there and instead they organize police sweeps and mass evictions

and instead they organize police sweeps and mass evictions. This creates a poverty trap for some residents and exacerbates inequality. Some people forego better jobs in factories to work out of their homes in case someone tries to destroy it while they're away. Informal settlers without access to water and electricity must pay more than the standard municipal prices.[27] Residents of Hlaing Tharyar with wells and generators have a notably higher standard of living than those without them.[28]

Informal settlers can also fall into debt traps, borrowing from friends or neighbors – both to cover regular expenses like housing and food as well as medical expenses, school fees, and authorization costs to work in a formal job – at up to 30 percent interest rates which they are often not able to repay.[29] Formal documentation is required for higher paying jobs, to access government services, and to acquire housing legally, but it is also difficult and expensive to obtain such documentation and it is out of the reach of many new arrivals. This forces them into lower paying jobs and insecure housing, which then makes it more difficult to save enough to get documentation. The one exception is that most newcomers do manage to "informally" acquire the official documents necessary for their children to go to school.

Recent research in Hlaing Tharya corroborates wider international evidence on the importance of migrant's social networks in obtaining access to resources and information. It noted experiences of migrants who were Christian or from ethnic minority groups such as Rakhine and Karen, who tended to live together in smaller communities and received support from social networks or churches in securing housing, identification documents and jobs. In these smaller communities the social networks appeared to bridge class divides. These findings highlight the important role community cohesion can play in a context where there are informational and structural barriers to accessing state services and economic opportunities. It similarly points to the additional vulnerability of migrants who are less connected to an informal support network.[30]
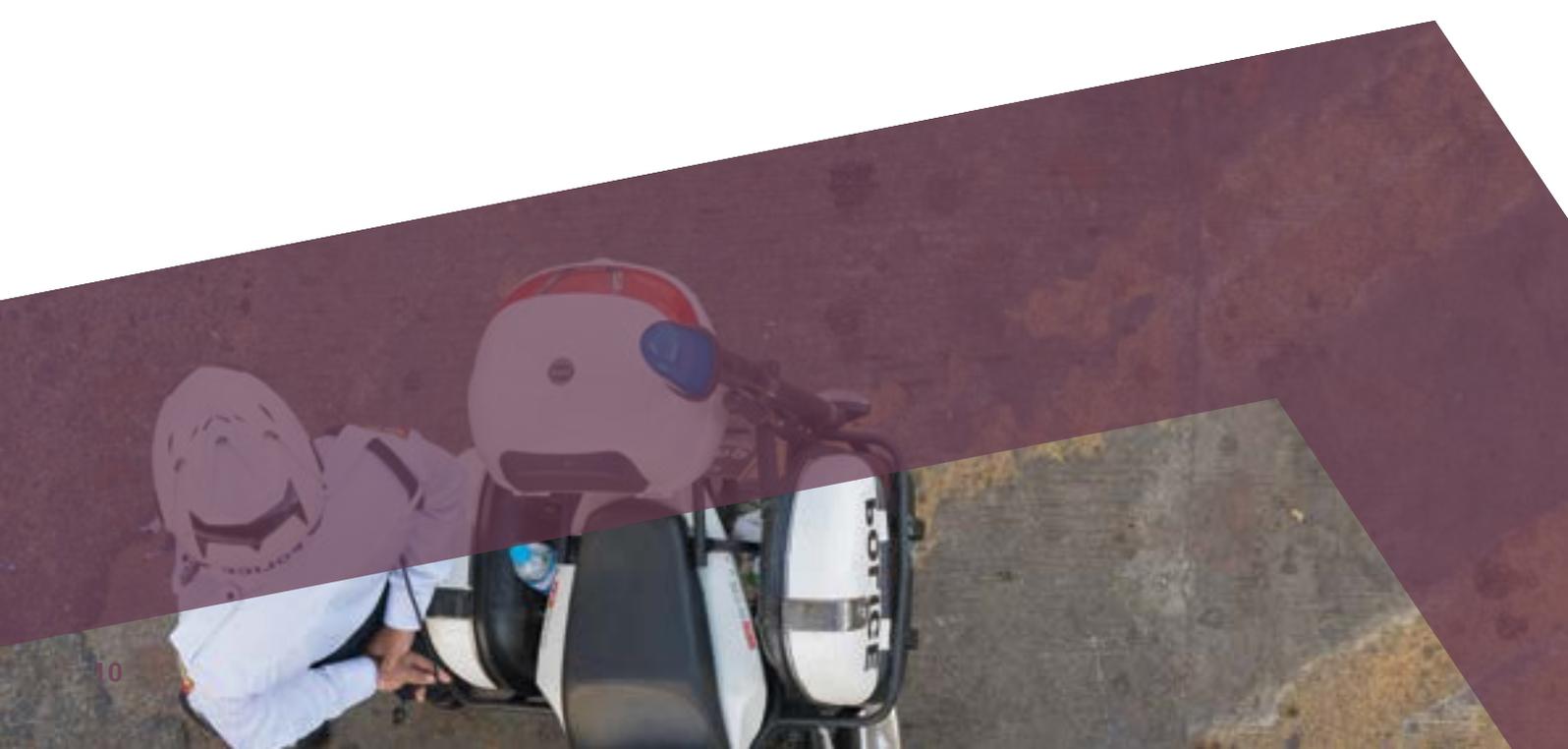
BOX 1:
ABOUT THE CITY LIFE SURVEY

The 2018 CLS is an initiative to understand the well-being of urban residents living in five cities across Myanmar; Yangon, Mandalay, Mawlamyine, Monywa, and Taunggyi. The CLS has three key goals:

1. **Providing policymakers with the information they need to make informed decisions**
2. **Helping policymakers understand the priorities of their communities**
3. **Facilitating lesson learning and healthy competition between cities**

The survey itself includes 135 questions covering all aspects of urban life. Questions can be roughly divided into the categories of economic, physical, and inter-personal well-being. Questions were selected to either capture holistic determinants of well-being, or to meet the specific needs of municipal authorities. The survey itself was conducted in 2018 in collaboration with the Yangon School of Political Science, and will be repeated every two years alongside parallel programs and products such as city-level briefings, the development of a public data portal, data analysis training workshops, and thematic Discussion Papers such as this one.

The idea of "positive deviance" as an approach to policy reform is a key part of CLS's theoretical framework. A positive deviance model identifies places where conditions are unusually good or systems are unusually effective, and then explores why that place is more successful than its peers — and whether their strategy or solution could be learned from and replicated elsewhere. Cities can be thought of as laboratories, and their wide diversity of practice means it is possible to compare the efficacy of different approaches, learn from successes and failures, and improve well-being in all cities as a result.

The CLS utilized three-stage randomization (by ward, household, and respondent) and was conducted by trained face-to-face interviewers who input responses into e-tablets. There were 2,414 respondents in five cities, 27 townships, and 228 wards, all of which are residents of Myanmar over the age of 18. Four religious groups and 48 ethnic groups are represented. For the full methodology please read the 'City Life Survey 2018 Summary Report'.

ANALYSIS

GENERAL MIGRATION IN THE 2018 CITY LIFE SURVEY

MIGRANTS AND RECENT MIGRANTS

If the 2018 CLS is carried out regularly in the long term, it will be a valuable tool for tracking patterns of urban migration over time. However, without several years of data looking at trends will be complicated. Fortunately, the survey collected each respondent's age and the year they arrived in their current city of residence. It did not ask where they came from, but by calculating a birth year for each person and comparing it to their migration year we can separate out those who migrated from those who have stayed in their city of birth.

Doing this shows a high level of mobility, although it is not equal across all cities. 85 percent of residents in Taunggyi and 77 percent in Mandalay and Yangon report being born somewhere else, compared to just 55 and 47 percent for Monywa and Mawlamyine respectively. We can also draw some inferences about different migration patterns over time by city. By graphing only the migration year for those respondents who report a different migration and birth year *(Fig. 1)*, we can see that migration seems to have peaked for most cities in the 1990s, but for Yangon it has continued to increase.

Because only people over the age of 18 were surveyed, this data set undercounts newer migrants. People who migrated as children in the 1990s and before are included, but people who migrated as children in the 2000s may not be. Therefore, we can assume that migration into Yangon is at least holding steady, if not increasing and the decline in other cities is less dramatic than it seems. Graphing the migration year for only people who moved when they were over 18 validates this assumption, showing an increasing rate for Yangon, flat migration for Mandalay and Monywa, and decreasing for Mawlamyine and Taunggyi (but less dramatically than in Fig. 1).

Whilst it cannot be identified how much of a difference more recent changes, such as the increase in foreign investment, are having on migration trends, it is clear that Myanmar has been urbanizing for several decades, which is in alignment with Myanmar's new industrialization policies of the 1990s. Current challenges widely reported for cities like Yangon, such as inadequate housing supply and infrastructure, are not the result of a sudden and unexpected spike in new residents, but are rather to be seen as the outcome of several decades of urbanization.

In this analysis recent migrants are defined as those who have moved since 2012. Given the political and economic changes Myanmar has been undergoing, the analysis tested for differences between various cut-off points of 2008, 2010, and 2012, and found no statistically significant differences in terms of demographics or migration rate (the changes in the number of people were proportional as the time range was expanded). 2012, therefore, was selected under the assumption that as time goes on migrants are likely to become less distinct from the general population in terms of their perceptions of urban life.

There was an equal number of male and female migrants in the dataset, which is not unexpected despite previous research. This matches trends in other countries in the region, and reports that found a higher percentage of men are included in rural-rural and international migration, which both have significantly more men than women.

Recent migrants were found to be better educated than non-migrants *(Fig. 2)*, with a higher percentage having college degrees and a few with only primary school education or no education. This difference −significant at the ten percent level − not only

**% OF RESIDENTS BORN OUTSIDE OF THE CITY THEY LIVE IN**

TAUNGGYI
85%
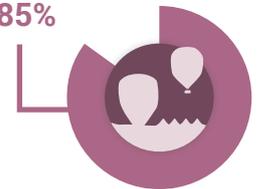
YANGON
77%

MANDALAY
77%
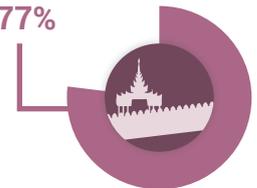
MONYWA
55%

MAWLAMYINE
47%
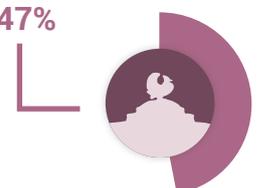
FIGURE 1:
% ARRIVING WITHIN EACH DECADE FOR IDENTIFIED MIGRANTS

YANGON

1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

MANDALAY

1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

MAWLAMYINE

1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

MONYWA

1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

TAUNGGYI

1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010
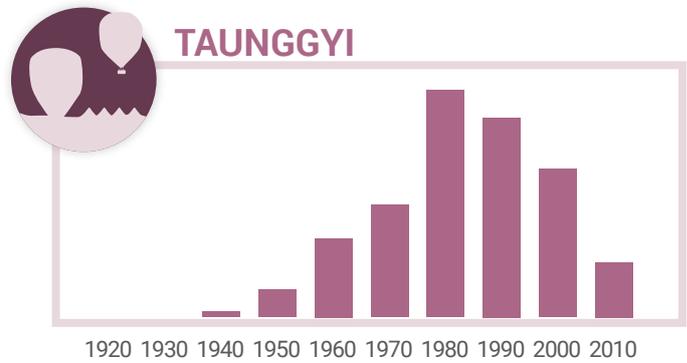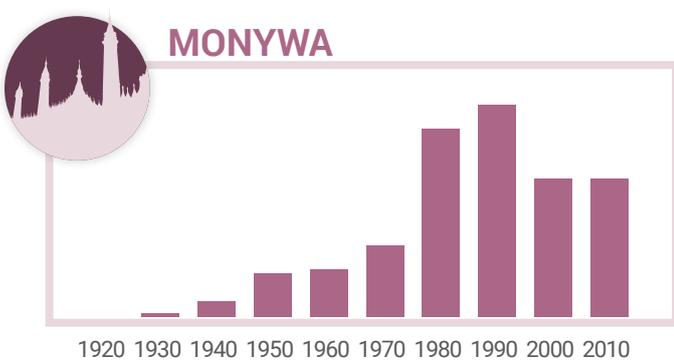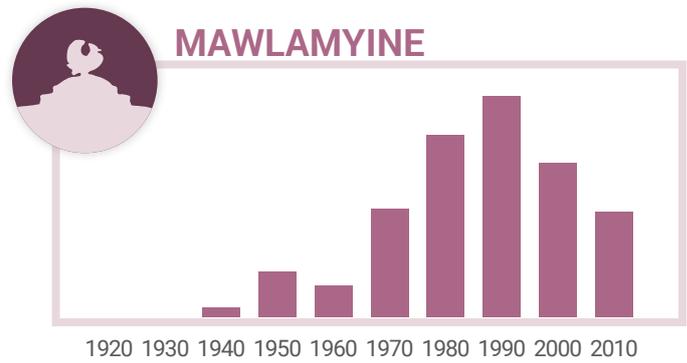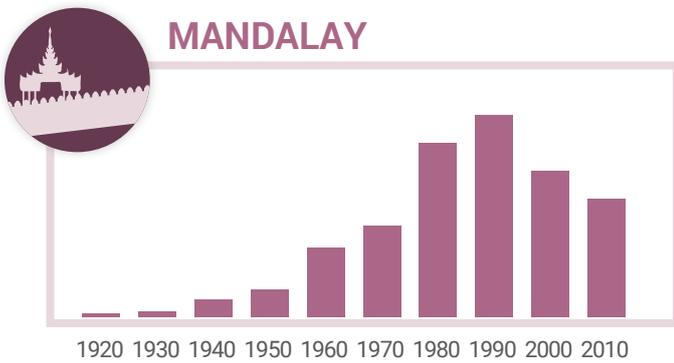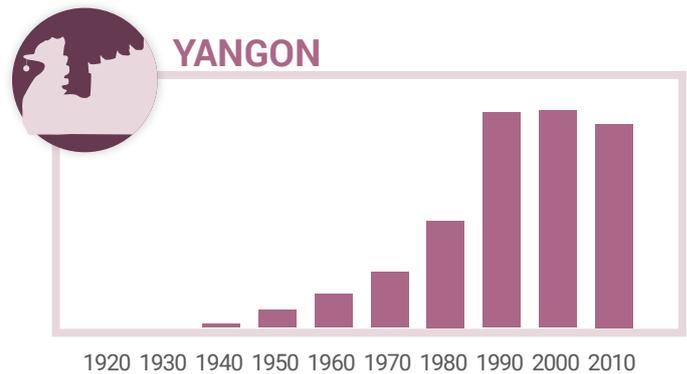
supports past research, which found that migrants were more educated than other people where they moved from, but also demonstrates that they are more educated on average than residents of the cities they move to.

A higher proportion of all migrants reported not working and not seeking work compared to non-migrants – 39.7 percent to 32.4 percent. However, this difference disappears when only looking at recent migrants. The difference remains noticeable even when controlling for education, age, gender, and city. This may indicate that it is possible that new migrants, who are mostly drawn by likely job prospects connected by existing social networks, are in a better position to benefit from new jobs in manufacturing than people who migrated in earlier waves who are now disconnected from the formal job sector, despite having lived in urban areas for longer. Earlier migrants have a similar education distribution to non-migrants, so it also may be that many of the new jobs drawing the newer workers have higher education requirements, which people who migrated in past decades are not able to access.

FIGURE 2: MIGRANT/NATIVE BY EDUCATION LEVEL

Post Graduate

Graduate

High school

Middle school

Primary school

No formal education

Prefer not to say

Native   Migrant
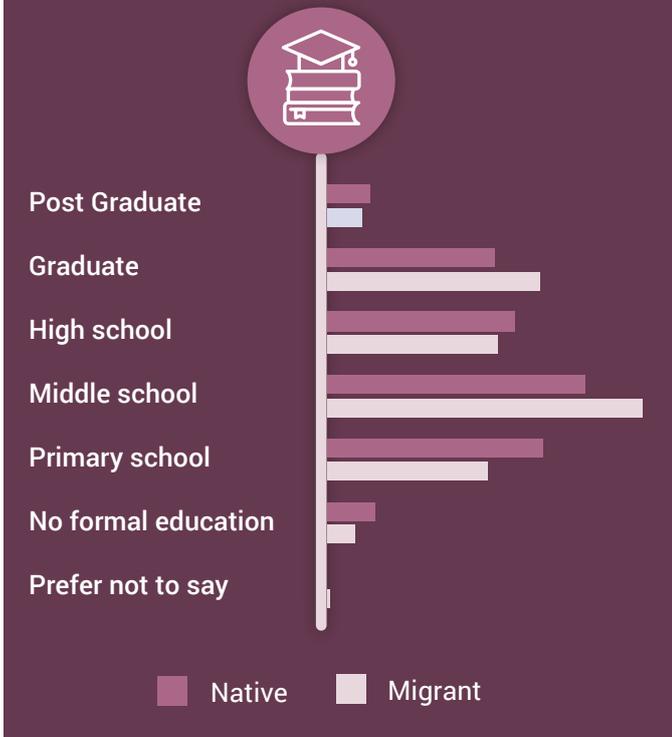
There did not seem to be a difference between recent migrants or migrants as a whole and non-migrants on many variables representing quality of life or perceptions of government. Recent migrants don't report worse health when controlling for age, gender, and city; there is no difference in their income level, how adequate they find their accommodations, their perception of government's economic performance, optimism about their household finances, length or method of commuting, or the safety of their neighborhoods. They do report fewer good employment opportunities, although once again this is stronger for all migrants than recent migrants, giving more weight to the theory that earlier migrants are being left out of current economic developments.

A significantly higher percentage of recent migrants also report living in a home owned by a private landlord – 45 percent compared to eight percent – rather than a home owned by the respondent, their spouse or their family. This has a strong negative correlation with life satisfaction; however, we can assume that this difference is temporary as migrants from before 2012 report only nine percent living in a home owned by a landlord. In fact, migrants from before 2012 have a higher rate of homeownership than non-migrants (38 percent to 23.7 percent), primarily because far fewer of them live with a relative.

CITY AND TOWNSHIP DIFFERENCES

An important takeaway from these findings is how heterogeneous urban migration is in Myanmar. Migrants are broadly distributed across education and income levels; they are more educated on average than non-migrants, but with no difference in income. While 34 percent of recent migrants have only a middle school education, 27 percent have gone beyond high school. 32 percent have a household income of less than 250,000 MMK per month (about 163 USD), but 19 percent have above 550,000 MMK per month. Notably, when comparing recent migrants with non-migrants, there are no differences in personal well-being – which in the 2018 CLS is measured by self-reported measures on life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety, health, and feeling life is worthwhile. It is to be expected that identifying differences in well-being correlated with migration as there is not one type of group dominating urban migration at present rather migrants represented a diverse cross-section of society.

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Although most of the research focus has been on low-skilled migrant workers moving to industrial townships on the outskirts of Yangon, that is not a complete representation of who the new arrivals are in Myanmar's large cities.

Table 2: Township recent migration comparisons

City	Township	Percent arrived since:			
		2012	**2010**	**2008**	**Total migrants**
Yangon	Dagon Seikkan	35%	45%	48%	83%
	Dagon South	11%	16%	18%	80%
	Hlaing Tharyar	8%	14%	19%	85%
	Insein	3%	3%	3%	72%
	Mayangone	8%	11%	24%	81%
	Mingaladon	13%	13%	15%	71%
	North Okkalapa	8%	8%	11%	67%
	Shwepyithar	13%	18%	23%	86%
	Tamwe	28%	31%	31%	63%
Mandalay	Aungmyetharzan	3%	5%	6%	76%
	Chanayetharzan	4%	7%	7%	70%
	Maha Aungmye	13%	13%	17%	76%
	Pyigyidagun	13%	14%	16%	83%

To get a better idea of how recent migrants were distributed throughout their new cities, townships were compared by the percentage of people who arrived at different times, and found some interesting results *(Table 2)*. Townships from the same districts in Yangon had extremely different migration rates, and there was little correlation between what percentage of a township's residents had migrated there and what percentage had migrated recently.

For instance, only eight percent of residents of Hlaing Tharyar, the subject of extensive research on migrants and squatter communities, have arrived there since 2012, compared to 35 percent for Dagon Seikkan. This is partially because Hlaing Tharyar is so much bigger, but as one can clearly see *(Fig. 3)* the number of new arrivals coming to Hlaing Tharyar has been going steadily down since the 1990s. However, migrants still make up a similar total percentage of its population as Dagon Seikkan.

Meanwhile, Tamwe, a more compact township near central Yangon, has had a large spike in migration in the last ten years, although the total percent of residents to have moved there is still much smaller than other townships. Insein has been noted for having very low crime rates, attributed to its tight-knit Karen community.[31] However, it is also notable for having had a large influx of migrants in the 1980s, before it was even officially part of Yangon, but having had very few new arrivals in at least the last ten years.

Looking at a sample of Mandalay's townships, one can similarly see that communities that have experienced significant migration in the past are not necessarily receiving many newcomers now. Aungmyetharzan and Maha Aungmye have the same percentage of residents who moved from elsewhere, but only Maha Aungmye continues to see substantial new migration.

FIGURE 3:
**SAMPLE TOWNSHIP MIGRATION PATTERNS**
**(% ARRIVING WITHIN EACH DECADE)**
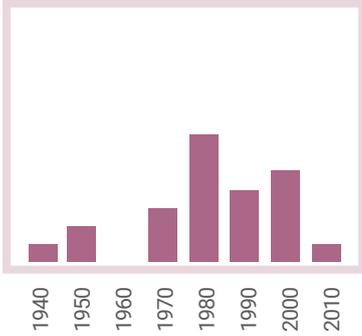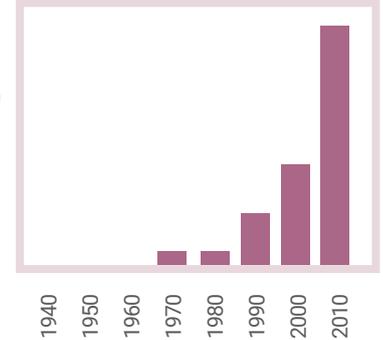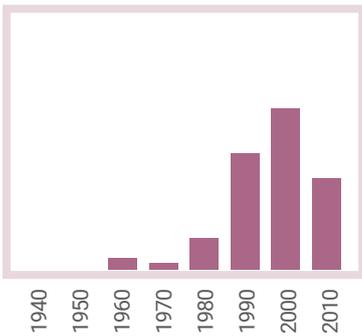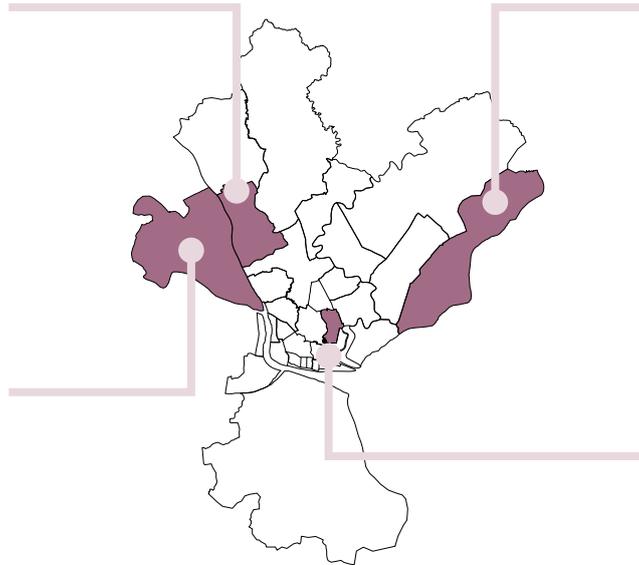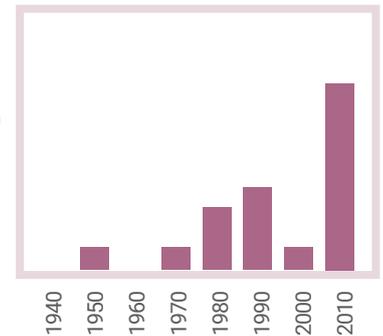

THE MIGRANT POOR IN THE 2018 CITY LIFE SURVEY

IDENTIFYING MIGRANT POOR WITH CLUSTERING

The common narrative about migration in Myanmar is that in the past ten years, as the country has simultaneously democratized and engaged more with the outside world, an explosion in new investment and industrialization has pulled workers to large cities at an alarming rate. These new arrivals mostly cluster on the outside urban fringe where land is cheap, if illegal, while an elite few move into the central core, raising rents and pushing long-time residents progressively farther towards the outskirts.

While no one can deny that Yangon is growing rapidly, it is clear that this is part of an on-going trend that began well before the political reforms of the 2010s *(Fig. 1)*. It is equally clear that the locations newcomers move to in a city is not as straightforward as often pictured, with some stereotypically migrant communities actually having a much lower proportion of recent arrivals than others *(Fig. 4)*.

As the 2018 CLS did not include a question about where respondents initially from, it is not possible to identify which migrants come from rural areas. The closest proxy we have relates to educational level. Several k-means cluster analyses were performed, grouping the townships in the dataset in different numbers of clusters based on education and, separately, on migration patterns in the past ten years. The data was restricted to responses from Mandalay and Yangon, as the other three cities only have one township each and always formed their own cluster with no other townships included.

K-MEANS CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Cluster analysis is a set of machine learning techniques for identifying subgroups within a dataset based on predetermined variables. K-means clustering is the simplest and most common of these techniques, in which the data is separated into k groups such that each observation is more similar to the other observations in its own group than it is to any observations in other groups.

The cluster analysis identified three distinct clusters of townships, which share similar characteristics. Based on the cluster analysis, five townships were identified as the most likely to have high proportions of recent, migrant poor based on education characteristics and migration patterns identified in past research – Dagon Seikkan, Hlaing Tharyar, Shwepyithar, Mayangone, and Pyigyidagun (in Mandalay). Lanmadaw also would have fit into this group, but it was excluded because of the sample size. This grouping of townships is referred to as "migrant poor".

A further grouping of townships was identified based on this analysis, which overlapped with the less educated migrant townships on education but had very low rates of recent migration – Insein, Dagon East, North Okkalapa, and Seikgyi Kanaungto. This subset is referred to as the "native poor" townships. Although education is highly correlated with income – both in general and for respondents in the 2018 CLS – residents of these townships have significantly lower incomes than those in the less educated migrant townships. This may be because many migrant poor townships already have a connection to a job before moving, but this also supports a larger body of evidence that less educated, longer-term urban residents are being left behind in Myanmar's current economic growth. Moving forward, this native poor subset is examined both to build a story about its residents and as a control to test if differences between migrant poor townships and the general population are because of their education or because they recently arrived from a rural area.

Comparing the migrant poor townships to the rest of the sample, there is a smaller percentage of people with post graduate, graduate, and high school education, and more people with middle school, primary school, and no formal education, with the largest differences being for graduate education (9.6 vs. 19.6 percent) and middle school education (39.7 vs. 27.5 percent). This aligns well with past studies suggesting the prevalence of rural-urban migrants with a middle school education, but nothing higher.[32] The native poor subset actually has a slightly higher educational attainment, but the differ-

FIGURE 4:
RECENT MIGRATION IN YANGON TOWNSHIPS

Migration after 2012, percentage

0 - 12

13 - 25

26 - 38
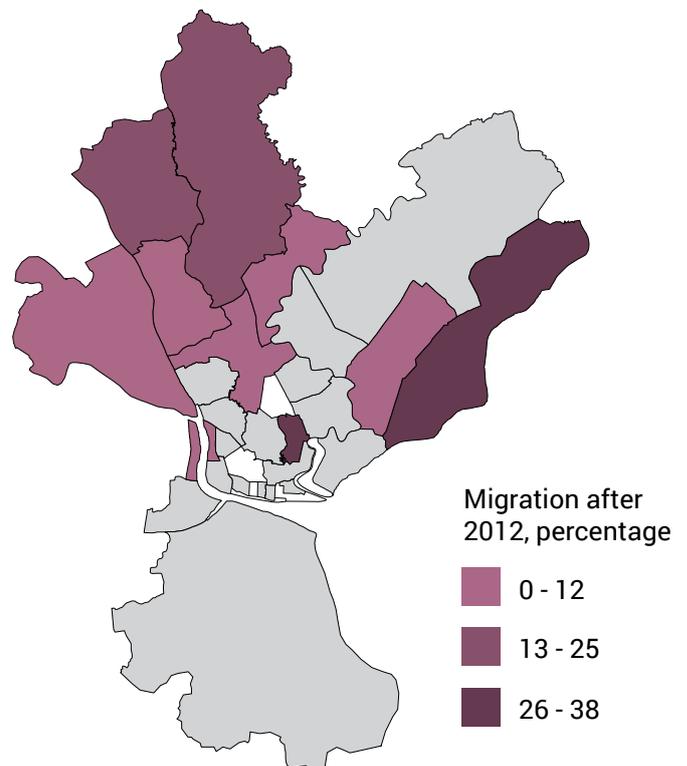
Cluster 1: migrant poor - townships with lower average education and more recent migrants
Cluster 2: native poor - townships with lower average education but fewer migrants
Cluster 3: general - other townships

ences are not statistically significant. None of the subsets – migrant poor, native poor, or general townships – have statistically significant differences in terms of gender or age distribution.

ASSESSING WELL-BEING IN MIGRANT POOR AND NATIVE POOR TOWNSHIPS

Reexamining the well-being metrics for these groups, it can be seen that migrant poor townships report lower life satisfaction and thinking that their life is worthwhile compared to the general townships, but no significant difference for happiness, anxiety, or health. This is consistent with past research on well-being in more economically developed countries, which found that things like education and wealth improve long-term well-being measures like life satisfaction, but not short-term measures like day-to-day happiness.[33]

The native poor townships also score lower on life satisfaction and thinking life is worthwhile than the general townships, but the differences are not statistically significant. They do report significantly higher anxiety, which is notable for two reasons. First, anxiety and happiness are highly negatively correlated, so it is surprising to find a population with higher anxiety but without lower happiness. Second, as will become clear later in this Discussion Paper, this native poor subgroup faces a distinct set of challenges from the migrant poor townships, and it is illuminating how these different types of challenges are reflected in the self-reported measures of well-being.

One of the clear reasons for this variance in long-term satisfaction and self-worth is the disparity in living situations. When regressing long-term satisfaction on a variety of income and quality of life variables with the full 2018 CLS dataset, homeownership and housing quality stand out as being strongly significant. In Mandalay and Yangon, seven percent more households in migrant poor townships are living in a house owned by a private landlord than the general or native poor townships; slightly more also own their own home but 15 percent fewer live in a house owned by relatives.

There are large differences in perceptions of housing quality and affordability based on who owns the home. For respondents living in a house owned by themselves, their spouse or a relative, around 80 percent agree that their housing meets their needs, with about 50 percent strongly agreeing. For those living in housing owned by the government or a private landlord, only around 60 percent agree that their housing meets their needs, with only 29 percent strongly agreeing. Around 18 percent of those living in a house owned by themselves or their relatives agree that it is difficult to afford compared to 58 percent of those in housing owned by a private landlord. Differences in housing affordability are still notable when looking at migrant poor townships, where 40 percent of residents agree housing is difficult to afford, compared to 26 percent in the general and in native poor townships.

This can be compared to differences in affording other necessities – food, utilities, education, and healthcare – which are still significant but smaller *(Table 3)*. All of the differences besides food are statistically significant. Healthcare is clearly the next largest potential expense, as 48 percent of migrant poor, 46 percent of native poor, and 38 percent of the general townships report difficulty in affording it. However, it is important to note that for all of the affordability metrics besides housing, migrant poor and the native poor townships seem quite similar,

There are large differences in perceptions of housing quality and affordability based on who owns the home.

Table 3: Percent with difficulties affording necessities based on township subset

	Housing	Food	Utilities	Education	Healthcare
Migrant poor	40%	30%	26%	27%	48%
Native poor	26%	26%	24%	27%	46%
General	26%	24%	20%	23%	38%
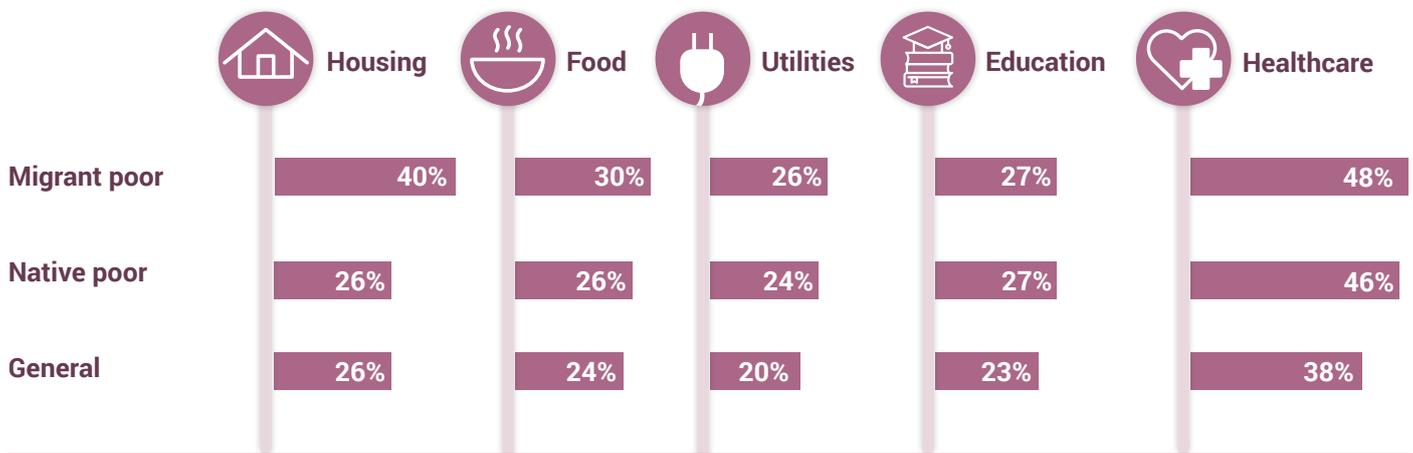
but on housing the native poor townships are the same as the general townships. This stands out as a difference specifically related to lower educated migrants, as opposed to lower average education.

When considering the affordability of utilities it is important to note that significantly fewer households in migrant poor townships have connections to the YCDC/MCDC water system – only 19 percent of households in migrant poor townships, compared to 50 percent of the general and 42 percent of the native poor townships. This is strong evidence that migrant poor townships living on the outskirts of the city do not have the same access to municipal services that longer-term residents of the same education level have who live closer to the urban core. Further evidence to support this is that only 36 percent of households in migrant poor townships report being satisfied with the quality of sewage removal, compared to 66 percent of the general and 72 percent of native poor townships. Interestingly, the difference for agreeing that the electricity supply is reliable is, while significant, smaller, with 79 percent of migrant poor agreeing, 84 percent of native poor and 87 percent of the general townships. This may be because the question was about the general reliability of the electricity supply, not the respondents' satisfaction with it, so people might have responded in more general terms, whereas when thinking about sewage removal they were reporting their personal satisfaction.

In general, migrant poor townships seem less content with environmental factors in their city compared with the native poor and the general townships. Only 45 percent of migrant poor townships agree that their city has clean streets and public areas, compared to 54 percent of the urban poor and 58 percent of the general townships. Similarly, only 19 percent of respondents in migrant poor townships agreed their city had clean waterways, versus 27 percent of the native poor and 29 percent of the general townships. However, those in migrant poor or native poor townships do not report feeling less safe in their neighborhoods or houses after dark or that they are more likely to be the victim of a crime than other townships in Yangon and Mandalay. This is interesting given other reports that hostels catering to relatively transient migrant workers are magnets of crime.

It is interesting to note is that migrant poor townships report being more prepared for natural disasters, and more likely to agree that the government provides them with useful information about future environmental risks. Although on the face this may seem positive, it may be connected to the prevalence of flooding in many wards around the outskirts of Yangon, and the efforts of government departments to encourage people to leave those areas.

There is no significant difference in the type of work – part-time, full-time, day-labor, etc. – performed by households in migrant poor townships compared to the general townships, but there is in the type of employer. Migrant poor are more likely to be self-employed and less likely to work for the government or private companies. This supports qualitative research which found that many migrant poor who intended to work in factories did not meet the qualifications and ended up taking on informal work to get by.[34]

This is not the case for the native poor townships, where more do day-labor or work part-time than full-time. Fewer are self-employed or work for private companies, but many more work for the government – ten percent compared to 0.8 percent of migrant poor and five percent of the general townships – and civil society organizations or NGOs. The native poor townships are less likely to believe the government is improving economic conditions, agree that they have access to good employment conditions, agree that their job gives them opportunities to develop valuable skills, or believe the city development committees have a vision for the city's development. They are more likely to feel unsafe expressing opinions about the government in public and disagree that the state/regional government is responsive to the needs of the people.

This gives a picture of many migrant poor people moving to bigger cities and generally finding a source of employment, but having difficulty affording housing and being forced to live in less palatable conditions. This negatively affects their long-term well-being, but so far has not made them more cynical about the present or pessimistic about the future than the general population. There is also a different kind of urban resident, clustered in specific townships, who has been in the city much longer, who owns their own home or lives with family who own a home, but are no better educated than the new workers arriving from elsewhere. These people have more difficulty finding a job, are generally better informed about the activities and plans of the local government but also less trusting of that government, and less likely to believe the government will improve their lives.

CONCLUSION

The rapid expansion of cities in Myanmar increases the importance of research on the well-being of urban residents. This Discussion Paper provides quantitative analysis of urban migration and the difficulties faced by urban migrants. The findings corroborate much of the existing research on urban migration in Myanmar, while challenging some of the existing narratives and demonstrating the value of utilizing different research methodologies to understand the complexities of urban migration and well-being.

- **Although Myanmar is less urbanized than its neighbors, urban migration has-been consistently high for over twenty years.** Analysis of the 2018 CLS data reveals that the popular narrative about migration trends changing abruptly with the political changes of the last decade are not entirely accurate. The seeds of urbanization may have sprouted in Myanmar during democratization and the removal of foreign economic sanctions, but they appear to have been planted 15-20 years earlier.

- **Patterns of migration have been shifting with some Yangon townships experiencing major internal migration within the last six years.** 2018 CLS data suggests that while Hlaing Tharyar continues to experience the largest influx of migrants in absolute numbers, other townships have experienced a more drastic change in the composition of migrants. For instance, eight percent of residents in Hlaing Tharyar arrived since 2012, compared to 35 percent in Dagon Seikkan. Significantly smaller changes were observed in other townships.

- **The people moving to cities are a diverse group.** Recent urban migrants are not just poor people moving into the fringes of the cities from rural areas; many are educated, wealthier, and moving into down town areas. There is large variation in where new migrants settle, with educated, wealthy newcomers moving into central urban areas and potentially displacing existing long-term residents. This diversity makes it hard to generalize about the urban experience of migrants.

- **As recent migrants are less likely to own their own home, they are more vulnerable to rising housing costs.** 45 percent of recent migrants live in a home owned by a private landlord, compared to 8 percent of non-migrants. Regression analysis suggests that home ownership and housing quality are a key component of life satisfaction and feelings of self-worth. While this warrants further research, it suggests that the government should accelerate its efforts to promote affordable housing. Migrants also face much lower access to key municipal services. For instance, only 19 percent of respondents in poor migrant townships have access to piped water provided by YCDC.

- **Migrants are not the only group facing difficulties.** Residents in townships with a less educated population and fewer migrants find it harder to gain employment and report lower satisfaction with government. Policy interventions are needed to help connect them to jobs and to provide skills training to increase opportunities for formal employment.

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