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# Female International Labour Migration from Southern Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

The chief objectives of this study, are to: 1) indicate the scale and composition of female international migration in the four southern border provinces of Thailand; 2) explore the causes of this movement and the extent to which existing migration theory is appropriate in understanding Southern Thai international migration; 3) study the main impacts of international labour migration on the women involved and their home communities; 4) draw out the policy implications for the welfare of migrants and for economic development and social change in these provinces of Thailand.

Data in this study are obtained from secondary sources and from primary data collection using qualitative as well as quantitative approaches. A field study was conducted between November 1999 and June 2000 in the four southern border provinces of Thailand: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun.

This study finds that a significant number of women move on a temporary basis from Southern Thailand to work in Malaysia. These include seasonal, circular and commuting labour migrants. They are generally unskilled labourers and mainly move on an undocumented basis and work in service, agriculture and factories as well as in small scale trade.

The limited availability of work in the home villages and the insufficiency of income of households are major factors causing outmovement. However the specific causes of migration between female and male migrants are different. In addition the reasons for migrating among single and married female migrants are different as a result of their different roles and statuses in the family. Female migrant workers here use long-

standing social networks which facilitate their migration for work because they benefit from the close proximity and language which they share with the destination.

The impacts of international labour migration on female migrants and their communities are generally positive from an economic perspective, but negative from a social viewpoint. Migration improves the economic status of female migrants and their families. However, this is not the case in relation to their social status in the family and in their community. The economic conditions of communities have been improved from the remittances which women bring back from overseas, but the migration of the female migrants also creates social problems.

Although the money brought back by female migrant workers in this area is not very large when compared with the remittances from female migrants in other regions of Thailand, the Government should be supportive of the migration of female migrants in this area.