

Sending money back home: banking digitalization, Myanmar migrant workers, and the Thailand-Myanmar border trade

Akkanut Wantanasombut, author

Deskripsi Lengkap: <https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail?id=9999920540672&lokasi=lokal>

Abstrak

In 2021 Thailand's Ministry of Labour reported that approximately 2.4 million migrant workers had been permitted to work in Thailand, with two-thirds arriving from Myanmar (Samnak Borihan Raeng Ngan Tang Dao Krom Karn Jad Ha Ngan 2021). For decades, this large number of migrant workers from Myanmar has benefited the Thailand-Myanmar border trade, both directly and indirectly, including the remittances that Burmese migrant workers send to their families back home. This paper studies how the economic activities revolving around border trade developed. It describes how informal remittances from Myanmar migrant workers have become one of the key elements of the massive illicit border trade and introduces the possibility of digital technology replacing traditional informal remittance methods. The data presented here was collected by way of semi-structured interviews with 32 Burmese migrant workers living and working in Samutsakorn Province, nine Thai border traders in Mae Sot, officials, and a Thai financial technology company operating in Myanmar. The interviews revealed that most of the migrant workers had experience using mobile banking and financial applications, they were familiar with the technology, and they were aware of its capacity as an alternative method of sending money back home. However, many still preferred to use informal banking as it benefited them the most. The border traders interviewed for this paper further confirmed that there was still no threat of consequences for payment offsetting. Therefore, the digitalization of banking strengthens the informal banking system as it both hastens and improves the processes of money distribution.