Beyond aid: The continuous struggle to cope with displacement in Myanmar and Thailand

Rudolf, Markus; Schmitz-Pranghe, Clara

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Arbeitspapier / working paper

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Beyond aid: The continuous struggle to cope with displacement in Myanmar and Thailand

Markus Rudolf \ BICC
Clara Schmitz-Pranghe \ BICC

SUMMARY

Multi-party elections and the signing of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015 raised hopes in the international community of a possible settlement of Myanmar's protracted conflict and one of the world's worst protracted displacement situations (PDS) in the near future. Yet conflicts in the border areas and human rights abuses carry on, more than 600,000 Burmese continue to be displaced within Myanmar and three to five million remain in Thailand. This *Working Paper* examines strategies that displaced persons from Myanmar have developed striving to cope with major challenges of displacement. We observed that strategies go beyond the commonly used three durable solutions. The findings suggest that neither return nor local integration into the society of the host country is necessarily definite or are mutually exclusive. Both are merely two poles of a wide range of displaced persons' possible coping strategies, encompassing return, cyclical movements, temporary return, *de jure* local integration and different levels and stages of *de facto* local integration.

In scrutinizing whether the change of governance eradicated the causes of displacement, brought peace and laid the foundation for return, our research revealed significant flaws in Myanmar's political transition. Notwithstanding impressive achievements, conflicts persist and are likely to cause new waves of displacement. With regard to access to legal, economic, political rights, services, house, land, property and livelihoods, the situation of displaced persons (DPs) remains dire. Still, the international community promotes return and has been reducing assistance for camps in and outside of Myanmar. For internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, this means that options of refuge have diminished, while the causes to flee remain. After decades of displacement, DPs have developed a set of practices such as diversifications of livelihoods, income sources, residences, and others. We argue that it is imperative for any long-term and coherent strategy that addresses protracted displacement to take those micro realities into account.

CONTENTS

Main findings

Legal categories do not suffice to address social realities

In the Thai–Burmese context, refugees, IDPs, returnees and migrants cannot be categorically differentiated. Categories are either officially not used, overlap or change over time. Solution strategies for protracted displacement situations, therefore, need to be derived from a conceptually widened analysis of forced migration as an act of involuntary movement.

DPs regard prospects for return dire

Return does not seem to be feasible for many refugees and IDPs, despite certain progress with regard to democratization and ceasefires in Myanmar.

Obstacles to the return of refugees and IDPs are foremost security concerns, distrust in authorities, low confidence in ceasefire negotiations and limited access to land, documents, legal representation, housing, healthcare, education or livelihoods.

DPs have developed a variety of coping mechanisms

The primary coping mechanisms of DPs are a diversification of livelihoods; modification of socio-economic units (e.g. family split-ups); multiple residencies; semi-autonomous infrastructure (health, education, administration); temporary, cyclical or partial return; expansion of translocal networks as well as a reliance on material and immaterial aid (e.g. camps, projects, funds). Identifying and supporting existing strategies beyond aid would be an important prerequisite to fostering forms of sustainable livelihoods.

Varying prospects for DPs' local integration

The prospects for displaced persons' local integration vary according to the quality of ties with the local population (common language, ethnic background) and how they secure their livelihoods. Decisive factors are also the social, legal and political status of DPs and the ensuing level of access to protection, free movement, work permits, infrastructure, and the labour demand in the receiving communities.

De facto local integration is an adaption mechanisms of everyday life

The lack of *de jure* local integration regarding citizenship, residence and work rights observed in Thailand contrasts starkly with the everyday life situation of DPs. A large number of displaced persons from Myanmar have achieved a *de facto* local integration outside the country in urban and rural areas. As the Burmese labour force is indispensable for Thailand's economy, Burmese employees and Thai employers would benefit from the extension of labour rights for Burmese.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

For the last decades, both Myanmar and Thailand have been affected by one of the longest-lasting and biggest protracted displacement situations in East Asia: More than 600,000 Burmese are displaced within and three to five million outside of Myanmar—most of whom live in Thailand. Armed conflicts in the border areas, state repression and human rights abuses have forced hundreds of thousands of Burmese—especially of ethnic minorities—to flee. Multi-party general elections and the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with eight of the armed ethnic actors in 2015 raised hopes in the international community of a possible settlement of Myanmar's protracted conflict and one of the world's worst protracted displacement situations (PDS) in the near future. International policy changed accordingly: International sanctions were lifted, and increased cooperation and development assistance were granted, based on the hope that the problem of displacement would cease to exist as affected persons would return. This idea, in turn, was based on the assumption that the root causes of displacement were in the process of being resolved. The central question of this *Working Paper* is to assess whether or not this view corresponds to the facts on the ground.

In contrast to many publications that address a macro–political level of displacement, this *Paper* assesses this topic foremost by examining displacement, perspectives and resulting strategies of affected people from Myanmar[1] within the country and in Thailand.[2] It analyzes the hardships and coping strategies of displaced persons and contributes to the debate on solutions to protracted displacement situations (PDS) by focusing on perspectives and agency of the displaced persons. Our transnational approach

pays attention to both the high mobility of the people concerned and to existing or persisting translocal networks. We argue that a better understanding of the nature of protracted displacement and the strategies used by the people concerned is a prerequisite for adapted, participative, coherent and sustainable strategies of humanitarian and development aid—and in fact for any conceptualization of durable solutions for PDS.[3]

Conceptual framework

In its conceptualization of solutions to protracted displacement, this *Paper* goes beyond the classical understanding of durable solutions—return, local integration and resettlement. Those concepts were found to be of relevance as a political and normative discourse but not as descriptive labels that match the reality on the ground.[4] Displaced persons have developed alternative strategies to secure their lives and livelihoods, i.e. in accessing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural life of the destination country to a varying degree or by combining classical solutions. We thus distinguish two concepts of local integration: A normative and fully legalized *de jure* local integration as defined in international conventions and a somewhat informal, limited everyday practice, henceforth called *de facto* local integration. Despite the fact that it has been advocated for since the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, *de jure* local integration, which primarily refers to the naturalization, i.e.

---

1 \ In 1989, the former military junta changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar. This study uses the term 'Myanmar' acknowledging that most people of the country use this term. It is, however, recognized that the name is controversial and for many emblematizes autocratic rule and severe human rights abuses. The term "Burmese" which in some conflict-affected communities is used to refer to the ethnic group of the Bamar or the the Burmese military refers to all citizens of Myanmar in this *Paper*, while the term "Bamar" is used for the major ethnic group.

2 \ As this *Paper* is addressed to a non-specialized public, a wide array of information is covered which necessarily affects the depth of analysis. We tried our best to counter this fallacy by including references to quality papers that explore the respective issues in depth throughout the text.

3 \ The *Working Paper* is based on findings of a research conducted in various locations in Thailand and Myanmar between July 2016 and February 2018 in the framework of the BMZ funded project "Protected rather than Protracted: Strengthening Refugees and Peace". The project addresses persons affected by displacement, government agencies, stakeholders from international and non-governmental organizations.

4 \ In Thailand *de jure* local integration is out of reach for the majority of displaced persons. The country is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees or its companion 1967 protocol and lacks a formal national asylum framework. Asylum seekers are technically designated as illegal immigrants, but they are allowed to stay in nine officially called "temporary shelters" along the Thai–Burmese border. Prospects for resettlement have considerably deteriorated for Burmese refugees since group resettlement programmes were closed down in 2014. UNHCR organized a pilot return programme in 2016 assisting 72 refugees to return to Myanmar. However, it remains to be seen whether conditions in Myanmar—especially with regard to persisting conflict and poor livelihood opportunities—allow for sustainable return and encourage large-scale voluntary return of internally displaced people and refugees in the near future.

the granting of citizenship to refugees, is rare. *De facto* local integration, in contrast, is a gradual process and an everyday practice of (forced) migrants. Due to missing residence or work permits, displaced persons in informal circumstances are highly vulnerable. They are excluded from the protection rights that they would enjoy as official refugees (Hovil, 2014).

Even though *de facto* local integration is an everyday practice of displaced persons around the globe, it has mostly been ignored by policymakers and is hardly researched by academics. In part, this has been due to policy preferences for encampment, which, in turn, have been related to logistical considerations and internal politics of the respective host countries (Bohnet, 2016; Bohnet, Mielke, Rudolf, Schetter, & Vollmer, 2015). Other reasons for this negligence have been difficulties in accessing and measuring *de facto* local integration due to its informal character. After years of disregard, there is now a growing academic interest in *de facto* local integration, especially in the context of urban refugees.[5] UNHCR started to focus on urban refugees and elaborated a "Policy on Alternatives to Camps" in 2014. Also, development cooperation increasingly recognized the needs of urban, often not registered, refugees and other displaced persons living outside of camps.[6]

In this *Working Paper*, we define a displaced person as someone who at a point in time has felt or feels compelled to leave their place of residence involuntarily.[7] With this definition, we neither adhere to the legally motivated differentiation between refugees and migrants and undocumented migrants nor exclude

internal displacement. Acknowledging that the relationship to the receiving community is a decisive factor for local integration and reintegration, our research took into account not only the displaced themselves but also the local communities. We understand displacement and return as a process that is often not linear but interrupted and sometimes characterized by cyclical movements and multiple displacements. This conceptualization is based on earlier studies that showed that static categorizations that differentiate between IDPs, refugees and (illegal) migrants do not match the reality on the ground (Richmond, 1994; van Hear, 1998).

In this *Paper*, we use the term 'coping strategies' to refer to adaption mechanisms individuals use to lessen the adverse effects of stress or to reduce their vulnerability (cf. Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). We understand resilience as the ability to re-establish such adaption mechanisms after the shock of a human-made or natural disaster. We do not argue that resilience is equivalent to an automatism of bouncing back after such disasters. We rather want to highlight opportunities to break vicious circles by building upon existing capacities (Lenette, Brough & Cox, 2013; Omata, 2012; Sousa, Haj-Yahia, Feldman & Lee, 2013). We recognize that not all persons are in a condition to exit those vicious circles without external help. We observed that, in fact, a majority of affected persons do not manage to re-establish their *status quo* before displacement. Nevertheless, we also observed a remarkable resilience among DPs and hosts that proves wrong any ideas about victims being deprived of all capacities and, ultimately, any agency.

Displacement dynamics

For the last decades, Myanmar and Thailand have been affected by one of the most long-lasting and biggest protracted displacement situations in East Asia. Large-scale internal displacement and cross-border movements in search for protection and survival already began when civil war erupted following independence in the late 1940s.[8] However, while

---

5 \ See *Refugee Law Project working paper series*; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; Briant and Kennedy, 2004.

6 \ In the Thai context, there are several studies on Burmese labour migration and Thai migration policies (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012), on migrant education (Lee, 2012), on humanitarian assistance for displaced persons from Myanmar (Vungsiriphisal et al., 2014), on temporary shelters and their interaction with and impact on surrounding communities and the environment (Chalamwong, Thabchumpon, & Chantavanich, 2014; Thadaniti & Chantavanich, 2014), on resettlement (Harkins & Chantavanich, 2014) and finally on return (Chantavanich & Kamonpetch, 2017b). Little effort has been made so far to connect these fields. We propose to close that gap by overcoming a strictly categorical differentiation between refugees, labour migrants, irregular migrants and internally displaced persons and by analyzing challenges and coping strategies of displaced persons from a transnational perspective.

7 \ For definitions, see https://www.bicc.de/fileadmin/Dateien/Projekte/1030/1030_methodology_paper.pdf.

8 \ For background information on Myanmar's ethnic armed groups and conflict dynamics see for example Duffield, 2008; Smith, 1999; Buchanan, 2016; Lintner, 1999.

displacement had been mostly temporary until the early 1980s, it became increasingly permanent and protracted in the course of the conflict: With the implementation of the four-cuts strategy, aimed at cutting off ethnic armed actors from their support base (food, funds, intelligence and popular support) and the permanent establishment of Myanmar's armed forces ('Tatmadaw') in parts of the eastern borderlands since 1983/84, displacement figures rapidly increased and internal and cross-border displacement became more and more protracted (Lang, 2002). The first refugee camps on the Thai border were established from 1984 onwards.[9]

The causes of displacement within and from Myanmar are multiple and overlap each other.[10] One can roughly differentiate three principal strands of displacement: There are 1) those who have fled violence, the direct and indirect impacts of armed conflict in the borderlands and persecution based on ethnicity, 2) the Rohingya who have been confronted with what the UN considers ethnic cleansing, and

3) those who have faced political repressions.[11] This *Paper* focuses primarily on the first group of people. Extending the model of Cernea (2000) and Kälin and Schrepfer (2012), we differentiate the impact of displacement with respect to access to housing, land and property (HLP), to basic services (nutrition/ health/ education), and to integration (social/ economic/ political/ legal).[12]

In Myanmar and Thailand, we looked into these dimensions for IDPs and refugees in camps, for confined and immobilized communities and for unregistered urban and rural IDPs and refugees (including those who were relocated).

IDPs are grouped in two different types of camps: Those under the realm of the central state and those in territories controlled by ethnic armed groups (EAGs). The largest—and by now most prominent—camps controlled by the Tatmadaw are the camps for Rohingya in Rakhine State. They are isolated, guarded and surrounded by the military that controls all movements. The sizes vary, locations are sometimes merely a few hundred metres away from the original settlements, and often it is virtually impossible to distinguish original Rohingya settlements from newly built camps. The population inside the camps has been virtually cut off from economic, social, cultural and political life and most State services (like education or health facilities) in Myanmar. The situation inside those confined areas was harsh in 2016, but it even deteriorated in 2017 during the targeted ethnic cleansing.

Besides the now well-known Rohingya, the case of numerous other displaced individuals inside Myanmar is less prominent. There are, for example, various immobilized IDPs in the eastern border areas.

9 \ Today, it is estimated that there are 635,000 conflict-induced IDPs (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre , May 2018) and 451,104 Burmese people under the mandate of the UNHCR in the neighbouring countries. Thailand that shares a 2,401 kilometre-long border with Myanmar alone hosts 99,886 (March 2018) refugees from Myanmar in nine camps in four provinces along the Thai–Myanmar border, most of them belonging to the ethnic minorities of the Karen (79.8%) and the Karenni (10.2%) (The Border Consortium, 2018).

10 \ Besides these violent conflicts and their consequences, forced relocations due to development projects such as dams or the Asia Highway are widespread. Poor livelihood conditions, education opportunities and health services, especially in rural areas, are common in Myanmar. All these factors contribute to ongoing displacement and large migration flows. The number of refugees and people in refugee-like situations from Myanmar is estimated at 451,105 as of mid-2016 (UNHCR population statistics). The number of conflict-induced IDPs is estimated at 635,000 as of December 2017 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, May 2018). In the same year, an additional 351,000 people had been newly internally displaced by disasters. Thailand is one of the main host countries of displaced persons as well as labour migrants from Myanmar. In 2016, over half a million (560,832) Burmese lived in Thailand under the mandate of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016; 2017a). According to estimates, however, between 1,5 and five million Burmese live in Thailand, be it as refugees, labour migrants, irregular or educational migrants (Herman, 2016; Martin, 2007; Ma, 2017). This means that less than every tenth DP lives in one of the nine official refugee camps ("temporary shelters") along the border (99,886 by March 2018; The Border Consortium, 2018; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017c).

11 \ Political dissidents and students fled the country especially in the course of massive political repression, which culminated in the crackdown of the democracy movement in 1988. Many of those who survived the crackdown fled imprisonment and torture across the Thai–Myanmar border (Betts & Loescher, 2011; Loescher & Milner, 2008). Since the political opening of the country, some of these refugees have returned, while others decided to remain abroad or are still blacklisted by the regime and hence not able to return (interview with political activist in Mae Sot, July 2016). Meanwhile, human rights violations and severe restrictions to the freedom of the press in Myanmar continue.

12 \ Cf our methodology paper at https://www.bicc.de/fileadmin/Dateien/ Projekte/1030/1030_methodology_paper.pdf

Especially in Kachin and Northern Shan State, civilians close to the front line are stuck. They are neither in camps nor made it to a safe distance. Most of the time they were immobilized due to financial problems, lack of access to alternative livelihoods or any options of a safe haven. As they have been unable to escape the threats permanently, they usually flee to the nearby forest either overnight or over some days and hide out there. Some also stay for extended periods of time in their jungle hideouts, e.g. during the whole farming season. This strategy has the advantage that they do not lose access to their livelihoods. Once they have left for good, they are not allowed to return—as their areas are declared unsafe for return by the army.

Many other IDPs live in spontaneous shelters, camps, church or temple compounds, or with hosts (IDMC estimates: 635,000, UNHCR: 450,000 IDPs). Once NGOs or armed groups—depending on which side of the front line the DPs are found—take over, limited access to markets, infrastructure and health amenities is arranged. Those administrated by ethnic armed groups, such as the KNU, get assistance through the respective organizations; in this case the Karen Office of Relief and Development and The Border Consortium (TBC) across the border. In Karenni and Mon State, most IDPs stay in areas controlled by the Karenni Army between Loikaw and the Thai border respectively by the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) close to the three Pagodas pass to Thailand. IDPs who stay in those areas are generally free to travel. However, due to insecurity and fears of attacks, movements are often limited to the vicinities.

Many IDPs, finally, turn into refugees, and returning refugees turn into IDPs. This process is gradual, not linear and often not documented. People and their adaption strategies are more dynamic than the differentiation between IDPs and refugees might suggest. Statistical numbers, therefore, have to be taken with a grain of salt.[13] With regard to their legal status in Thailand, persons who have been displaced from

Myanmar encompass a very diverse group of people. These groups range from recognized refugees (or as the Thai government puts it: "displaced people escaping from fighting") who stay in one of the temporary shelters to off-camp populations such as undocumented or irregular migrants, to labour migrants and students.[14] Drivers for such cross-border movements are diverse: Tens of thousands of minors are being sent or are coming for educational purposes to the camps, joining monasteries or attending migrant schools in the cities (though many also had experienced conflict and violence in the border regions). For adults, prospects for better livelihood opportunities and health services are important factors. Hopes for resettlement in a third country (despite decreased chances) have also been playing a significant role for movements into Thailand.

Methodology and research design

Our research took a qualitative approach. We conducted on-the-spot observations, focus group discussions and in-depth qualitative narrative interviews in Thailand and Myanmar with displaced persons, members of the host communities, experts, international humani-tarian and development actors, local civil society organizations dealing with displacement and human rights, representatives of refugees and IDPs as well as political organizations. We also conducted some interviews with (former) combatants of ethnic armed organizations as armed actors proved to play an important role both for return and (re-)integration processes. This resulted in 200 of these interviews and focus group discussions in Thailand and
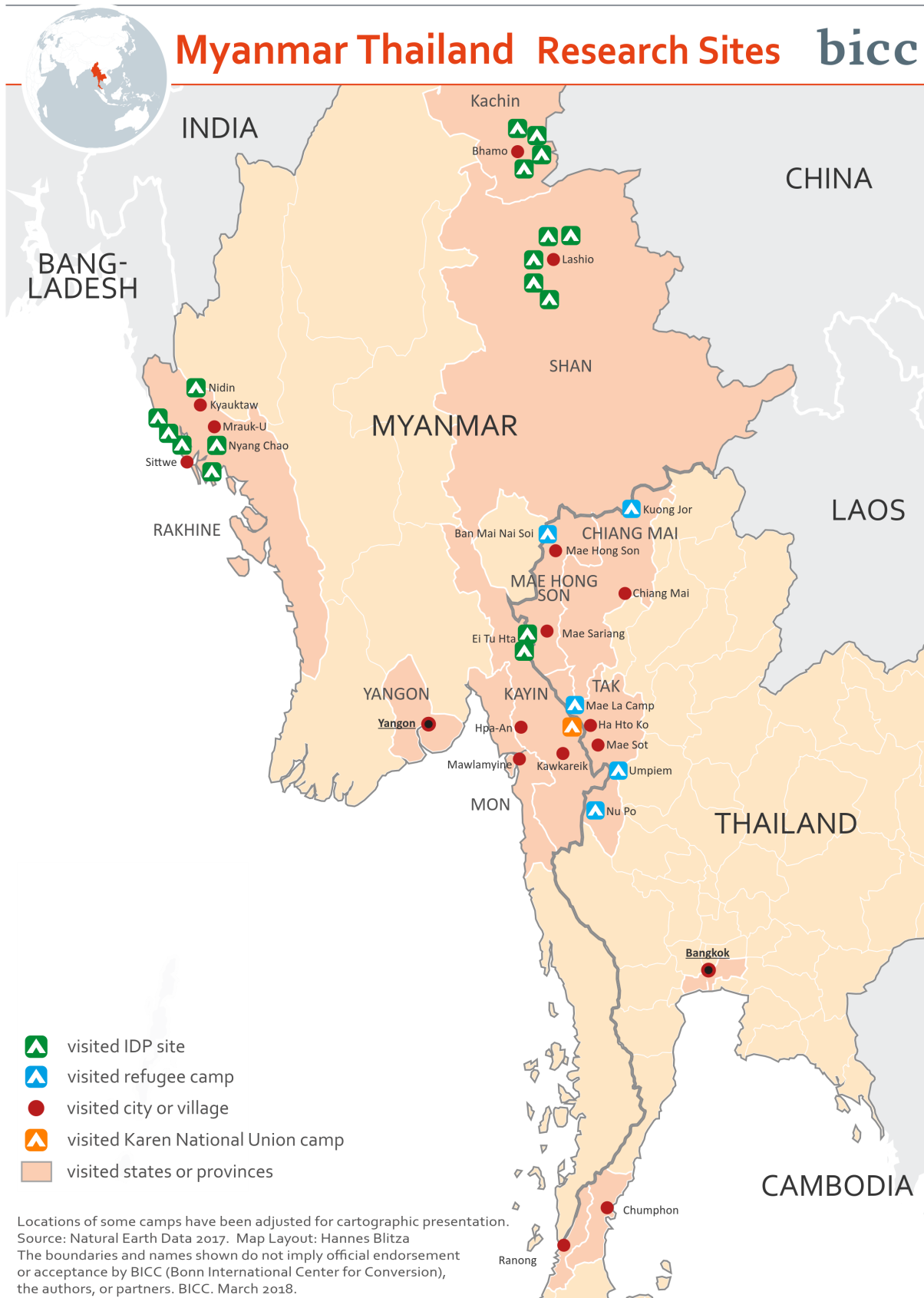
13 \ The case of a 51-year-old Karen women, who was internally displaced twice before she crossed the border to Thailand and reached a camp can be called paradigmatic. She did not possess a Burmese ID and was only able to register once she got in touch with UNHCR (interview with Karen women in Nu Po Camp, July 2016).

14 \ Besides the conflict-induced displaced persons from the Myanmar's south-eastern regions, we find considerable numbers of displaced Rohingya from Rakhine State in Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia. As new boat people and victims of trafficking, this persecuted group made international headlines in 2015. The extent of government officials' involvement in systematic abuses in Thailand has caused political uproar. Bases of smugglers and mass graves were found in Thailand's south (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Those who escaped and survived are detained in various Immigration Detention Centres. While hundreds of female and child refugees have been released to shelters of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, UNHCR was still advocating for the release of the male Rohingya. Another important group of forced migrants in Thailand not covered in this study are trafficked persons, mainly women and children supposed to work in the sex industry and young men shanghaied on fishing boats.

Myanmar Thailand Research Sites bicc

INDIA

CHINA

BANG-
LADESH

Kachin

Bhamo

SHAN

Lashio

MYANMAR

Nidin
Kyauktaw
Mrauk-U
Nyang Chao
Sittwe

RAKHINE

LAOS

Kuong Jor

Ban Mai Nai Soi   CHIANG MAI
Mae Hong Son

MAE HONG
SON

Chiang Mai

Ei Tu Hta   Mae Sariang

YANGON   KAYIN   TAK
Mae La Camp
Yangon   Ha Hto Ko
Hpa-An   Mae Sot

Mawlamyine   Umpiem
Kawkareik

MON   Nu Po

THAILAND

Bangkok

Legend:
⛺ (green) visited IDP site
⛺ (blue) visited refugee camp
● (red) visited city or village
⛺ (orange) visited Karen National Union camp
▨ visited states or provinces

Locations of some camps have been adjusted for cartographic presentation.
Source: Natural Earth Data 2017. Map Layout: Hannes Blitza
The boundaries and names shown do not imply official endorsement
or acceptance by BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion),
the authors, or partners. BICC. March 2018.

CAMBODIA

Chumphon

Ranong

Myanmar. Two junior assistants did an additional 39 individual interviews plus three focus group interviews with persons that self-identified as displaced persons and labour migrants. The assistants were recruited, trained and supervised during our field stay. To take into account developments in the highly dynamic context of displacement in and from Myanmar, two additional senior research assistants conducted longitudinal field research enabling us to constantly update our results until spring of the year 2018.

Though it was impossible to set up a representative sample due to reasons of time and staff, the authors tried to depict the diversity of displaced persons from and in Myanmar by taking into account different ethnicities, gender and age groups, diverse livelihood contexts in- and off-camp and different legal status of the displaced, e.g. refugees, labour migrants, stateless and undocumented persons. Regarding ethnicity, the focus lay on Burmese minorities. We focussed on Shan, Karen and Kachin as the most prominent cases, but also included Rohingya, Karenni and Mon in our regional approach. To prevent blind spots, representatives of other ethnic minorities such as the Chin and Rakhine enlarged the focus. We discussed the methodology and our results with Thai and Burmese counterparts to achieve a participatory approach. This meant that from the elaboration of specific questions to the interpretation of answers we did all we could to strive for unbiased triangulation and intercultural sensitivity (e.g. through a kick-off workshop in Bangkok). The authors / researchers complemented triangulation of all interview data by the analysis of country-specific secondary data and relevant literature on return and local integration. A final workshop in Yangon assured that preliminary results were shared with and commented by stakeholders and all the partners without whom this work would not have been possible.

Strategies to cope with displacement

To differentiate between exceptional and typical cases, politicians, civil servants, experts, reporters and analysts describe social reality by grouping people together. Generalized patterns are labelled, categorized and can then be dealt with. By their very nature, generalizations cannot do justice to each case. Extremes are extrapolated, exceptions become a case in point for the rule. The delicate part is that the labels often have an impact on the labelled persons. For legal categories, this effect is even more evident than for social roles, for instance as the former might be enforced with different means than the latter. Still, even a legal framework must be communicated and implemented by someone to come into effect. In the following, we will scrutinize the categories related to displacement, their level of implementation—and hence their impact—from the perspective of affected individuals. Rather than examining the challenges and coping mechanisms for refugees, IDPs and migrants separately, this allows us to study how all of those affected by displacement react and how their reactions are in turn related to mentioned labels.

Our ranking of the challenges mentioned by the interviewed persons shows the urgency of the challenges above (housing, land, property–HLP, services, integration) in the following order: Access to nutrition and income, to services, to protection and political, respectively social, inclusion. This order reflects the weight respondents, in general, gave those needs after displacement. Each case of displacement differs considerably—and the persons we talked to responded in a variety of ways—yet a general pattern is palpable. First, the more people have lost access to everyday necessities, the more they are affected by displacement. Second, the more they regain access, the more such negative consequences are overcome (cf. Cernea, 2000). It is evident that after life-threatening situations, the immediate need is to access food. It is also apparent that shelter or services such as healthcare are a high priority. The fact that protection was mostly not mentioned as a top priority reflects the prominence of the efforts to secure access to food and basic services in their daily lives and shows that people in protracted conflicts have gotten used to the state of insecurity. The same holds true for political and

social inclusion—after decades of exclusion, respondents do not consider it a realistic option. Yet, this does not mean that they consider it to be irrelevant.

The respective legal status that is attributed to displaced people from Myanmar frames how they are coping with those challenges. Depending on the circumstances, their status can either be beneficial or detrimental in their quest for access to HLP, services and integration. The status fosters or deters access and thereby frames the options. Accordingly, individuals try to claim or refuse the labels within the range of choice given by the circumstances.

Some coping strategies are based on the explicit reference to a displacement status. These include the reliance on humanitarian assistance, livelihood programmes, educational and health services provided by humanitarian actors in the camps as well as the employment by humanitarian organizations as camp staff. Also, pupils and students attending migrant schools in the cities follow livelihood strategies based on the reference to their status as exiles.

The second strand of coping strategies differs from those strategies referring to a displacement status insofar as it is not based on any claims bound to the status of being displaced. On the contrary, it is a low-profile strategy with the goal to stay below the radar of any authorities. While it is true that a majority of Burmese in Thailand do not have a chance of getting recognized as displaced persons and remain undocumented or migrant workers against their will, this strategy is also actively chosen by Burmese to better cope with the challenges of integration. Some try to acquire legal residence and work permits as migrant workers, some stay and work in Thailand's informal sector. The individual strategies do not necessarily coincide with the legal constraints attached to a given status—it is but one option for the individuals. Displaced Burmese frequently switch their status according to the trade-off of the respective advantages and disadvantages (of the two mentioned main strategies). It is quite frequent that displaced persons try to combine options, for example by sneaking out (and back into) the camps to take up work and diversify their income.

Access to livelihoods

Displacement is often connected to the loss of land. As livelihood opportunities are frequently based on this access, it is crucial to regaining access to land, and the question of how to achieve this is, therefore, a crucial issue for IDPs and refugees in Thailand as well as returnees and many hosts.[15] IDPs in Myanmar struggle with their livelihoods as their conditions and access to rights have *de facto* not changed. Burmese refugees in Thailand struggle with it because a full and *de jure* local integration, i.e. residence and work titles, are out of reach. This status quo, in turn, influences the decision of many DPs in Thailand to opt for return or against seeking refugee status. Returnees and hosts also struggle with securing their livelihood in the process of (re)adapting to the changes caused by displacement.

Land, work and entitlement

On both sides of the border, DPs' difficulties related to land are quite similar. In Myanmar, forced relocations caused by infrastructure projects and systematic land grabbing by armed actors play a significant role regarding the lack of access to land. Here, the military often restricts access to large parts of the land, blaming it on insecurity. IDPs deplore a systematic land grab by the Tatmadaw that allegedly cooperate with the office of land registration. We observed that the amount of land that has been fenced off by the military is indeed considerable. Behind sheer endless walls, Myanmar's armed forces have built small cities with workshops and greenhouses, where cohorts of soldiers can be observed cultivating the land.

Various displaced communities that live next to their original settlements reported that the best chunks of land along the main streets had been confiscated and never given back (Northern Shan State). Many areas occupied by the Tatmadaw are situated around or close to mines (various interviews July to September 2016). Furthermore, the army has also claimed land in the border area. "[There] they claim to … secure the border. But according to me, they want to get a foot in the door of the drug traffic," an anonymous NGO employee (working in Lashio, September 2016) commented. The continuing prevalence of the very same imminent threat people had fled from deters them from returning. The vicious circle continues: During displacement, their vulnerability increases due to the loss of access to livelihoods. Upon return, their vulnerability increases as the conditions have often not changed (cf. Box 1).

Box 1
Involuntary return to Stone Village

In autumn 2016, people from Stone Village, Kachin, had to return to their village, even though it is close to the actual front line and lies behind the military checkpoint that marks the end of the area that is controlled by the govern-ment. This area is far from appeased and not even demined. As a consequence, previous live-lihood activities, such as living off the forest and the mountains surrounding the village, were impossible. Agricultural work is rare—thus the village's name. Life before displacement was hard, the women reported, and it deteriorated further when they lived in the camp. A spokes-person of the women explained "Our life now is worse than it was in the camp," without access to their former livelihoods, behind the frontlines and mostly cut off from aid.

15 \ With the term livelihoods we refer to the "capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: A livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term" (Chambers & Conway, 1991, p.7).
In many parts of the world, including rural Myanmar, land is more than a resource to access a means of living: Living off the land is the only possibility to survive without making a living. This means that if they have access to land, even without access to any market, people can assure access to food.

Once people have become vulnerable due to a loss of access to land respectively livelihoods, the risk of experiencing additional vulnerabilities during displacement is common. In Myanmar, returnees and IDPs (mostly from ethnic minorities) face extortions, forced labour, embezzlement and corruption. Income opportunities are often limited by the lack of infrastructure—goods cannot reach the market due to

adverse road conditions. In Shan State, locals recounted: "The transport routes are blocked by the military. We risk to either pay a bribe or lose our products". Respondents also feared to be recruited for forced labour. This situation, in turn, fosters the decision of farmers to cultivate poppy. "It can easily be transported on less frequented paths and the price is good" (Shan male, July 2016). The persistent preference farmers have for the drugs trade is, in other words, due to high profits for poppy and few alternatives for making money in the agricultural sector.

In Thailand, the undocumented migrants and refugees, in particular, are also vulnerable to exploitation. The major hazard is related to their legal status. Most Burmese in Thailand have no choice but to take up jobs in the informal labour market. Undocumented migrants, as well as registered refugees, work primarily in the agricultural, service, construction and sex industry, the fishing and manufacturing sectors. They usually earn a lot less than the official Thai minimum wage of 350 Baht/day in most of the western Thai border regions (Mon, 2010). Non-Thais are neither allowed to acquire land nor houses. It is difficult for undocumented Burmese migrant workers to find a place to rent: "The patron or friends help you and put you up", a Shan male worker explained (September 2016).

Due to their precarious legal status, migrant workers frequently become victims of hazardous working conditions, human trafficking and forced labour. Occasionally, there are police raids on companies that employ illegal Burmese workers. In May 2016, for example, roughly 10,000 people were deported.[16] Yet, it is quite common that the deportees quickly find their way back to Thailand (representative of ADRA, Mae Sot, July 2016; Ranong human rights groups). Police in areas like Ranong and Mae Sot with high numbers of illegal migrants often tolerated

habitual offenders after a while. They are a significant source of income for the officials after all. Posts in border, customs or police departments in Mae Sot are said to be among the most lucrative ones in Thailand.

Undocumented migrants are often arrested or forced to pay bribes. "If you are arrested they will fine you 100,000 Baht. Or, if you can't give [them anything], they might put you in jail" (Karen refugee, Mae Sot, July 2016). Other sources speak of 50 to 500 Baht the police charges for not having papers (Representative of CIDKP, Mae Sot, July 2016). Refugees that get caught outside the camps without valid documents are considered illegal migrants and face detention or deportation or are again forced to pay bribes. Outside the camps, refugees might also become victims of violence without any chance of getting justice. Reportedly, there have been incidents where public security forces forced undocumented migrants to work for them (local activist, Mae Sot, 18 July 2016). In some incidents, refugees have been found shot outside the camps (NGO representative, 11.11.2016).

Reliance on humanitarian assistance

To cope with livelihood insecurity, parts of the displaced population in Thailand and Myanmar rely on service provisions by humanitarian and development actors. IDP camps in Myanmar are run either by the ethnic armed groups (EAGs) in the autonomous areas or by various international NGOs together with the Burmese government. In Rakhine State, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has the lead in camp management. In Kachin State, the churches play a major role. In Karen areas, the dependence on humanitarian aid deliveries, especially cross-border aid by TBC, has been high. IDPs in KNU-controlled areas reported that KNU did not allow them to do farming arguing that they would receive enough support by TBC and that farming would have a negative impact on the environment. Only now, with cuts in the food delivery to IDP settlements, does KNU reportedly allow IDPs to do farming (interview with 40-year-old male Karen IDP village leader, July 2016).

16 \ In June 2017, the Thai government nevertheless issued a new labour law providing harsh punishment against firms that hire undocumented (foreign) workers. This triggered an exodus of migrants to Myanmar. Immigration officials put this exodus at 60,000 (23-28 June). With the sudden absence of thousands of workers, many Thai companies were under pressure. The country's military leaders, therefore, delayed the implementation of the new law until January 2018 to allow illegal workers to register and apply for proper documents. They also called for a public hearing to receive input from companies and workers (Martin, 2007).

In Thailand, the Royal Thai government (RTG) runs all camps, while UNHCR focuses on protection activities and programmes as well as resettlement procedures. Although the shelters have existed for more than 30 years now, the RTG insists on the term of temporariness. It tolerates the camp population on its grounds but does not grant official refugee status to the displaced let alone open paths towards achieving citizenship. Camp residents are officially neither allowed to exit the camps nor to take up work outside the camps. This situation renders them highly dependent on humanitarian service delivery—mainly provided by The Border Consortium and other INGOs. These services include the provision of nutrition, shelter, healthcare, education, sanitation, training, income or resettlement opportunities.

Despite restrictions that have considerably increased, particularly since 2014, many refugees have been seeking to combine international aid provisions with other livelihood strategies. "Usually, the men leave the camp in the rainy season for three or four months and come back only once a month to get registered and to receive their rations" (Karen refugee, Mae La, July 2016). Even though this has been a pattern ever since, the rate of such cases has increased lately due to the reduced food rations: NGO staff reported that they were wondering why the young men were not available for farming training courses during their holidays until they discovered that they had been farming their fields on the other side of the border. Despite the risks involved, the refugees had to compensate the rations that were reduced by the international organisations as a consequence of decreasing humanitarian funding for the region (all camps on the Thai side). Similar cases have been encountered regarding IDPs in disputed areas.

Since the onset of the democratization process, most agencies have started orientating themselves towards Myanmar. It is expected that Thailand will soon close down all camps and withdraw all funds. Staff and operations have either already moved or are in the process of moving across the border. Since 2012, TBC has received only half of its funding for shelters than before due to donor cuts, and the funds are

expected to decrease further (TBC representative, Mae Sot, July 2016). Since then, food rations provided by the Border Consortium have also continually decreased forcing refugees in the camps again to follow additional strategies for securing their livelihoods. This means, in sum, that the challenge to secure livelihoods is exceptionally high for those who have not been able to diversify their livelihoods beyond aid yet. According to our interview data, the decrease in livelihood options outside the camps due to increased restrictions of movement, the reduction of food rations in the camps and the uncertainty about their future prospects when the camps close down are already indirectly pushing refugees and IDPs to return.

Relation of encampment and dependency

With decreasing rations in the camps, it became evident that displaced persons usually do not rely exclusively on humanitarian assistance. While there are some blind spots concerning the conditions of the population in and off camps in Myanmar, more is known about the interrelation of access to livelihoods and dependency in Thailand. The refugees adopt coping strategies that contribute to the evolvement of a cash economy in the camps. This cash economy is bigger in well-connected areas, like Mae La, which is close to surrounding communities and the booming border town of Mae Sot than in camps in remote areas. An INGO representative estimated that in Mae La, two-thirds of the population have access to cash income besides the rations distributed by TBC: INGOs, for instance, employ one-third of the camp refugees. Another third receives money from resettled relatives or irregular work (Mae Sot, July 2016). Burmese DPs' modes of livelihood have changed considerably over time.[17] Inside the shelters for IDPs and refugees,

17 \ Longitudinal fieldwork conducted by Lee (2014) showed that the RTG did not guarantee any institutional support for the refugees nor interfered in the NGOs' activities of providing food and shelter or in the refugees' livelihood activities until 1995. However, between 1995 and 2005, the RTG changed its stance towards refugees considerably—mainly due to border security concerns resulting from the collapse of Karen strongholds and cross-border attacks by the Burmese army and DKBO forces. RTG initiated a policy of "control" and "regulation" (Lee, 2014, p. 469). The number of camps were reduced from 30 to 12, guard forces were reforced, camps fenced and checkpoints established. This decrease severely restricted the refugees' mobility and livelihood opportunities. Refugees were no longer able to move out of the camps, and agricultural spaces inside the camps were heavily reduced. As a

sewing and weaving are important income-generating activities. Different NGOs run diverse livelihood projects like small animal raising and small-scale agricultural activities, as in Karen, Karenni and Kachin camps. These livelihood programmes by INGOs—designed and implemented in a strikingly similar way both in IDP and in refugee camps—are in high demand. Critics point out that the activities are not always sustainable. The income generated in the small gardens in IDP or refugee camps is criticized for being insufficient and the pig raising activities, e.g. in Kachin, for not being diversified enough. But, participating women told us, they had joined the so-called livelihood groups not only to increase their income but also to 1) follow any economic activity at all, 2) provide for their families and to 3) eventually share their acquired knowledge.

A successful livelihood strategy that has evolved in the refugee camps during the last decades of humanitarian action is to work as staff for one of the many INGOs. All organizations heavily depend on camp staff to keep their programmes running. This offers refugees some income and the opportunity to gain valuable language and professional skills. These skills, in turn, serve them when they decide to leave the camps and work as either labour migrants or as undocumented migrants in Thai communities or upon return to Myanmar. An NGO representative pointed out that none of their 130 camp staff members were interested in receiving Thai work certificates. They planned to return to Myanmar to

consequence, living conditions in the camps deteriorated. While until 1995, INGOs supplied only 50 per cent of the food needed by the refugees, INGOs provided for 100 per cent of the refugees' food needs (Lee 2014, p. 470). In other words, the refugees became completely reliant on external food aid. 2005 to 2011 was again marked by a shift of the RTG's perspective on refugees: From being perceived as security risk, they turned into a useful economic resource. The Thaksin government strongly focused on development projects, particularly in border regions. In 2004, Mae Sot and its surroundings was declared a special economic zone. The RTG approved skills-training projects designed to produce household income, improve livelihoods, employment opportunities and agreed to support education in the camps by setting up learning centres with a focus on teaching the Thai language. In 2007, Thailand issued identity cards to some 85,000 refugees in the camps (Lee, 2014, p. 472; Betts & Loescher, 2011; Loescher & Milner, 2008). Today, after the military coup of 2014, confinement policies are still in place, and regulations are more strictly enforced. The nearby farmers already complain about losing workers, just as bus drivers do about having fewer customers.

get jobs in the ever-increasing humanitarian and development cooperation sector. The most jobs of returnees that we encountered during our fieldwork were indeed reported to be with either INGOs or teachers that returned to work with their respective ethnic communities.

Access to basic services

In Myanmar, members of ethnic minorities deplore the lacking access to healthcare and education in their native tongue respectively the poor quality or high costs of both. The ethnic minorities feel that they are not only on the periphery in a geographical sense but also regarding basic services. For years, healthcare in the periphery has only been provided by non-state actors. The local population has been left to fend for themselves. The central government keeps ignoring burning issues like that one of the highest Burmese rate of drug addicts and HIV in Kachin State as well as the language barrier. Even though many non-Bamar do not understand Burmese, the ability to speak the language is required as a *sine quae non* in the school system throughout Myanmar. Those experiences related to access to health care and education enforce the widely shared impression among ethnic minorities that the current ethnocentric regime disadvantages them, and that the system is representing a policy of cultural hegemony (Walton, 2013). The absence of services has been met with two complementing strategies: Migration to Thailand and local capacity-building.

Health infrastructure

The lack of infrastructure in the border areas is especially evident in healthcare. A considerable number of humanitarian actors have been criticizing the underdeveloped, underfinanced, understaffed and low-quality health system (Latt et al., 2016; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2008; Risso-Gill, McKee, Coker, Piot, & Legido-Quigley, 2014). The demand for health services in areas of protracted conflict clashes with the actual level of access to it. There are more fatal injuries as a result of shootings, mine incidents, victims of abuse

and torture that need medical assistance; there are also more persons suffering from secondary and tertiary effects—yet there are fewer hospitals and medical staff than in other areas.[18] Due to the structural and continuous lack of health care services, ethnic and community-based health organizations have stepped in (cf. Jolliffe, 2014). Their relative success on various levels has been widely documented (cf. Mahn et al., 2008; Teela et al., 2009).

In Thailand, international aid agencies can only provide health services for those who have a proper migrant status. Undocumented migrants often have no such access. Displaced persons themselves had to step in to close these service gaps. Alcohol and drug consumption, for example, affect especially the poorest among the refugees. These vices, often in combination with large debts and gambling, are related to high suicide rates within the camps (representative of ADRA, Mae Sot, July 2016). The Mae Tao Clinic near Mae Sot is an example of how persons affected by displacement have managed to help each other based on their needs. It was founded by a Myanmar refugee and offers medical treatment free of charge for labour migrants and undocumented migrants.

Education and schooling

The lack of access displaced persons have to basic services like health and education services has led to a multitude of responses both from affected persons and international aid in Myanmar and Thailand. These responses show how local coping strategies evolve in interrelation with external aid and, how this combination influences future trajectories. The demand for cultural autonomy and the fear of a cultural hegemony of Bamar culture has, for example, been a major driver of resistance among all ethnic armed groups (EAGs). Educational policies were part of the quest for autonomy (cf. Horstmann, 2015). The efforts

to establish an autonomous curriculum for pupils, teachers and school boards in areas controlled by EAGs inside Myanmar and in camps have therefore been considerable. As they were deliberately pursuing an agenda of resistance, the policies used to run counter to the official Burmese curriculum. The negative result of this system has been that students are often secluded from tertiary education (Lall & South, 2014).

The chances of accessing such tertiary education have, as a matter of fact, been traditionally slim for ethnic minorities. These groups, also denounced as hill tribes, montagnards, or highlanders, have been discriminated by the respective majorities throughout South East Asia. The groups are quite diverse, but they are united by the fact they have been excluded on multiple levels from state services (Formoso, 2010; Laungaramsri, 2014; Michaud, 2013; Scott, 2009; Smith, 2005; Toyota, 2005; Winland, 1992). In Myanmar, their vernacular excluded them first and foremost from Burmese education. In offering education to minorities, missionaries and churches were the first to find an alternative path to support them in their struggle to gain access to education. Missionaries usually not only translated and catalogued languages of minorities but also offered education as way out of marginality to them. Today, still, many of the encountered networks that have facilitated access to higher education in the capital Yangon or abroad are a result of personal relations with missionaries.

International aid providers have continued and expanded the work that the missionaries had started. Awareness of the value of education among the refugees from Myanmar has risen considerably over the last decades. Also, groups that are less often recognized as refugees like the Shan have benefitted from contact with international aid. But also ethnic armed groups and other community-based providers have established ethnic basic education in their areas of influence and throughout the camps (see above and Davis & Jolliffe, 2016). The quality of ethnic based education reportedly often exceeds that of national schools in Myanmar. Especially the knowledge of English as a foreign language is much better due to the presence of native speakers in the education

18 \ Secondary effects are secondary diseases caused by a lack of treatment or no access to hospitals for e.g. accidents, diseases or pregnancies. Tertiary effects are linked to traumatized family members, respectively drug or alcohol addicts. The latter are directly linked to the protracted conflict because drug abuse and trafficking are generally said to thrive in protracted conflicts. In Kachin State, for instance, every family is said to have a heroin user amongst them. This affects the rate of HIV and, in turn, the work of health providers such as MSF that operate the only hospital in town for such treatment (MSF clinic Bahmo, Kachin, August 2017).

system. International staff even teaches in the officially not recognized camp Koung Jor on the Thai-Myanmar border. This opportunity, in turn, has attracted non- refugee Myanmar nationals to temporarily stay in the camp. The presence of international teachers, language and migrant schools has opened up long-term perspectives at international universities and institutions. A shortfall of this model is that the often US-American-oriented curriculum has been making it harder to access the respective national institutions of higher education.[19]

The abundance and increasing formalization of the learning centres respectively migrant schools referred to above is an example of the organizational skills and capacities of refugees in Thailand:[20] Informal and illegal, migrant schools in Mae Sot, however, operated "on a persistent and regular basis, as a non-state informal institution" (Lee, 2012a, p. 127). In contrast to other migrant schools across the world that are mainly set up by the state and school mainly citizens of the receiving country, the migrant schools in Thailand were established by migrants themselves in cooperation with NGOs, and enrolled students are mainly foreign nationals (Lee, 2012a, p. 126). The first

migrant school was founded in Mae Sot in 1991. In the 2000s, the number of schools heavily increased and so did the number of enrolled students. Migrant schools were more and more institutionalized: In 1999, an umbrella organization of migrant schools, the Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC), was founded.

One major hindrance to education is the high school fees in the camps. According to a female interviewee, school fees are as high as 150 Baht (approximately four euro) per semester or higher. Bible school in Mae La reportedly costs 1,000 to 2,250 Baht per semester (focus group discussion at Mae La, July 2016). Undocumented migrant workers in Thailand struggle with education, too. Only migrant children who are officially registered in school or who have parents who are documented workers are normally counted in official data. This renders undocumented out-of-school migrant children largely invisible. However, more and more migrant children have enrolled in Thai schools since the "Education for All" (EFA) policy was adopted in 1999 and a cabinet resolution on the same issue followed in 2005.

Drive for social change

The example of education shows how migrants and refugees compare and combine benefits, and how this, in turn, influences individual trajectories across borders. Due to the high reputation of the migrant schools, some students who would have the chance to attend Thai schools opt deliberately for migrant schools. It has become common practice among the Burmese to send their children to Thai temporary shelters to let them attend the camp schools, where children are taught in English already at the primary level. Mae La Camp is said to host approximately 3,000 boarding house students. While parents often stay in Myanmar, these children frequently live with relatives in the camps or boarding houses and go back to their parents in Myanmar during the summer break. Camp staff in Thailand recounted that most newcomers are usually students who arrive without their parents. In contrast to families who have stayed in the camp for decades, these students often return to Myanmar. In Myanmar, the parallel systems of

19 \ Today, migrant schools are "strongly and visibly rooted in almost every migrant living compound scattered all over town" (Lee, 2012, p. 125) and there are 64 migrant schools in Mae Sot alone, according to a volunteer teacher (BEAM school, Chiang Mai). The growth of migrant schools has certainly also improved conditions for undocumented migrants (Lee, 2012, p. 135). However, the lack of centralized oversight and limited resources are heavily restricting possibilities. The Thai and Myanmar governments formally recognize only some of the learning centres, and although many migrant schools accept undocumented migrants, the vast majority of students go through their basic education without receiving any accreditation. This is severely limiting their future education options and job prospects (Save the Children & World Education, 2014). Despite large numbers of graduates, very few are able to obtain secondary education. Those who cannot study further, usually volunteer in camp schools or return to Burma (migrant school teacher, Chiang Mai, July 2016). The main strength of the education system—its autonomy—has certain drawbacks. The education system is self-referential and for now mostly qualifies pupils to either reproduce the system (by becoming teachers) themselves or to work with NGOs (Mae Sot, Ban Mai Nai Soi, August 2016).

20 \ Thai law stipulates that all children, regardless of their nationality or legal status, have the right to 15 years of free basic education (Save the Children and World Education, 2014). But still, it is estimated that more than 60 per cent of migrant children (200,000) in Thailand do not attend school (Save the Children and World Education, 2014). For those who attend school, there are two options: Learning centres and Thai schools. 34 per cent attend Thai schools, five per cent attend learning centres that are largely unaccredited institutions (Save the Children and World Education, 2014).

ethnic basic education providers (EBEP) and state schools have led to a double qualification of many ethnic minority members. It is common practice nowadays, e.g. Karen, to attend both schools.

The change of individual options related to displacement has accelerated social change. Young refugees, who have received a relatively good education in the camps and the migrant schools, in particular, have a different perspective on livelihood activities than previous generations or more isolated groups. Many voiced the wish to return as a teacher to their place of origin. However, due to low wages and feared ethnic discrimination against them, they rate their chances of entering public services as slim. Interviewees criticized the education policy of the Myanmar government for discriminating local culture and excluding workers from ethnic minorities. Burmese schools are seen as spearheading and imposing Bamar culture in the border regions. Karen teachers are said to earn a lot less than Bamar teachers—1500 Baht compared to 6000 Baht per month (Chiang Mai, July 2016; Brettell, 2008). [21]

The exposure to new options in Myanmar, primarily transmitted through education is, in sum, a drive that pulls and pushes people in various directions. On the one hand, well-trained persons are returning while on the other, especially in the rural and ethnically controlled areas, people are pushed to camps as the only viable chance of receiving an education in Myanmar. For others who wish to return, the quest for education leads to contrasting results. Some potential returnees fear that they would have to drop out of school due to the high expenditures, since "[they] have no one who will help them with their food, housing, schools and travelling fee" (focus group interview with young adults at Nu Po Camp,

July 2016). Others have returned to Myanmar because of the schools and opportunities for higher education. In Hpa-An, students, for instance, reported to have better opportunities than in Thailand—a conclusion that requires an informed and transnational assessment of the restrictions and options DPs have.

Besides the highly visible structures in the area of health and education, other coping mechanisms of displaced Burmese in Thailand and the border areas have been institutionalized over time. The probably most successful socio-political structures are the various, relatively autonomous refugee organizations. The Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) and the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC), for example, successfully ensured that the refugee and the local population remain in close contact. While they have been maintaining strong linkages to their respective ethnic groups in Myanmar, they have also taken up important representative and organizational functions in the border camps. Nowadays, they oversee all activities, coordinate assistance provided by NGOs and liaise with UNHCR, the RTG and security personnel.

The example of these refugee organizations was followed by others, and the level of social organization and capacities of community leadership among refugees today is much higher than that of IDPs in Myanmar. Members of other sizeable sectors of the population—commonly organized along ethnic lines—also set up their own organizations. The main women and youth committees are the Karen Women's Organization (KWO), the Karenni National Women's Organizations KNWO), the Karen Youth Organization (KYO), the Karenni National Youth Organizations (KNYO), the Burmese Women's Union in Ban Mai Noi Soi and the Muslim Youth Association in Umpiem Mai. The capacity of community leadership transcends ethnic lines: the Women's League of Burma (WLB) is an umbrella organization of women's groups from all over Myanmar. Also, there is an abundance of NGOs and CBOs set up or supported by Burmese refugees exemplifying their self-organizational capacities.

21 \ Interviewees also mentioned the fear that the authorities in Myanmar may not accept the certificates from the camps in Thailand: "We don't have a chance to higher education in Myanmar because the certificates that we got from refugee schools are not accepted in Myanmar (focus group discussion with Karen college students, Umpiem Mai Camp, July 2016). "All refugees finished school in the refugee camp. They also have some vocational skills to work in the community or an organization. But when we're back in Burma, we cannot work or continue our future study in government schools because the education from the camp is not accepted by the Myanmar government" (Focus group discussion with Karen junior college students, Umpiem Mai Camp, July 2016).

Access to protection

Insecurity and ongoing fighting present a significant challenge both to IDP and refugee return in many parts of Myanmar.[22] After the democratic elections, fighting has stepped up again and has intensified in the border region. "We hear about the peace talks, but we see something different. There are soldiers, air raids, mines", people in IDP camps in Kachin report (August 2016). Even where peace talks are effectively in place, action taken by the army is anything but trust-building: "In my area, the military told the ethnic armed group: you misunderstood. When we said we will pull back from this area we meant that we now work together. We will both control the area. We cannot, and we will not go back" (Southern Shan State, July 2016).

Ongoing insecurity

Landmine contamination—especially in Kayin, Kachin and Karenni State—is a significant security concern. Those who did not leave high-risk mined areas declared: "We do not have a choice". International staff deplored that, in addition to those who are immobilized, many IDPs in Kachin were sent back into areas that had not yet been declared mine-free (Bahmo, September 2016). Maps of mines, in general, are either not available or cannot be trusted, since improvised explosive devices are widely used. As there is no exact information about mines available, their spread is difficult to assess, but we were told on our visit in August 2016 that there were many in the Bahmo area, for instance. A major difficulty is that neither the Myanmar government nor the ethnic armed groups are willing to demine yet, a fact that is attributed to the lack of trust in the nation-wide ceasefire agreement (DCA, Chiang Mai, July 2016).[23]
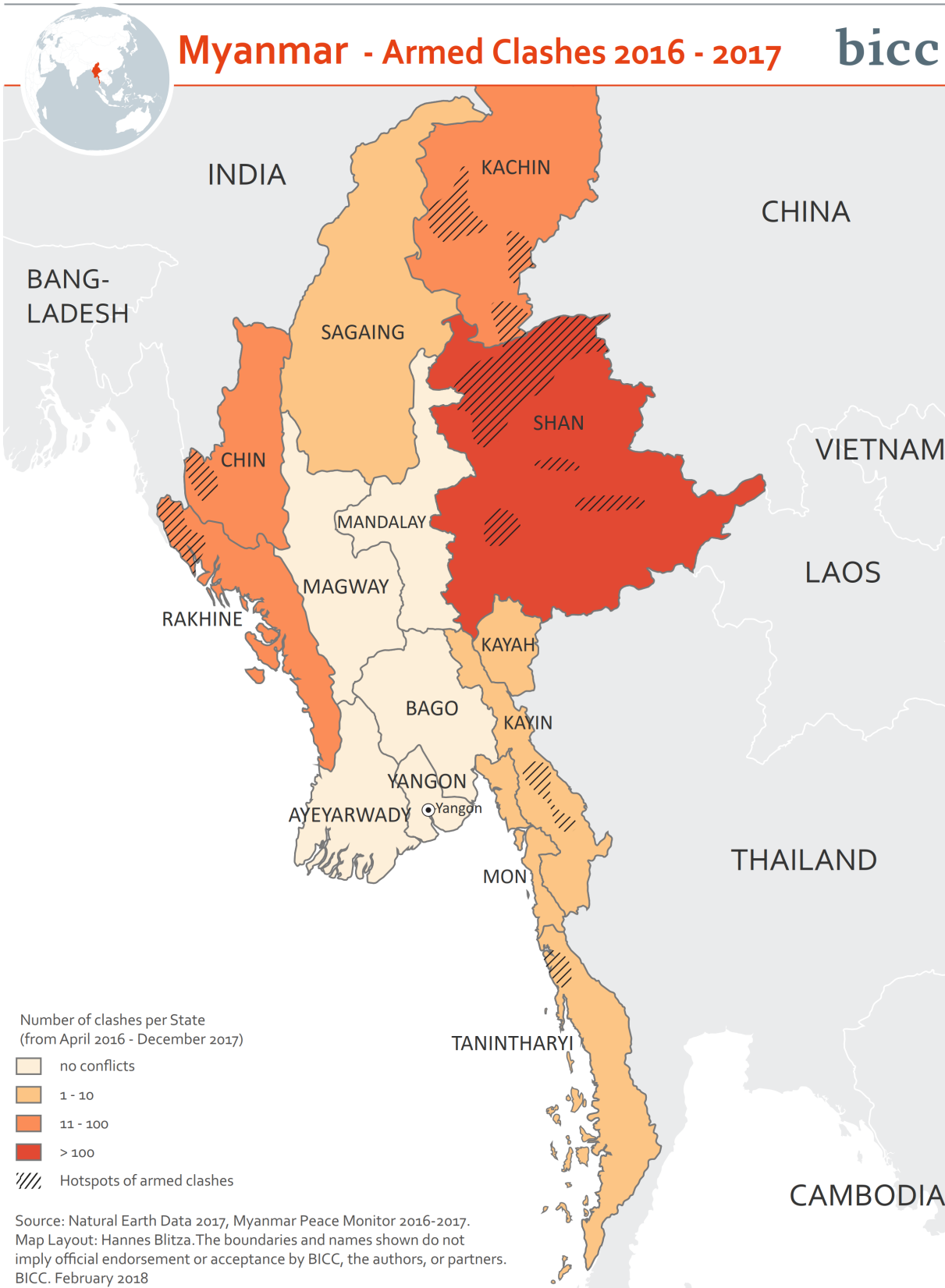
22 \ DPs in Thailand generally considered themselves safe and secure in regard to the ongoing conflicts in Myanmar despite ambushes by the Tatmadaw and DKBO on refugee camps in the past. Refugees and undocumented migrants nonetheless frequently become victims of police violence, arbitrariness and forced labour (NGO representative, Mae Sot, July 2016). Also, domestic violence and petty crime inside the camps are protection issues that were mentioned as severe problems both by INGOs and refugees.

23 \ According to a DCA representative, there were less than 1,000 mine victims in the last two or three decades, and only three to four were officially reported from mid-2015 to 2016. According to our observation, this number seems low. Numbers that are more exact, however, are

On a micro level, it is indeed often difficult to see positive developments with regard to the armed conflicts. Quite the contrary is the case: In Northern Shan State, the number of ethnic armed groups has been steadily rising due to the 'divide and rule' tactic of the army. The continuous presence of EAGs worries especially families with young men. Drafting young men into EAGs has been a common strategy among the armed actors and is still an important reason why people flee their homes and refuse to return. One former child soldier with the KNU and DKBA stated that he still fears forced recruitment upon return to Karen State (interview with Karen student, Chiang Mai, July 2016). With the fragmentation of EAGs and the rise of inter- ethnic fights in Northern Shan State, those recruitments have risen lately (interviews around Lashio, September 2016). To avoid his son from being drafted, a father of an interviewed person in Northern Shan State, for example, had volunteered in his son's stead and was killed recently. The brothers of the interviewee hid in monasteries and one sister in the nearest town. To this day, young men are sent to monasteries to avoid forced recruitment.

Among DPs, there are various levels of support for the armed ethnic actors, and they differ from one individual to another as well as from one ethnic group to another: While the majority of Kachin refugees strongly support the KIO, it seems that the Karen refugees are more divided in regard to supporting the KNU lately (expert interview, NGO representative, Mae Sot, September 2016). Still, nationalism among the Karen in Thailand is often stronger than in Karen State (expert interview, Bonn, September 2016). In the border areas, in temporary shelters or camps, large parts of the displaced population are organized in ethnic political organizations. The Refugee Committees such as KRC and KNRC usually have a considerable authority—based on their history of representing the refugees' interests. The organizations abroad are usually closely connected to the ethnic political actors in Myanmar. This is why many refugees and field staff stressed that the population usually trusts and follows their leaders in their decisions.

hard to find. As victims have doubts about the rule of law or, even worse, fear further reprisals because armed groups are still operating, they are usually reluctant to report such incidents publicly.

Myanmar - Armed Clashes 2016 - 2017

bicc

INDIA

KACHIN

CHINA

BANG-
LADESH

SAGAING

CHIN

SHAN

VIETNAM

MANDALAY

RAKHINE

MAGWAY

LAOS

KAYAH

BAGO

KAYIN

YANGON

⊙Yangon

AYEYARWADY

THAILAND

MON

TANINTHARYI

CAMBODIA

Number of clashes per State
(from April 2016 - December 2017)

- no conflicts
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 100
- > 100

/// Hotspots of armed clashes

Source: Natural Earth Data 2017, Myanmar Peace Monitor 2016-2017.
Map Layout: Hannes Blitza.The boundaries and names shown do not
imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC, the authors, or partners.
BICC. February 2018

Peace negotiations and return

Contrary to the high level of trust in their respective leaders, there is profound mistrust from all sides as regards the peace process. Most statements collected were related to the negative impact of the political framework of Myanmar: "We heard that we got [a] new government that will lead to [a] democracy [sic] system right now, but they cannot control the military or give orders to stop the wars […]" (focus group, Umpiem Mai Camp, July 2016). Another Karen refugee stated: "If we want peace, it is in the hand of the military not in the current government because the power is not in government […] If the international community and international organizations can help us to force our government and military to change the 2008 constitution, there will be peace and freedom to set up real democracy […]" (19-year old camp resident and former child soldier, Nu Po Camp, July 2016). This former KNU fighter saw the increased presence of the Burmese military (he mentioned the number of soldiers and barracks) in Karen State as threatening and an impediment to return: "It seems like they are going to stay for good in our region. So, I feel like there will be war anytime when there is an argument or disagreement among governments and Karen armies." He added that, in his opinion, there is a high risk of war among the ethnic groups themselves considering their increasing fragmentation.

Despite such risks, reconciliation was rarely mentioned as a topic during the interviews. Neither as a prerequisite for sustainable peace nor for return (female Karen officer at the Education Department, Mae Sot, September 2016). This might be related to experienced traumata or to the fact that displaced persons perceive peace as completely out of reach, as a 54-year old Burmese (former political activist from Taungoo and now returnee from Mae La Camp Thailand) described: "Peace is still a long way away, and it will take long to achieve it. I'm not optimistic about this peace process. I don't think NLD [National League for Democracy] can bring peace, and these peace talks will not bring peace. Reconciliation is not possible […]" (South Dagon, May 2017). One of the hindrances on the road towards peace is the fact that most armed actors, including the Tatmadaw, feel that

negotiations about a ceasefire concern only armed actors (WLB representative, Chiang Mai, July 2016). Many national and international organizations like the Women's League of Burma (WLB) try to influence the process despite such odds. The WLB—with limited success so far—wants to increase the participation of women in the struggle for democracy and human rights and advocates a 30 per cent quota for women in the negotiations.

But still, most do not see the necessary conditions for return given. Many villagers have been (forcibly) relocated to government-controlled areas and reportedly need official permission of the Burmese authorities to return to their place of origin. Those who returned without government permission live in fear of being relocated again and thus have not built permanent houses (representative of CIDKP, Mae Sot, July 2016). Often "family lands were lost and burned" (focus group discussion with Karen college students, Umpiem Mai Camp, July 2016) and are now occupied by various new tenants. Some were told that KNU officials are living on their land now (female Karen refugee, Mae La camp, July 2016), some said that houses built for returnees were given to Shan militias (Koung Jor, July 2016). Cases of involuntary return (cf. Box 1) show an additional challenge: Upon return, IDPs lose livelihood activities that they had developed during displacement. Often, they can neither substitute them nor return to activities they pursued before they were displaced as livelihood opportunities have not yet been re-established in the place of origin.

DPs usually assess the risks and benefits of different options—including return—carefully. Spontaneous return demonstrates this clearly (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017b). In general, their assessments reveal two main obstacles to sustainable return. First, refugees are often not consulted beforehand. "We were told that a deal had been struck, that we could go back, and that our houses had been built without anybody asking us before" (Koung Jor, July 2016). In other words: The community was not involved in the process, it had neither chosen the site nor verified the commitment of the armed groups. As they did not share the assessment of the NGO that had initiated the return process and built the houses,

they did not return. Second, the legal access to land is unclear.[24] Nobody is certain that the people that have acquired land and access to resources following the displacement of others are willing to give it up. Third, trust in the NCA is fragile and long-term prospects of peace poor. Many therefore prefer to stick to options they consider safe.

Legislation and legal rights

One serious obstacle to both *de jure* and *de facto* (re-) integration of DPs and returnees is the frequent lack of documents, particularly birth certificates and identification cards needed for gaining access to legal and political representation. In conflict-affected areas, in areas controlled by EAG or in isolated places like the Southern Tanintharyi Region, ethnic minorities only have restricted access to identity documents. According to an NGO that has stepped in with mobile registration offices to provide citizens of Myanmar with legal documents, 11 million persons do not have an ID in Myanmar. For example, most of the elderly Shan do not have official Burmese papers. As most do not speak Burmese, they are not able to apply for them (interview with community leader, Koung Jor, 14/15 July 2016). The same is true for IDPs and other vulnerable groups: "Without an official ID card, people cannot access medical services, open a bank account, go to school or travel anywhere, and they can be arrested at any time", NRC explains in a recent report (Jenssen, 2017).

The high number of people without citizenship or legal papers is a logical consequence of Myanmar's military junta's triple strategy to simultaneously promote (1) ethnic division, (2) religious nationalism and (3) territorial integrity respectively unity over the last decades (cf. Kipgen, 2017). Legal obstacles to obtaining papers have been used systematically as a means to divide and rule (cf. IRIN, 2016). Restructuring the legal framework of citizenship had already been identified as one of the major challenges before transition started (Lall, 2014, pp.10 ff.): Experts explicitly pointed out that

the combination of religious nationalism and citizenship could alienate non-Buddhist groups and divide the nation (Lall, 2014, p. 42 ff.).[25] Various interviews that we conducted in 2016 showed that Rohingya and other Muslims throughout Myanmar had been denied their citizenship (August, September 2016; cf. Green, Maymanus, & de la Cour Venning, 2015, 56 ff.). The history of scapegoating Muslims is still vivid and has driven many of them into exile (cf. van Klinken & Aung, 2017; McCarthy & Menager, 2017).

In exile, the problems related to missing documents continue. Because of the difficulties in obtaining papers inside their country of origin, many displaced persons and migrants lack IDs, residence permits, birth certificates and labour permissions. Burmese birth certificates or IDs are required if one wants to work as a migrant worker. But those who came from areas under

Box 2
Caught between the front lines—Burmese Muslims

Ahmed was born to a Muslim father and a Buddhist mother. Such interfaith marriages became illegal under the law in 2015. His mother nevertheless had him registered as a Buddhist under her name even before the law came into effect. Ahmed's whole family is based in Yangon, and different family members practise different religions. His father was a government official who then did not have any issues with his religion. According to Ahmed's knowledge, his grandfather fought for the British and was most likely from India. Both his father and grandfather had married a Buddhist and raised their children as Muslims. Ahmed got into trouble as a student leader during protests against the military regime in the 1990s. He managed to flee to the border areas and then to Thailand. There, he succeeded to get a working permit and residency papers. He moved on to Singapore where he got a job, but he went back to Karen State where he is currently working. He lives among others Muslims in a village close to Hpa-An. Despite being well aware of anti-Muslim sentiments and discriminatory practices in Myanmar, he sees more opportunities there than in Thailand. Yet, if conditions worsen he would move to another country in South East Asia, to the United States, Canada or Europe.

---

24 \ For those returnees who manage to acquire land for cultivation, there are significant differences regarding legal entitlements. While KNU issues land titles (ownership of the land), the government only issues permissions to use the land (interview with representative of the CID-KP, Mae Sot July 2016).

25 \ The population in Myanmar is far from homogenous. We observed many interethnic marriages, and various family genealogies include various nationalities and ethnicities. Cases where both grandparents and parents speak different languages were frequent. The number of people that find it hard to reconcile a policy of purity with their personal history is therefore high—especially in the border areas.

the control of ethnic armed groups have had hardly any chance of getting a Burmese ID. Moreover, the lack of funds for traveling to Myanmar prevents many DPs without papers from obtaining any legal documents there. Even those who have papers from Myanmar face bureaucratic and financial hindrances in Thailand. Thai IDs are expensive (around 10,000 Baht according to a male Shan, Koung Jor, July 2016), and this is why many migrants and refugees prefer to get by without them. Especially those with the same ethnic, religious and linguistic background manage to blend in. Still, access to health services, formal employment, housing and land in Thailand often remains limited. As one refugee noted, "even with the 10-year ID, permissions are limited. Like [you can only rent the house, [but] can't buy or build your own house. You can only buy [a] motorbike, not [a] car. As I have already decided that I will stay here, I need to get the opportunity to own a house and other things that I need. If I get a Thai ID, I also will try to acquire assets for the future of my son" (interview with Karen refugee, July 2016 Mae Sot). Without the proper documents, movement is restricted. Police checkpoints at entry points of provincial capitals as along the borders of provinces adjacent to Myanmar (e.g. Mae Sot, Ranong) are common and target especially non-nationals (personal observations August 2016).

Access to social and political inclusion

Refugees and migrants experience that bureaucratic hurdles from the Thai side and the level of welcome to newcomers depend much more on the perceived strain on resources and the current demand of labour than on documents. Some feel that discrimination has decreased in general and the reputation of Burmese displaced people has improved over the last years: "In my view, the citizens of Thailand are [...] changing their view toward the Burmese. I saw a lot of discrimination when I first arrived in Thailand [...]. But now, they are becoming more aware of Burma than before as we are ASEAN countries. Thai media are also showing TV programmes about travelling to Burma, so there is less discrimination [...]" (student at a migrant school, Chiang Mai, July 2017).

Local integration

Despite all bureaucratic hindrances in the border areas, especially on the village level, a certain degree of "*de facto* local" integration seems to be possible. However, the level of integration into Thai society differs substantially depending on ethnolinguistic commonalities between the displaced and local host communities. This is exemplified by the Karen and Shan communities. In western Thailand, the porous border to Myanmar and the existence of a Thai Karen community facilitates *de facto* local integration. For decades, numerous individuals from the ethnic groups of the other side of the border have been informally integrated into the host communities. Even today, many displaced Karen settle down in Thai Karen villages on the border. There, it is reportedly easier for Karen people to locally integrate—which includes finding a spouse—while integration in the city without Thai ID and language skills is said to be much more difficult (female Karen and representative of DCA, Chiang Mai, July 2016).

But interviews with displaced and local experts have revealed that the Thai and Karen communities in Thailand usually do not mix: "When I was living in Thoo Mweh Kee, there were only Karen from Thailand and Myanmar. We lived in our community, a little bit isolated from the [non-Karen] Thai community. So we didn't have to communicate with the Thai community that much. As there are also Karen in Thailand, they treated us the same. They didn't do anything to us" (female Karen student of a migrant school in Chiang Mai, August 2016). Though the Karen reportedly enjoy the sympathy of the local population, the relationship outside the borderlands is often characterized by segregation and discrimination. Some Karen, therefore, do not speak Thai even after having been in Thailand for a long time. Thai–Burmese marriages are not very common. Therefore, many Christian Karen convert to Buddhism as a strategy to become "more Thai" (expert interview, Bonn November 2016).[26]

26 \ On the host side, both fears and an awareness of benefits prevail. Refugees usually have to accept lower wages than local residents. Consequently, Thai communities fear for their jobs and wages. Yet, since the younger generation in northern Thailand usually leaves the region to follow job opportunities in the cities, farmers need workers on their land. Therefore, the benefits of Burmese workers are not only their positive work ethics but also the fact that they offset the nega-

Another example is that of the Shan. Similarities of language and religion have been fostering integration into the host communities to a certain degree. Thai who live in the border area—including some police and military personnel—understand or even speak Shan. The refugee children usually attend the Thai school in the village and thus speak Shan and Thai (Focus group interview with three Shan women, Koung Jor, July 2016). Generally, the children in Koung Jor Camp go to Chiang Mai or Bangkok to look for work. Others work for (local Thai) Shan people in the nearby village. Shan refugees integrated into the Thai labour market from the very start as migrants or undocumented workers because they were not allowed to enter the official temporary shelters on the border. It also helped in regard to integration that the refugees have been able to leave for work and school as they please and that local villagers have been able to enter the camp and hire workers.

The relations between host and refugee (be it living together or be it living apart), in sum, are generally good. But there are cleavages within the refugee community in Thailand. Displaced persons described various tensions between Bamar and ethnic minorities. A 54-year old Burmese former political activist stated: "If you speak Burmese, no one trusts you in the camp […]. This is the hatred that the ethnic minority/groups has/have towards the Burmese government and because of this, speaking Burmese and being Burmese [Bamar] is very hard for me in the camp, but I don't think I can say that this is discrimination. After a while, I'm a teacher, people started to recognize me and know me as a teacher. It's tough being a Burmese [Bamar] and living among the ethnic groups especially those who were forced to flee for political reasons" (interview with 54-year old Burmese, South Dagon, July 2017).[27]

tive consequences of the rural exodus resulting in a shortage of labour supply in an ageing Thai society.

27 \ The fact that Burmese students that had been active in the pro-democracy uprising of 1988 were accepted by UNHCR as *people of concern* and enjoyed special protection at Maneeloy *safe camp* might have fostered resentment among ethnic minority groups even more. Bamar refugees were said to receive preferential treatment in terms of asylum options and opportunities to resettle overseas (South, 2013, p. 189)

Return and reintegration

Exclusion also plays a major role regarding return. In Myanmar, local communities are often not consulted when it comes to the return of IDPs and refugees. The Burmese government's steps to facilitate return have reportedly often ignored the perceptions and needs of the local communities and future returnees: The government has, for example, built new buildings in remote areas, which were supposed to house returning DPs in the future. According to an advocacy group in Thailand, these projects were implemented without consulting local communities. What is more, there were rumours that other people than refugees have moved in (interview with Burmese activist, Mae Sot, July 2016). As a result, people did not return. The same happened to a return programme of an INGO. It reportedly had conferred with the government and armed groups but not with the refugees themselves: "They told us we have houses for you—but they had not consulted us before," a community leader justified his refusal to follow the invitation of an INGO to return to Myanmar (Chiang Mai area, July 2016).

Furthermore, Burmese refugees fear discrimination in case of their future return. Those who stayed behind see refugees as "[...] lazy, reliant on other people, uneducated and think that refugees cannot work like them. So, there will be some discord among refugees and local people in Myanmar" (focus group interview with young refugees, Nu Po Camp). Another Karen college student stated: "If we go back to Myanmar, we will surely face discrimination among local people. Currently, some people from my village [...] think refugees are bad peo-ple because refugees have betrayed the country. So that there are wars because of refugees. We are rebels and they stare at us as if we were bad men" (focus group discussion with Karen junior college students, Umpiem Camp, July 2016).

Karen interviewees in Thailand also mentioned their fear of racial and religious discrimination by local communities when imagining their possible return to Myanmar (interview with female Karen office worker, Mae Sot, September 2016). Religion was considered a leading obstacle to any repatriation process, since it is feared that returnees with a different religion will not be accepted in certain villages in

Karen state (focus group discussion with Karen junior college students, Umpiem Mai Camp, July 2016). Yet, as one representative of Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) stated, the relationship with the communities at the place of return is usually good, since most return to their home villages. "Only very few have to locally integrate into a new environment, but those usually experience sympathy" (Mae Sot, July 2016).

Besides those fears, everyday trials of a seemingly less problematic nature play an important role. "I did not know where to go, I did not know anybody or anything about the place", a young refugee recounted his visit in his parent's village of origin in Myanmar (Mae Sot, August 2016). Many other refugees who were either born or raised in exile recounted similar experiences about different behaviours, different ways of relating socially, different living standards on the other side of the border. Their so-called social capital and their networks in Myanmar are therefore small. There are also different perceptions and related expectations of life in exile: Those who stayed feel that they have suffered and endured more than those who allegedly abandoned their homes while the refugees feel that they are the ones who have endured more. Practically this means that returnees often struggle to get the support from the village of origin they expected and vice versa (Chiang Mai, July/ September 2016).

Many displaced Burmese DPs are well aware of the obstacles to return with regard to persisting conflict in Myanmar and a lack of livelihood opportunities. Therefore, return is one but not necessarily the favoured option for them: "We are only guests here [in Thailand] and have to go whenever asked to", a Karenni representative explained, "but we cannot go now. Maybe in 30 years". When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of being a camp resident compared to a legal work migrant, the same person answered: "We cannot turn into migrants, because they can be sent back whenever their permit is expired" (Ban Mai Nai Soi, August 2016). What the representative pointed out was the principle of non-refoulement, the option respectively the right to remain in the host country as long as refugees do not voluntarily

want to go back. This shows that many DPs are well aware of the rights, restrictions and opportunities—access to aid, resettlement, work, etc.—that are connected to different statuses. However, others completely lack such information. The cautious approach to return is also related to the fact that it becomes more difficult to re-register as a refugee. The primary lesson DPs have learnt after multiple displacements is that you have to widen your options and be prepared for any eventuality.

Mobility and translocality

On the backdrop of substantial obstacles to local integration in Thailand and to reintegration in Myanmar, trans-local livelihoods, movement back and forth, as well as partial return movements, have evolved as coping strategies. DPs strive after a variety of alternative options available. Burmese from the periphery have always crossed the border to search for job opportunities, for economic and social purposes, to flee persecution and violent conflict and to find better healthcare and education. For a long time, the border between Myanmar and Thailand has been less of a dividing line than a resource in the everyday practices of those communities and is still highly porous. The passing via motorboat over the green border without any passport or visa control is easy. In Mae Sot, for example, boats cross the Mo River every minute in peak times to bring people and goods from one side to the other. Better-off Burmese cross the border for one-day shopping trips from Yangon.

Burmese children attend migrant schools or camp schools across the border or stay in boarding schools and go back to their families in Myanmar in the summer break. A considerable number of the students we talked to in the camps, in migrant schools and also at a KNU school we visited, came to Thailand by themselves and stay there with relatives or in the mentioned boarding houses (focus group discussion, Mae La, July 2016). These boarding houses have come to be important access points for education. The downside of sending unaccompanied children is that it often increases the children's vulnerability as those who look after them have different motivations and agendas. But it is not only pupils who travel back

and forth. It is quite common that those in the camps regularly travel back to their communities of origin to meet their relatives and to bring in the harvest. These trips also help to defend possible property rights back in Myanmar and to stay informed about the situation back home. Such trips also clearly illustrate that—despite confinement policies and precarious living conditions—there are close linkages between both sides of the Thai–Burmese borderland (Lee, 2012b).

However, the option of movement is not the same for all displaced persons. Besides those who cannot afford to travel or those that are hindered by security constraints, age or health problems, political activists who have not been resettled to a third country are quite restricted with regard to visits or financial remittances. They often fear difficulties with the Burmese authorities and explicitly ask their exiled relatives not to come back (interview with KRC representative, Mae Sot, July 2016). Then there are those who have already returned to Myanmar, but refrain from repatriating to their village of origin: "They are scared of me because they don't want to be in trouble because of me and I don't want to give them trouble and put them in danger, too" (interview with 54-year old Burmese former political activist from Taungoo, now returnee from Mae La Camp Thailand, South Dagon, July 2017).

Motives for movements are, in sum, complex. Rather than finding neatly separated realities of refuge and return, our study revealed a high level of interwoven in-between layers. Trans-locality and cyclical return movements are much more significant than permanent return or facilitated repatriation.[28] This holds true for migrant workers and the camp population. Displaced persons have developed a wide array of coping strategies depending on available

resources, networks, skills and various other factors. The case of a college student who recently returned to Hpa'an is paradigmatic: He used to study in Thai border camps but decided to stay in Burma for good. But he still kept his UNHCR card (interview with 19-year old Karen college student, Hpa'an, Myanmar, September 2017). DPs have experienced that it is vital to maintain multiple access points to healthcare, food, job markets, education or resettlement opportunities, etc.

Family and community split-ups are an important coping strategy during displacement. In some cases, the men who were bound to work for one of the armed actors stayed behind, while the women and children were able to flee. The men would eventually follow later. The pattern of family split-ups is illustrated by the case of a 63-year old Karen woman in Mae La Camp. She fled in 2009, came with one daughter, one son and three nephews, while her other daughter stayed in Karen state, where she cultivates the family's land. She gets permission to visit her daughter in Myanmar every two years for one month. Her other daughter works in the camp hospital, her son with an INGO, her nephews attend a camp school. She is the only one who would like to return (interview with female Karen refugee, Mae La Camp, July 2016).

The question of who flees with whom largely depends on external circumstances: In the case of the Koung Jor community, for example, the entire village was able to flee and find refuge collectively. Yet people do not necessarily always flee with relatives, but often join their peer group. Security risks—such as many checkpoints—force people to split up regardless of such preferences (KRC representative, Mae Sot, July 2016). Some of the interviewed families split up deliberately. One part of the family stayed to continue cultivating the family's land. Those and other trans-local networks are maintained through remittances. A survey from 2012 of 204 Burmese workers in Thailand showed that it is quite frequent to support family members that have stayed in Myanmar: 66.7 per cent of all respondents (Burman 41.1%, Mon 31.9%, Karen 13.7%, Shan 7.4%, Rakhine 2%, Rohingya 1%) sent back more than 10,000 Baht annually (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012, p. 268).

28 \ Some stressed their wish to stay independent in their decision to return: "I heard bad news about those who return ...That's why I return on my own. If I come back with a repatriation programme, there will be a lot of procedures and restrictions that we are required to follow. They will give us money, but there will be monitoring and evaluation and that undermines my freedom [...]. I want to be a free person who abides by nothing [...]. People will call you to evaluate you [...]. I don't like to be controlled. If the government could provide assistance—financially and a mental health programme—for those who return, this would be good. But now, they are asking too many questions and our freedom will be undermined [...]". Recently intensified battles and the low trust in the peace process make this assessment appear sound.

Conclusion

This *Working Paper* analyzed the main challenges that displaced persons from Myanmar face and the coping strategies that they develop as a reaction to these challenges. A transnational approach that stretched beyond legal categorizations revealed parallels and differences in the trajectories of refugees, IDPs and migrants affected by protracted displacement in Myanmar and Thailand. The research team analyzed these similarities and disparities with regard to protection, livelihoods, access to land, property, services, rights and questions of social inclusion. An analysis of the perspectives, trajectories and strategies of displaced persons themselves indicates that there needs to be a broader understanding of durable solutions for protracted displacement. Beyond the three classical legal–normative solutions (return, local integration and resettlement) DPs found a wide array of coping strategies that are situated in-between or beyond those solutions. When scrutinizing the reliance on humanitarian assistance, we discovered a diversification of livelihood strategies within camps. Beyond aid-related strategies, we also observed (cyclical) return movements and the establishment of translocal networks; we also found the establishment and institutionalization of self-organized infrastructure to be vital coping mechanisms. Return and local integration (and probably resettlement) should thus neither be considered an exhaustive list of alternatives nor be regarded as completely unconnected approaches. They are rather two options in a continuum of strategies comprising cyclical and temporary return processes, transnational networks and patterns of *de facto* local integration.

The role of risk-benefit considerations for agency

Our research in Thailand and Myanmar showed that the legal status of people is not necessarily predetermined: A person might shift from one status to another or hold different legal statuses simultaneously. It also became evident how these legal categorizations frame individual coping options. Those in Thailand, who have successfully escaped dirty,

dangerous and demeaning (3D) jobs and established their businesses are still in a tenuous position due to their volatile legal status. Crackdowns are frequent and force some to return. Those who return rarely stay for good but rather go back temporarily. Many cases encountered in Thailand featured regular pendulum movements: A common pattern encountered was that Burmese refugees who went to Myanmar to do construction work and who then came back to restart their business in Thailand (interviews with several Shan in Chiang Mai, December 2016).

In consequence, an ethno-economic division of work has been established in many parts along the border. The migrant economy on the border enables people to run micro-businesses (e.g. minibus services, internet cafés, tea shops, etc.). The western part of Mae Sot, for example, is primarily run by Burmese. Muslims from Myanmar dominate the import and export of vehicles of all kinds, Burmese Chinese dominate the warehouses. Those who have stayed the longest rent out shops and apartments to those who have arrived later. The daily commuters provide the goods; their profit margin is reflected in the height of the bribe they have to pay to the vigorously controlling Thai police. The networks extend all the way to Mahachai, a town on the outskirts of Bangkok: From fruits to textiles to money transfers "all is connected to Myanmar—and you will find everything you would find in Yangon, too" (migrant worker, Mae Sot, August 2017).

These cases show that refugees weigh the risks of return in comparison to their current situation. Decisive factors concern security, access to legal documents, public services and infrastructure.[29] The lack of infrastructure is directly related to security concerns: "We are still afraid of the Burmese military. If war comes again, how should we ask for help, communicate and spread the news to the media without phone or Internet [...]. Our land and regions are not

---

29 \ In a focus group discussion with college students in Nu Po Camp in July 2016, the following concerns were raised: "If we go back, we don't have cash to go to hospital [...]. Do we have to be refugees again to return to Thailand?" [...] "We don't have a Burmese ID and some refugees lost or burned it during the war in their villages. Without ID, we will probably face difficulties in travelling to other regions".

developed yet for travelling, like roads and bridges; we worry that if something happens that we need to go to town or the countryside or the Thai–Burmese border in an emergency, it will be very difficult to travel" (focus group discussion, Umpiem Mai Camp, July 2106). Furthermore, decreasing prospects of resettlement, the general uncertainty about the future of the camps, fear of forced return and the discrimination at a place that is not home influence the trajectories of DPs. "Integration is a European idea", many correspondents stated, indicating that they have to develop other options based on a more diversified tactic in the long run.[30]

Our research has shown that any dichotomy that contrasts non-refugees as masters of their fate with displaced persons as victims without agency is obsolete. The coping patterns of displaced persons are highly flexible and adaptive. Conditions for pursuing certain strategies differ considerably for the Shan, Rohingya, Karen and Kachin and within those groups themselves. But if circumstances require or allow it, IDPs might become refugees, refugees might become internally displaced while trying to reintegrate, and refugees frequently leave the temporary shelters to become illegal migrant workers or to obtain official migrant worker status. This list is by no means exhaustive, and the options are not mutually exclusive. We found persons who were immobilized in conflict zones, educational migrants in camps, people who had fled violence and conflict who have not registered in camps and a variety of other patterns: Some displaced persons have applied for migrant status instead of applying for asylum. Others live and work as illegal migrants.

It seems evident that it makes sense to work with categories that go beyond the status attributed to individuals based on their final or temporary destination, particularly in the Thai context in which refugees in the strict legal terminology do not exist at all. As legal-normative categories are blurred both in time and space, we thus argue that it is somewhat counterproductive for descriptive studies (probably also for humanitarian interventions and development aid) to stick to them (cf. Horstmann, 2015; Sadan, 2013).

Relation of time in exile and prospects of return

The international community, the Thai as the Myanmar government seem to agree that the time has come for refugees, illegal migrants and IDPs to return. Most humanitarian actors are compliant with this policy: They are reducing assistance for camps (in Thailand and Myanmar) and promote return. However, IDPs, migrants as well as refugees weigh their options to either stay or to return carefully. Their assessments are not necessarily in line with the official policy. The factors that influence the decision vary: Refugees as migrants in Thailand are very concerned about their regulated status; IDPs in Myanmar worry more about concrete security risks such as fighting, the presence of armed actors and landmines. The decision also depends on the individual context: Benefits and risks are always evaluated according to the nature of experiences and the hardships that the respective DPs have gone through.

Those who have fled conflict and repression often stressed that they would not return until the conflicts have been settled. Those who, in contrast, have fled the indirect consequences of conflict such as poverty or have left preventively would be more likely to go back if there were a public infrastructure and individual opportunities. Even though the weight of factors varies, livelihoods, peace and security, regulated availability of land and housing, access to health services and education, marginalization and discrimination by the authorities and conflict with local communities are crucial for the decision of all

---

30 \ According to a representative of the Committee of Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), 70 to 80 per cent of the IDPs in Kayin State have returned. The majority of these former IDPs would go to their place of origin, while some, especially those who do not own land, go to the newly built settlement sites, which are financed by the government and built by KNU. Reportedly, there is also a generational difference. While the elderly usually want to return to their home villages, the younger ones prefer relocation sites. The better educated ones—in contrast—would prefer to move to the cities or to be resettled in a third country (Mae Sot, July 2016).

displaced persons to eventually return. The choice, therefore, depends mainly on the amount and quality of knowledge people have of the political situation, the political transition process and ceasefire negotiations in Myanmar.

Different experiences lead to varying perceptions and, for example, generational differences: Older persons who have experienced many displacements (sometimes stretching back to the Japanese invasion) are more sceptical about return than younger ones (who usually have not experienced as many traumatic events). The latter are described as more hopeful and more willing to return—even to a place different from their place of origin (local expert and activist, Mae Sot, September 2016). As described above, education is a decisive factor in this regard: Children are sent (often on their own) to benefit from migrant schools on the other side of the border. Responsibilities towards younger relatives who attend school in the camps, in turn, play a role in deciding whether to return or not for camp residents (interview with Karen male refugee, Nu Po camp, July 2016). Finally, the time in exile and the number of contacts to the area of origin is of utmost importance for movement dynamics.

The more bridges were burnt during displacement, the less likely people are prepared to go back. The existence of social networks, contacts with relatives or friends in Myanmar have been positively related to the likelihood of return. Many displaced persons travel to their community of origin on a regular basis and are thus able to maintain these networks. Through these networks, many displaced persons gain insights into the livelihood and security situation in their communities of origin. But there is quite a large number of refugees who have not had this opportunity. They rely on their village or community leader: "Some [returnees] will go back to their families. Others who have no land [back in Myanmar] will go where their leaders will send them. The village and district leaders still have authority, and people will go where they send them" (Interview with KRC representative, Mae Sot, 23 July 2017). Many organizations that are working in the camps have confirmed the crucial role of the leaders and their vertical line of command in tightly knit communities in this regard.

Displaced persons' preference for mixed solution strategies

Local actors, in contrast to the coalition of governments and international NGOs mentioned above, see and seek alternative options to return. They are aware of the risks connected to a return to Myanmar and of giving up the status and the respective special protection as a refugee and the option for resettlement. The experience of multiple displacements and protracted conflict have led to a diversifications of livelihoods (e.g. farming, gardening, day labour), income sources (e.g. work, aid, remittances), residences (e.g. rural, urban, bi-national), poly-local households (split-up of family members), entitlements (right to stay, resettle, return, compensation, option of work permit or amnesty in Thailand). Those strategies have not always made people less vulnerable. In some cases—for trafficked persons for instance—exploitation and insecurity even increase. But the bottom line is that those strategies define the agency on which any durable solution strategy of international actors has to build on.

Aid that builds upon this agency should be more likely to be sustainable because merely existing resilience is fostered rather than built-up from scratch. Even though this seems paradoxical in times of democratization and peacebuilding, existing coping mechanism are in a moment of crisis in Myanmar. Increasing difficulties in finding safe refuge over the border are amplified by more unstable front lines and ever-changing alliances respectively fallouts of armed actors: IDPs have to react to fights among the different armed groups. Those fights, unlike before, have started to foster ethnic tensions amongst the civilians. In addition, forced recruitment into these groups has been increasing. While the causes to flee have thus multiplied, options of refuge have diminished.

We have shown that DPs have developed a wider range of mixed strategies in response—parts of the family are sent to safe havens while others remain in high-risk areas. Livelihood activities that turned insufficient due to the violent conflict were complemented with labour activities, seasonal national and international migration. Refugees in camps resorted

to their fields across the border to compensate diminished food rations. Numerous IDPs found temporary shelter arrangements in camps, temple compounds or with hosts. Some IDPs are still near their houses and fields, some with, others without access to them. Many are confined in areas with very limited opportunities to make a living (e.g. Rohingya), while others are in areas where their labour force is highly sought after.

These types are again not clearly distinguishable and often interrelated. Although empirically relevant, little is known about movements in the context of a protracted conflict that do not necessarily fall under the binary refugee/ IDP radar. Specifically immobility—the fact that armed groups force communities to stay in a restricted area—and seasonal internal labour migration are often not sufficiently correlated with armed conflict. This is illustrated by the following case: An orphan in Northern Shan State, whose father was killed after having been drafted in his stead, reported that he had to stay in this high-risk area to access his land. He explained that he was hiding in the nearby forest during the night and was working the fields during the day. Yet this has not been sufficient to cover his family's expenditures. As the father is gone, the first-born son has to make up the missing income. To sustain his sister and brother, he has to earn extra money. His strategy was to migrate as a seasonal worker into an even more war-stricken area: The mining sector in Kachin. "We do not have a choice", he explained (interview, Lashio, September 2017).

More investigations into such cases—that are not on the radar of most aid organizations—are needed to better understand and distinguish causes, form and long-term impact of violent conflict. We have demonstrated that—due to the loss of assets, dwindling funds, lack of access to former livelihoods—DPs usually have to look for additional income opportunities. In consequence, they have been diversifying—in reaction to the challenges they encountered—their range and scope of work. Many families have members in other parts of the country or other countries and are working and living there permanently or as

seasonal workers. However, diversification is not by definition beneficiary for DPs. The desperate situation opens the door for abuses and exploitative practices by employers and authorities (Brees, 2008; Marschke & Vandergeest, 2016)—including cases of trafficking, especially of female victims (Beyrer, 2001; Thomas & Jones, 1993; Young, Pyne, Quick, & McKenna, 2006).

Outlook: Can expectations and practices be reconciled?

While the latest democratization achievements in Myanmar seem impressive, they also expose significant flaws: Key ministries like the Ministry of the Interior and Border Affairs, or the Ministry of Defence and a veto fraction of parliament are still reserved for the military. The transition is struggling with the constitution of 2008, which legitimizes these residues. The official beginning of democracy did not coincide with the disappearance of violent conflict and displacement in Myanmar, despite many unquestionable advances. Contrary to expectations of the international community, armed clashes between the army and ethnic armed groups persist in many parts of the country. They even intensified in October 2016—especially in Kachin and Shan States (Myanmar Humanitarian Country Team, 2017). Also in Karen State, violations of the NCA and clashes between the Tatmadaw and EAGs have been reported and lead to new displacements. Furthermore, some of the country's most important armed actors remained outside the ceasefire process and have formed a new alliance of ethnic militias (Northern Alliance-Burma). Moreover, various splinter groups and new actors evolved.

The split-up of ethnic armed groups causes further recruitment, fights and displacement. Other EAGs like the Wa-State army—which is the most influential armed group by now and not yet cut off from Chinese support—remain in control of autonomous regions. Much of this is related to the drugs trade and illicit activities of influential cartels, which are sometimes hard to distinguish from a land grabbing and resources appropriating army and its cronies.

Rakhine state violence made headlines in 2017, and the offensive of the army has been stepped up in various zones in border regions since the end of 2016.[31] The situation in Myanmar is, in sum, very diverse and regionally often completely different, if not contradictory. On the one hand, transition made the daily lives of a significant number of people more peaceful. Yet, on the other hand, forced displacement due to industrialization, violence by armed actors and land grabbing has increased in a good number of places. Those conflicts seem likely to increase and cause new waves of displacement in the short and mid-term future.

Against this backdrop of ongoing fighting and mass displacement, it is somewhat improbable that large-scale and sustainable return processes of ethnic minorities will take place. It is more likely that only the encamped populations will take advantage of assisted return, and it remains to be seen whether this return is permanent and sustainable or whether people—especially the younger generations—will find their way back to Thailand or elsewhere.

This means that seasonal and permanent migration to Thailand, triggered and boosted by displacement, seems to be there to stay. In the construction, hotel and agricultural sector—and in jobs that are dirty, dangerous and demeaning (3D)—the role of Burmese in Thailand is crucial. Surveys on migrants and their impact on the economy of Thailand vary greatly. Some claim that out of 1.2 million migrants from Myanmar in Thailand, only 620,000 have a regular (legal) status and 570,000 an irregular status (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012, p. 260). Others put the numbers with three million illegal and two million legal workers from Myanmar much higher (Herman, 2016). Large parts of the industry and service sector rely, without doubt, on Myanmar workers—estimates speak of six per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in general.

The 40 per cent of the workforce in the fishing industry and 50 per cent of the domestic jobs done by Burmese are the most prominent (Mon, 2010). Besides that, they are also found in garment production, sales, street stalls, restaurants, wholesale, retail trade and vendor- and husbandry-related work (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012, p. 252).

In sum, while Burmese workers are discriminated against and exploited, there is a strong dependence of local economies on the Burmese labour force, especially in the agricultural and manufacturing sector. Both trends have existed alongside for decades. Rather than seeing the potential synergies if both were related, e.g. by building upon the language skills, work experience and intercultural capacities of displaced persons from Myanmar, both issues are seen as unrelated, even exacerbating the problem posed by their presence in Thailand.

Therefore, it is not surprising, that the Thai government and the international community—despite persisting conflicts and enduring challenges for return in Myanmar—are planning the closure of the temporary shelters in Thailand and the return of large parts of the in-camp population to Myanmar. However, it is expected that a residual population (est. 20,000) will remain and require services. It remains to be seen whether the Rohingya crisis will reverse the fading-out of aid for IDPs. The leading question of this *Paper* was whether the change of governance eradicated the causes of displacement, brought peace and laid the foundation for return. According to the cases presented, such assumptions have proven to be wrong in many ways.

Looking at the level of access to legal, economic, political rights, services, to housing, land, property and livelihoods, the situation on the ground remains dire. To halt displacement and find durable solutions, these issues need to be addressed in a way that shows immediate and graspable effects on the micro level.

31 \ Conflict also persists in Rakhine State between the Muslim minority and ethnic Rakhine. It escalated after attacks on Myanmar's border posts in October 2016 that were ascribed to an Islamist movement among the Rohingya. In the summer of 2017, after an attack on police and army posts, the situation further escalated in such a way that thousands of people were displaced. On 17 December 2017, the UN Children's Fund reported that 655,000 new refugees had arrived in Bangladesh since 25 August 2017 (UNICEF, 2017).

APPENDIX

Indicators and limitations

To assess de facto local integration and conditions for sustainable (re-)integration, this *Working Paper* extended Cernea's Impoverishment, Risk and Reconstruction (IRR) Model (2000), which delineates eight risk factors that come with displacement. The model offers clear indicators for measuring impoverishment and reintegration focusing on social and economic components such as access to land, employment, shelter, food, healthcare, education, social inclusion, the restoration of common property and services and social capital. Kälin & Schrepfer's (2012) adaptation of the model adds to the list of risks leading to impoverishment as well as to the processes needed to reverse or mitigate them. For our research, we included the following indicators to also be able to assess social, economic, political and legal (re)integration: Access to legal representation and law enforcement; access to political recognition and representation; holding of valid documents, titles; and empowered awareness of human (women's, children's) rights.

In Thailand and Myanmar, the accessibility of camps represented a significant obstacle. Entry permits to the shelters need to be requested from the Ministry for the Interior (MOI) several weeks in advance. Although we were able to obtain camp passes for two camps, we were not always able to choose interview partners ourselves or to move freely within the area. Even though access is strictly controlled in Myanmar, security personnel only escorted us in one site. We were generally able to discuss issues privately—thanks to extended visits and more meetings outside formal settings: e.g. accompanying the interview partners to their home or work place. Many of the younger interview partners who were educated in the temporary shelters had considerable English skills, but interpretation from the different vernaculars to English was often necessary.

Other concerns related to trauma sensibility in a setting that is shaped by violent conflict, atrocities and grave human rights abuses. To avoid increasing fears of involuntary return, we consistently emphasized the fact that our academic research is independent. Handling expectations of the interviewees posed another challenge to the research, which was confronted by maximal transparency and clarity about the scientific character of the research project, its aims and limitations.

Research sites

In Thailand, the research took place in Bangkok, Bankrut, Chiang Mai, Mae Sariang, Mae Sot, Mae Hong Son, Mai Chai and Ranong, including five different camp sites (Koung Jor, Umpiem Mai, Nu Po, Mae La and Ban Nai Soi). The sites were chosen according to the prevalence of the ethnic communities from Myanmar that were historically significantly affected by displacement and mostly sought refuge in Thailand. In Myanmar, we did our research in Yangon and its outskirts, Kachin State (Bahmo, Momauk, Dawawbya, Pakkagom), Northern Shan state (Lashio, Namlok, Theinni, San Phyat, Par Sar, Pan Thad), Rakhine State (Sittwe, Kyauktaw, Yei Thai, Raw Ma Ni, Pa Rein, Mrauk-U, Paungdok, St Twe, Thetkalpyen, Taw Gyi, Min Gyan, Nget Chaung, Nyaungshwe) as well as in Mon and Karen State (Mawlamyine, Hpa-An, Kawkareik, Mu Aye Pu, Ei Tu Hta, U Wee Klo).

The most displaced people can be found in those border regions on the periphery. There are various IDP camps in the border areas—some in, others outside government-controlled areas, the team visited both during the research. Many are only set up for a very short time, others have existed for years. The camps mostly consist of makeshift wooden structures as no permanent buildings are allowed. International NGOs provide food and non-food items. Thai authorities control access. The camp residents mostly organize education and administration. As monasteries and churches are the refugees' first choice for fleeing violent conflicts, many camps are located on church compounds.

Research in Myanmar included neighbourhoods that have been the site of displacement, confined neighbourhoods of persons threatened by displacement

and those quarters where IDPs have been resettled—all in urban areas like Sittwe or Bahmo. The camps range from makeshift wooden shacks in the tidal swamps of Rhakine's coast, prison-like tent towns close to Sittwe, wooden long huts in Kachin, where dozens of families are cramped into a few square metres to settlements in the countryside in Karen State that have the appearance of average villages. Also, visits to political parties, newspapers, schools, learning spaces for minors, migrant schools, youth clubs, military camps, cultural festivals and the like were an elementary part of the research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Betts, A., & Loescher, G. (2011). *Refugees in International Relations*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Beyrer, C. (2001). Shan women and girls and the sex industry in Southeast Asia; political causes and human rights implications. *Social Science & Medicine, 53*(4), 543–550. doi:10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00358-0

Bohnet, H. (2016). *Back to turmoil: Refugee and IDP return to and within South Sudan* (BICC Working Paper 7/2016). Bonn: BICC. Retrieved from https://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx_bicctools/WP_7_16_final.pdf

Bohnet, H. G., Mielke, K., Rudolf, M., Schetter, C., & Vollmer, R. (2015). *Protected rather than protracted: Strenghtening displaced persons in peace processes* (BICC Working Paper 3/2015). Bonn: BICC., Retrieved from https://www.bicc.de/publications/publicationpage/publication/protected-rather-than-protracted-strengthening-displaced-persons-in-peace-processes-631/

Brees, I. (2008). Refugee Business: Strategies of Work on the Thai-Burma Border. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 21*(3), 380–397. doi:10.1093/jrs/fen022

Briant, N., & Kennedy, A. (2004). An Investigation of the Perceived Needs and Priorities Held by African Refugees in an Urban Setting in a First Country of Asylum. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 17*(4), 437–459. doi:10.1093/jrs/17.4.437

Buchanan, J. (2016). *Militias in Myanmar*. The Asia Foundation, Retrieved from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Militias-in-Myanmar.pdf

Cernea, M. M. (2000). Risks, safeguards and reconstruction: A model for population dis-placement and resettlement. *Economic and Political Weekly, 35*(41), 3659–3678.

Chalamwong, Y., Thabchumpon, N., & Chantavanich, S. (2014). SpringerBriefs in Environment, Security, Development and Peace. In *Migration Studies: Vol. 15. Temporary shelters and surrounding communities: Livelihood opportunities, the labour market, social welfare and social security*. Cham, Heidelberg, New York: Springer.

Chambers, R. & Conway, G. R. (1991). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century* (IDS discussion paper 296). Institute of Development Studies, Retrieved from http://publications.iwmi.org/pdf/H_32821.pdf

Chantavanich, S., & Kamonpetch, A. (2017). *SpringerBriefs in Environment, Security, Development and Peace. Migration Studies. Refugee and Return: Displacement along the Thai-Myanmar Border*. Cham: Springer.

Chantavanich, S., & Vungsiriphisal, P. (2012). Myanmar migrants to Thailand: Economic analysis and implications to Myanmar development. In H. Lim & Y. Yamada (Eds.), *BRC Research Report: Vol. 10. Economic Reforms in Myanmar. Pathway and Prospects* (pp. 213–280). Bangkok: Bangkok Research Center; IDE-JETRO.

Davis, B. & Jolliffe, K. (2016). *Achieving health equity in contested areas of southeast Myanmar* (Policy Brief). The Asia Foundation, Retrieved from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Achieving-Health-Equity-in-contested-areas-of-southeast-Myanmar_Policy-Brief_ENG-1.pdf

Duffield, M. (2008). *On the edge of 'No Man's Land': Chronic Emergency in Myanmar* (Working Paper 01-08). Bristol: School of Sociology, Politics, and International Studies, University of Bristol., Retrieved from http://www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/sites/spais/migrated/documents/duffield0108.pdf

Formoso, B. (2010). Zomian or zombies: What future exists for the peoples of the Southeast Asian Massif? *Journal of Global History, 5*(02), 313–332. doi:10.1017/S1740022810000100

Green, P., Maymanus, T., & de la Cour Venning, A. (2015). *Countdown to annihilation: Genocide in Myanmar.* London: International State Crime Initiative.

Harkins, B., & Chantavanich, S. (2014). *Springer Briefs in Environment, Security, Development and Peace. Migration Studies: Vol. 18. Resettlement of displaced persons on the Thai-Myanmar border.* Cham, Heidelberg, New York: Springer.

Herman, S. (2016). Myanmar migrants in Thailand rush police, Greet Suu Kyi. *Voanews*, Retrieved from https://www.voanews.com/a/rohingya-muzzled-in-bangkok-as-myanmar-leader-lands/3388652.html

Horstmann, A. (2015). Secular and religious sanctuaries: Interfaces of humanitarianism and self-government of Karen refugee-migrants in Thai-Burmese border spaces. In A. Horstmann & J.-H. Jung (Eds.), *Contemporary anthropology of religion. Building Noah's Ark for migrants, refugees, and religious communities* (pp. 129–156). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hovil, L. (2014). Local integration. In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, & N. Sigona (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (pp. 488–498). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Human Rights Watch. (2015). *Thailand: Mass graves of Rohingya found in trafficking camp: Independent investigation needed to determine facts, prosecute traffickers*, Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/05/01/thailand-mass-graves-rohingya-found-trafficking-camp

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2018). *Global Report on Internal Displacement*, Retrieved from http://internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2018/downloads/2018-GRID.pdf

IRIN. (2016). *Bribes and bureaucracy: Myanmar's chaotic citizenship system*, Retrieved from https://www.irinnews.org/feature/2016/10/31/bribes-and-bureaucracy-myanmar%E2%80%99s-chaotic-citizenship-system

Jacobsen, K., & Landau, L. B. (2003). The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration. *Disasters, 27*(3), 185–206. doi:10.1111/1467-7717.00228

Jenssen, S. (2017, 8 June). *Half a million identities.* Norwegian Refugee Council, Retrieved from https://www.nrc.no/news/2017/june/half-a-million-identities/

Jolliffe, K. (2014). *Ethnic conflict and social services in Myanmar's contested Regions*. The Asia Foundation, Retrieved from https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/MMEthnicConflictandSocialServices.pdf

Kälin, W. & Schrepfer, N. (2012). *Internal displacement in Africa: A development challenge*. IDMC, Retrieved from http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/7221~v~Internal_Displacement_in_Africa__A_Development_Challenge.pdf

Kipgen, N. (2017). The continuing challenges of Myanmar's Peace Process: A federal army and secession are the two most contentious issues for Myanmar's ethnic groups. *The Diplomat*, Retrieved from https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/the-continuing-challenges-of-myanmars-peace-process/

Lall, M., & South, A. (2014). Comparing models of non-state ethnic education in Myanmar: The Mon and Karen national education regimes. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 44*(2), 298–321. doi:10.1080/00472336.2013.823534

Lall, M.-C. (2014). *Citizenship in Myanmar: Contemporary debates and challenges in light of the reform process. Myanmar Egress and FNS*, Retrieved from http://mariellall.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/Myanmar-Egress-Citizenship-FINAL-as-sent-out.pdf

Lang, H. J. (2002). *Fear and sanctuary: Burmese refugees in Thailand*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Latt, N. N., Cho, S. M., Htun, N. M. M., Saw, Y. M., Myint, M. N. H., Aoki, F., Reyer, J. A., Yamamato, E., Yoshida, Y., & Hamajima, N. (2016). Healthcare in Myanmar. *Nagoya J Medical Science, 78*(2), 123–134. doi:10.18999/nagjms.78.2.123

Laungaramsri, P. (2014). Contested citizenship: Cards, colors and the culture of identification. In J. A. Marston (Ed.), *Ethnicity, borders, and the grassroots interface with the state* (pp. 215–247). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.

Lee, S. K. (2012a). Migrant schools in the Thailand-Burma borderland: from the informal to the formal. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 34*(1), 125–138.

Lee, S. K. (2012b). Scattered but Connected: Karen Refugees' Networking in and beyond the Thailand-Burma Borderland. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal, 21*(2), 263–285. doi:10.1177/011719681202100207

Lee, S. K. (2014). Security, economy and the modes of refugees´ livelihood pursuit: focus on Karen refugees in Thailand. *Asian Studies Review, 38*(3), 461–479.

Lintner, B. (1999). *Burma in revolt: Opium and insurgency since 1948* (2nd ed.). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Loescher, G., & Milner, J. (2008). Burmese refugees in south and southeast Asia. In G. Lo-escher, J. Milner, E. Newman, & G. G. Troeller (Eds.), *Pro-tracted refugee situations. Political, human rights and security implications* (pp. 303–332). Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations University Press.

Ma, A. (2017). *Labor Migration from Myanmar: Remittances, Reforms, and Chal-lenges.* Migration Policy Institute, Retrieved from https://www.migra-tionpolicy.org/article/labor-migration-myanmar-remittances-re-forms-and-challenges

Mahn, M., Maung, C., Oo, E. K. S., Smith, L., Lee, C. I., Whichard, E., Neumann, C., Richards, A. K., Mullany, L. C., Kuiper, H., & Lee, T. J. (2008). Mul-ti-level partnerships to promote health services among internally displaced in eastern Burma. *Global public health, 3*(2), 165–186. doi:10.1080/17441690801942821

Marschke, M., & Vandergeest, P. (2016). Slavery scandals: Unpacking labour challenges and policy responses within the off-shore fisheries sector. *Marine Policy, 68*, 39–46. doi:10.1016/j.marpol.2016.02.009

Martin, P. (2007). *The economic contribution of migrant workers to Thailand: To-wards policy development,* Retrieved from http://www.ilo.int/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_098230.pdf

McCarthy, G., & Menager, J. (2017). Gendered rumours and the Muslim scapegoat in Myanmar's transition. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 47*(3), 396–412. doi:10.1080/00472336.2017.1304563

Médecins Sans Frontières. (2008). *A preventable fate: The failure of ART scale-up in Myanmar,* Retrieved from http://www.msf.ca/en/article/preventa-ble-fate-failure-hiv-treatment-scale

Michaud, J. (2013). *Turbulent times and enduring peoples: Mountain minorities in the South-East Asian massif.* Richmond: Curzon.

Mon, M. (2010). Burmese labour migration into Thailand: Governance of migration and labour rights. *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy, 15*(1), 33–44. doi:10.1080/13547860903488211

Richmond, A. H. (1994). *Global apartheid: Refugees, racism, and the new world order.* Oxford u.a.: Oxford University Press.

Risso-Gill, I., McKee, M., Coker, R., Piot, P., & Legido-Quigley, H. (2014). Health system strengthening in Myanmar during political reforms: perspectives from international agencies. *Health policy and planning, 29*(4), 466–474. doi:10.1093/heapol/czt037

Save the Children & World Education. (2014). *Pathways to a better future: A review of edu-cation for migrant children in Thailand* (Policy brief), Re-trieved from https://thailand.savethechildren.net/sites/thailand.savethechildren.net/files/library/Policy%20Brief_Eng_final_resized.pdf

Scott, J. C. (2009). *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia.* Yale agrarian studies series. New Haven Conneticut. u.a.: Yale University Press.

Smith, A. (2005). Burma/Myanmar:: The struggle for democracy and ethnic rights. In W. Kymlicka & B. He (Eds.), *Multiculturalism in Asia* (pp. 262–287). Oxford University Press.

Smith, M. (1999). *Burma: Insurgency and the politics of ethnicity.* New York: Zed Books.

South, A. (2013). *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma: The Golden Sheldrake.* Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, Retrieved from http://gbv.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1111478

Teela, K. C., Mullany, L. C., Lee, C. I., Poh, E., Paw, P., Masenior, N., Maung, C., Beyrer, C., & Lee, T. J. (2009). Community-based delivery of maternal care in conflict-affected areas of eastern Burma: perspectives from lay maternal health workers. *Social Science & Medicine, 68*(7), 1332–1340. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.01.033

Thadaniti, S., & Chantavanich, S. (2014). *Springer Briefs in Environment, Securi-ty, Development and Peace. Migration Studies: Vol. 16. The impact of dis-placed people's temporary shelters on their surrounding environment.* Cham, Heidelberg, New York: Springer.

The Border Consortium. (2018). *Refugee Camp Populations: March 2018,* Retrieved from http://www.theborderconsortium.org/me-dia/104588/2018-03-mar-map-tbc-unhcr.pdf

Thomas, D. Q., & Jones, S. (1993). *A Modern form of slavery: Trafficking of Bur-mese women and girls into brothels in Thailand.* New York: Human Rights Watch.

Toyota, M. (2005). Subjects of the nation without citizenship: The case of 'Hill Tribes' in Thailand. In W. Kymlicka & B. He (Eds.), *Multiculturalism in Asia* (pp. 110–135). Oxford University Press.

UNICEF. (2017). *Bangladesh: Humanitarian Situation* (Report No. 15 - Rohingya influx), Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Bangladesh%20Humanitarian%20Situa-tion%20Report%20%23%2015%20%28Rohingya%20Influx%29-%2017%20December%202017.pdf

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2016). *Global report 2015,* Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/gr15/index.xml

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2017a). *Global Report 2016,* Retrieved from http://reporting.unhcr.org/publica-tions#tab-global_report

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2017b). *Myan-mar SE Operation - Return Assessments,* Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ReturnAssessmentSouth-East-DashboardSeptember2017.pdf

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2017c). *Thailand Border Operation: RTG/MOI-UNHCR Verified Refugee Population, 31 March 2017,* Retrieved from http://www.refworld.org/docid/590743874.html

van Hear, N. (1998). *New diasporas: The mass exodus, dispersal and regrouping of migrant communities. Global diasporas.* London: UCL Press, Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=e000xat&AN=139060

van Klinken, G., & Aung, S. M. T. (2017). The contentious politics of anti-muslim scapegoat-ing in Myanmar. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 47*(3), 353–375. doi:10.1080/00472336.2017.1293133

Vungsiriphisal, P., Chusri, D., & Chantavanich, S. (2014). *Springer Briefs in Environment, Security, Development and Peace. Migration Studies: Vol. 17. Humanitarian assistance for displaced persons from Myanmar: Royal Thai Government policy and donor, INGO, NGO and UN agency delivery.* Cham, Heidelberg, New York: Springer.

Walton, M. J. (2013). The "wages of Burmanness": Ethnicity and Burman privilege in con-temporary Myanmar. *Journal of Contemporary Asia, 43*(1), 1–27. doi:10.1080/00472336.2012.730892

Winland, D. M. (1992). The role of religious affiliation in refugee resettle-ment: The case of the Hmong. *Canadian Ethnic Studies, 24*, 96–119.

Young, W., Pyne, S., Quick, D., & McKenna, M. (2006). *Abuse without end: Bur-mese refugee women and children at risk of trafficking.* New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BICC	Bonn International Center for Conversion	BICC
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung	BMZ
CIDKP	Committee of Internally Displaced Karen People	CIDKP
DCA	Danish Church Aid	DCA
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army	DKBA
DKBO	Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization	DKBO
DP	Displaced person	DP
EAG	Ethnic armed group	EAG
EBEP	Ethnic Basic Education Provider	EBEP
EFA	Education for All policy	EFA
IDMC	The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre	IDMC
IDP	Internally displaced person	IDP
IEDS	Improvised explosive device	IEDS
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization	KIO
KNU	Karen National Union	KNU
KNRC	Karenni Refugee Committee	KNRC
KNWO	Karenni National Women's Organization	KNWO
KRC	Karen Refugee Committee	KRC
KYO	Karen Youth Organization	KYO
KNYO	Karenni National Youth Organization	KNYO
KWO	Karen Women's Organization	KWO
LWF	Lutheran World Federation	LWF
MNLA	Mon National Liberation Army	MNLA
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement	NCA
NGO	Non-governmental organization	NGO
NLD	National League for Democracy	NLD
PDS	Protracted displacement situation	PDS
RTG	Royal Thai government	RTG
TBC	The Border Consortium	TBC
UN	United Nations	UN
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR
WLB	Women's League of Burma	WLB

bicc Bonn
International Center
for Conversion \

AUTHORS
Dr Markus Rudolf is Senior Researcher at BICC
Clara Schmitz-Pranghe is Researcher at BICC

MEMBER OF Johannes-Rau-Forschungsgemeinschaft
JRF

Supported by

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development