



# Thai berry pickers in Sweden

– A migration corridor to a low-wage sector

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Charlotta Hedberg, Linn Axelsson and Manolo Abella

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# Preface

Year after year, millions of people around the world leave their homes for work in other countries, as labor migrants or seasonal workers. Some look by themselves for work opportunities, while others use job brokers or recruitment agencies. The costs that migrant workers incur to get jobs abroad are often very high. One of the objectives of the newly adopted Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is to facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work. To prevent debt bondage, exploitation and forced labour, one key focus of this framework is to prohibit recruiters and employers from charging or shifting recruitment fees or related costs to the migrants.

Since the 1980s, a so-called migration corridor, i.e. routes followed by labour migrants traveling between two countries, has developed between Thailand and Sweden. In the summer months of June through August, around 5 000, mostly poor farmers, travel from Thailand to Sweden to pick wild berries in the northern forests. Media has repeatedly reported on the vulnerability of the Thai berry pickers, when it comes to the living and working conditions, as well as the economic compensation. Yet, despite this vulnerable situation the number of seasonal workers are increasing, and many of them return year after year.

The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) has studied the costs associated with labor migration for a couple of specific migration corridors, with results pointing to many benefits being gained for the migrants as well as their developing communities by lowering these costs. To better understand the specific migrant corridor between Thailand and Sweden, Delmi initiated a project with Charlotta Hedberg – Associate Professor at the Department of Geography, Umeå University – Linn Axelsson – Research Fellow at the Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University – and Manolo Abella – Chair of the Technical Working Group on Labour Migration of KNOMAD World Bank.

Our hope is that the report will shed light on labor migration and recruitment agencies and contribute to efforts made for decent work and fair recruitment fees.

External reviewers of the report have been Johan Lindquist – Professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the Forum for Asian Studies at Stockholm University, and Henrik Emilsson – doctor in International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER) from Malmö University and a member of the Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM).

The work on this report has been followed by Annika Sundén, member of Delmi's board of Directors as well as Director of Labour Market Analysis at the Swedish Employment Service. At Delmi's Office, the delegation secretaries André Asplund, Constanza Vera-Larrucea, Caroline Tovatt, Linus Liljeberg and intern Freja Skytt have contributed to the project.

Stockholm, May 2019

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# Summary

Every year, around 5000 berry pickers travel from Thailand to Sweden to pick wild berries. This report describes the system and regulatory framework that surrounds the berry pickers, and analyses their costs and earnings. The report has a comparative approach, and compares the Thai berry pickers with other types of international labour migration and with their alternative earnings in Thailand. It also describes the workers demographic background and their use of the earnings from berry picking. The report is uniquely based on 165 standardized interviews with Thai berry pickers, which were performed in Thailand on behalf of this study.

The main conclusion is that the costs surrounding berry picking are relatively high, as seen against the background of the short berry picking season and the time that the workers are spending in Sweden. On average, a berry picker pays around 4000 USD to work in Sweden for a period of 70 days. This means that, for the average worker, it takes 1,6 months to earn enough money to cover these costs, and thereafter remains only a limited time window to earn enough money to bring back to Thailand. Around 50 percent of the costs incurred are paid to Thai staffing agencies, and the other half is paid to Swedish berry companies as a daily fee for accommodation, food and access to a car. After the deduction of all costs, the average berry picker returns to Thailand with around 2000 USD from one season in Sweden. This figure is roughly three times that of what the average worker would normally earn in Thailand during the same amount of time. The worker with the highest net earnings from berry picking in Sweden, however, could make as much as 12 times more than what he or she would make in Thailand. The report also shows that the berry pickers, who often are men working as farmers in north-eastern Thailand where they also have their families, are travelling to Sweden repeatedly. A majority of the workers in the study had travelled to Sweden seven times or more, whereas the most frequent worker had travelled as much as 26 times. According to the study, there is no positive relationship between the frequency of work in Sweden and the size of

the earnings. The earnings from berry picking are being used for daily consumption and investments in farming, housing and children's' education.

In the report we discuss the motives behind the perpetuation of the migration system despite the relatively high costs. One explanation could be that the workers are being paid on a piece rate, meaning that they are aspiring, and believing that they can achieve, the same high earnings as the most successful workers. However, the payment system also implies that the workers are at high risk, since almost 50 percent note that they have earned less than the guaranteed wage that they are entitled to according to Swedish collective agreements. Another reason why berry pickers travel to Sweden repeatedly could be that it's associated with relatively low social costs. The berry season in Sweden occurs at a suitable time in the Thai growing season, and the berry pickers are spending a relatively short time away from their families.

The system surrounding berry picking can be seen both as it's solution and it's problem. On the one hand, Thai staffing agencies and Swedish berry companies are providing the infrastructure that sustains the system across time, thus enabling the workers to invest in their children's futures, etc. On the other hand, the report shows a lack of transparency in relation to the costs, which might be excessive, while the costs and risks are put on the individual worker. The practice of using staffing agencies has been enacted as a way to avoid taxes and social responsibility in Sweden. As an alternative, it is possible that experienced berry pickers could use their own social networks to travel to Sweden, while starting up a cooperative and in that way, reduce the costs.

# Sammanfattning

Årligen reser omkring 5000 bärplockare från Thailand till Sverige för att plocka vilda bär. Den här rapporten beskriver det system och regelverk som bärplockarna reser inom, samt analyserar deras kostnader och intäkter. Rapporten har ett jämförande anspråk, och jämför de thailändska bärplockarna med andra typer av internationell arbetskraftsmigration samt med alternativa inkomster i Thailand. Den redogör också för bärplockarnas demografiska bakgrund samt för deras användning av inkomsterna från bärplockningen. Rapporten är baserad på ett unikt enkätmaterial bestående av 165 standardiserade intervjuer med thailändska bärplockare, som genomfördes i Thailand för denna studies räkning. Rapporten bygger även på kunskap från tidigare intervjustudier med bärplockare, representanter från bärbranschen samt beslutsfattare i Sverige och Thailand.

Rapportens slutsats är att kostnaderna kring bärplockningen är relativt höga, sett till den korta tid som bärplockarna spenderar i Sverige. I genomsnitt betalar en bärplockare cirka 33 000 kronor i fasta kostnader för att arbeta under 70 dagar i Sverige. För den genomsnittlige bärplockaren från Thailand krävs det 1,6 månader för att tjäna ihop till denna summa, och därefter återstår endast ett begränsat tidsfönster för att tjäna ihop pengar att ta med sig tillbaka till Thailand. Cirka hälften av de fasta kostnaderna betalas till thailändska bemanningsföretag och den andra hälften betalas till svenska bärföretagare som en daglig avgift för boende, mat och tillgång till bil. Efter att alla kostnader har dragits av tjänar den genomsnittliga bärplockaren cirka 17 000 kronor under en säsong. Detta innebär att de tjänar ungefär tre gånger mer under en säsong i Sverige än vad de normalt sett tjänar i Thailand, medan den arbetare som tjänade mest kunde inbringa hela 12 gånger mer. Rapporten visar också att bärplockarna, som ofta är män som arbetar inom jordbrukssektorn i nordöstra Thailand där de också har sin familj, reser till Sverige vid upprepade tillfällen. En majoritet av bärplockarna i studien har rest sju gånger till Sverige eller mer, medan den mest frekvente arbetaren hade rest hela 26 gånger.



Enligt studien finns emellertid inget positivt samband mellan antalet gånger man har arbetat i Sverige och inkomstens storlek. Inkomsterna som bärplockarna får av sitt arbete i Sverige används till såväl daglig konsumtion som investeringar i jordbruk, bostäder och barnens utbildning.

I rapporten resonerar vi kring vilka drivkrafter som kan ligga till grund för att systemet upprätthålls trots relativt höga kostnader. En förklaring kan vara att betalningen sker i form av ett ackordsystem, vilket innebär att arbetarna arbetar i tron om att det är möjligt att uppbringa så stor inkomst som de allra mest framgångsrika plockarna. Samtidigt innebär detta att arbetarna tar stora risker, eftersom nästan hälften av arbetarna uppger att de tjänat mindre än den grundlön de har rätt till enligt svenska kollektivavtal. En annan orsak till att bärplockare vid upprepade tillfällen åker till Sverige kan vara att det är förknippat med relativt låga sociala kostnader. Bärssäsongen i Sverige infaller vid en lämplig tidpunkt i det thailändska odlingsåret, och bärplockaren spenderar relativt kort tid borta från sin familj.

Det system som kringgärdar bärplockningen kan ses som både dess möjlighet och dess problem. Å ena sidan utgör thailändska bemanningsföretag och svenska bärföretag den infrastruktur som upprätthåller systemet över tid, och gör det möjligt för bärplockarna att exempelvis investera i sina barns utbildning. Å den andra sidan visar rapporten att det saknas transparens kring om kostnaderna är skäligen, samt att kostnader och risker läggs på den individuella arbetaren. Användandet av thailändska bemanningsföretag har utarbetats som ett sätt att undvika arbetsgivaransvar och skatt i Sverige. Det är möjligt att arbetare med stor erfarenhet av bärplockning istället skulle kunna använda sig av egna sociala nätverk för att åka till Sverige, exempelvis genom att starta kooperativ och på sätt sänka kostnaderna för att arbeta i Sverige.

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# 1. Introduction

Every year, close to 5,000 Thai farmers come to Sweden during summer to pick wild berries in Sweden's dense forests and sell their produce to Swedish berry companies. They are recruited by Thai staffing agencies, which charge them hefty fees for organising their travel, accommodation and links with the berry-buying companies in Sweden. With the expectation of earning substantial extra income abroad during the off-season in Thai rice agriculture, these men and women have become part of a system of labour migration that seems unique to Sweden. It has the features of a "posted worker" system, where they are, for immigration purposes, employed by a staffing agency in Thailand, while still performing their work for a berry company in Sweden (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018). Their earnings are not based on a contracted wage but on how much they are able to harvest and sell to the berry traders. There has been concern that the system is not benefiting all farmers because of the high costs they incur to be recruited for this short seasonal job. Particularly so, since their earnings fluctuate depending on the weather (which determines the amount of berries available), the supply of workers, and the volatility of market prices for a commodity now exported by many other countries. In response, the Swedish government has established a guaranteed minimum wage, to which the berry pickers are entitled, although it is not clear how many benefit from this policy.

At the instance of the Migration Studies Delegation (Delmi), a survey of former berry pickers was conducted in sampled villages of origin in Thailand in order to develop a better understanding of the berry pickers' experiences with the system and to suggest what improvements might be necessary to enhance the benefits for all parties.<sup>1</sup> This report draws on the survey findings to find answers to several questions, such as: How are the berry pickers recruited and what costs do they incur to find work and to live in Sweden? How many hours do they spend working and travelling to work? How much is deducted from their earnings for their accommodation, food, transport to work sites and related expenses? Are they able to recoup

their investment in going to Sweden, and are they able to bring home some savings? How do the worker-paid costs in migrating from Thailand to Sweden for seasonal work compare with similar costs in other corridors? Did most of the migrants earn an adequate return on their investment in seasonal migration and were there large differences among them? and Can information on such differences suggest better policies to improve outcomes?

The Swedish berry industry distributes around 10,000 tons of wild bilberries<sup>2</sup> annually to distant locations around the globe for further refinement of the product. Global competition in the berry trade has sharpened significantly in recent years, especially after the entry of Russia and Eastern European countries into the global market (Hedberg, 2013). The declining price of berries in the world market has cut margins in the berry trade, placing a lot of pressure on Swedish berry companies to trim costs, ultimately impacting the earnings of the berry pickers (Wingborg, 2016). Unlike in Canada and the US, where berries are largely grown on farms and harvesting has become increasingly mechanised, picking wild berries remains a labour-intensive operation in Sweden. Historically, the work was performed by native Swedes, but as workers were absorbed into more remunerative employment, wild berry picking became increasingly internationalised, starting with seasonal migrant workers from eastern and central Europe and, since the 1980s, from more distant Thailand (Jonsson and Uddstål, 2002; Hedberg, 2013).

The seasonal labour migration of wild berry pickers from Thailand to Sweden has been subject to much debate and interest. Thai berry picking has the character of circular migration, that is, it is a process where migrants continuously circulate between origin and destination within an established economic industry (SOU 2010:40). In contrast to many other cases of labour migration, the case of Thai workers in Sweden's wild berry industry is characterised by short-term, seasonal migration. Just as in other labour migration processes (Ashan et al., 2014; Abella, Martin and Yi, 2016), the workers typically spend the first months recovering the high costs associated with the recruitment process. However, due to the limited season in the Thai-Swedish case, the workers become particularly sensitive to high recruitment costs and have a much shorter space of time than other groups

of migrant workers to recoup the money they have spent on travel documents and other fees. In turn, this increases their vulnerability to high fees. Reports about exploitation and poor working conditions of Thai berry pickers have been highlighted internationally (Yimprasert, 2009; Saltmarsh, 2010; Economist, 2012; Yimprasert, 2014), as well as nationally (Andersson, 2013; Rydman and Hökerberg, 2009; Wingborg, 2011; Wingborg, 2014). More specifically, the high migration costs and the insecurities regarding payments have been identified as issues requiring the attention of policy makers. In 2012, the confederation of Swedish trade unions (LO) even referred to wild berry picking as “modern slavery” (The Economist, 2012). Other studies give a more nuanced picture of the motivations and consequences for the workers (Hedberg, 2013; 2014; 2015; Kamoltip-Källström, 2011). Frequently found in discussions on circular migration is the notion that seasonal migration can contribute to development in the country of origin (GCIM, 2005). In relation to Thai berry pickers, research has pointed to the importance of looking at Thai berry picking from a household perspective, where migration to Sweden is viewed as a “relatively sustainable household strategy” (Hedberg, 2015).

Existing knowledge about Thai workers in Sweden, however, is mainly based on qualitative, information rich studies and journalistic work (Hedberg, 2013, 2014, 2015; Wingborg, 2011, 2016; Eriksson and Tollefsen, 2013). Few studies, if any, have considered extensive research data. In this study, thus, we combine qualitative knowledge with the analysis of survey data on the costs that wild berry pickers are facing and their earnings from work in Sweden. We compare the costs of Thai berry pickers with the migration corridors<sup>3</sup> that have been investigated within the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD)<sup>4</sup>.

Against this background, the aim of this study is to provide an extensive picture of the costs and earnings of Thai berry pickers in Sweden, to compare this with other labour migration corridors and to provide relevant background information about the case regarding the recruitment process and the demographic and socio-economic background of the workers.

Due to the geographically targeted and relatively scarce selection of the respondents, the study makes no claim to be statistically representative of all Thai berry



pickers, but rather gives a detailed and nuanced picture of the costs and earnings for a relatively high number of workers. In designing and interpreting the survey, we drew on a qualitative study that has been performed 2011-2015 in one of the key centres of seasonal migration to Sweden (the district of Kaeng Khro).

## Endnotes Chapter 1.

1. This study on Thai berry pickers in Sweden is a continuation of the research project Grapes of Wrath? Global labour mobility in the wild berry industry affecting rural development in Sweden and Thailand (Swedish Research Council FORMAS), and attached to the research theme Migration and Development at the Migration Studies Delegation (DELMi) in Sweden.
2. "Bilberry" is often confused with the term "blueberry", which in Swedish both go under the term blåbär. Whereas the former refers to the plant that grows wild in Europe, blueberries are grown in the US.
3. A migration corridor is a substantial flow of migrants between an origin country or region and a destination country or region, such as for example the Asia to Middle East corridor.
4. The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) is a global hub of knowledge and policy expertise on migration and development issues. KNOMAD draws on experts from all parts of the world to synthesize existing knowledge and generate new knowledge for use by policy makers in sending and receiving countries. KNOMAD works in close coordination with the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the Global Migration Group (GMG). The World Bank has established a multi-donor trust fund to implement the KNOMAD. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) are the largest contributors to the trust fund. Within the World Bank, KNOMAD is located in the Development Indicators Group of the Development Economics Vice-Presidency (DEC) ([www.knomad.org](http://www.knomad.org)).

## 2. Literature review

### The high costs of low-skilled migration

One topic that has been discussed within international policy frameworks regards the recruitment of low income migrant workers. In particular, it has been highlighted how to help prevent human trafficking and forced labour, how to protect the rights of migrant workers, and how to reduce the cost of labour migration (ILO, 2014). With respect to low income migrant workers, the International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasises the need to put focus on the recruitment process, including the need to reduce the cost of labour migration. In today's globalised world, people increasingly cross borders in search of work and an opportunity to improve their lives. Finding a job and working in another country is associated with a range of costs. Migrant workers pay recruitment agencies to find jobs for them. They pay to obtain passports, visas and other documents that they need to travel to and work in the destination country, and they pay for the travel to the destination country (Ratha, Yi and Yousefi, 2016).

Previous research suggests that the cost of migration is often high, and that it has been increasing in recent years. Ashan et al. (2014), for example, claim that migrant workers within the East Asian and the Pacific region usually spend the first few months of earnings to cover the cost of migration. Previous research by KNOMAD<sup>1</sup> suggests that the cost of migration varies between different migration corridors; worker-paid costs ranged from one month's earnings for migrant workers in Korea up to 15 months' earnings for Pakistani migrants working in Saudi Arabia (Abella, Martin and Yi, 2016). Moreover, high cost items vary between countries of origin. For Pakistanis working in a Gulf state, visas were the highest cost, while for Indians working in the same destination recruitment fees were the highest cost. Abella, Martin and Yi also found that a high cost of recruitment did not necessarily

reflect higher wage differentials. Pakistani workers in Saudi Arabia, for example, paid around nine months of expected earnings while earning four times more than if they had remained in Pakistan, while Vietnamese workers in Korea earned six times more in Korea while only paying one month of their expected earnings for their recruitment.

Why is the cost of migration high and why has it been rising? Abella, Martin and Yi (2016) identify three main reasons. First, weak governance in some destination countries has led to such unscrupulous practices as selling visas (in other words, selling work opportunities). Second, convoluted recruitment practices and the opaqueness of most transactions serve to further obscure the costs of migration and leave space for over-charging the workers for recruiters' services. Third is the high cost of air travel for some migration corridors, sometimes aggravated by monopolistic pricing practices by national airlines.

The increasing costs of migration may also be the result of state policies. While generally aimed at protecting migrant workers (Ashan et al., 2014), attempts to regulate migration often result in raising its costs. According to Baey and Yeoh (2015), for example, the Singaporean requirement that incoming workers must go through pre-departure training has resulted in almost all migrant workers having to pay an agent or training centre in their country of origin in order to take up work in Singapore. To attend pre-departure training, for example, migrant workers may have to pay a fee, in addition to cover any local cost of travel to the location where pre-departure training is held. Governments themselves may extract fees to approve work contracts and provide exit clearance. To navigate increasingly complex emigration and immigration systems, prospective migrant workers tend to pay for the services offered by a plethora of private actors including, for example, recruitment agencies and various informal brokers (e.g. Hernández-León, 2008; Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh, 2012).

To pay the increasing costs of migration, many migrant workers borrow money at high interest rates. In order to repay those loans, some migrants work extra hours or take a second job. Others overstay their visas and consequently become irregular migrants (ILO, 2016) or simply opt to migrate outside of formal migration channels

to avoid high fees and lengthy and complicated migration processes altogether (Ashan et al., 2014).

To realise the economic potential of labour migration, it is important to reduce the cost of migration. It would enable people from lower income households to access international employment opportunities, minimise indebtedness, and prevent asset depletion of migrant households (ILO, 2016). Indebtedness exacerbates the precarious position of migrant workers since it reduces their bargaining power in the workplace, often forcing them to accept exploitative working conditions (Axelsson, Malmberg and Zhang, 2017; Baey and Yeoh, 2015). Indebtedness may also lead to a rise in irregular migration if migrants overstay their visas to repay their loans.

Many governments have set a ceiling on recruitment fees. India, for example, has set the ceiling to 45 days' earnings in the destination country (Ratha, Yi and Yousefi, 2016). Other governments, by contrast, "have adopted the philosophy that because migrants will earn much more working abroad, they should share these income gains with the state. Migrants [from these countries] are thus paying to the government what in other countries might have to be paid to private recruitment agencies" (Ahsan et al., 2014: 161).

## Seasonal migration

The agricultural sector increasingly depends on cheap migrant labour and many governments have opened agriculture to migrant workers on a temporary basis. Although temporary labour migration, or circular migration, is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon, it has received limited attention in the literature and in politics (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2009). According to Zapata-Barrero et al. (2009) temporary workers are subject to legal and political invisibility, which could be partly explained by the fact that, due to their temporary nature, they are outside of national statistics. Moreover, the hiring of temporary workers has been subjected to regulatory avoidance and the 'posting' of transnational workers (Knox, 2018; Lillie and Wagner, 2015).<sup>2</sup>

Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) has attracted particular attention. The SAWP is a demand-driven labour migration programme, which since 1966 has regulated access to Canada's agricultural industry through bilateral agreements between Canada and countries in the Caribbean and Mexico. It operates outside quotas and caps, and employers are generally supplied with the number of workers they request. As a bilateral programme, a large share of its administration is undertaken by the labour-sending countries. Canadian employer organisations are also involved in the administration of the programme (Hennebry and Preibisch, 2010).

The SAWP permits Caribbean and Mexican citizens to work in Canada for a maximum of eight months every year, and many return year after year to work on Canadian farms (e.g. Lenard and Straehle, 2012; Preibisch, 2012). Unlike domestic agricultural workers, SAWP workers are tied to a single employer and a particular place of work.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, SAWP workers are required to live on-farm and have to report their movements off-farm to their employer (Reid-Musson, 2017; Tomic and Trumper, 2012). Employers name the workers they wish to employ and who may return the following season. Preibisch and Otero (2014) claim that participants in the SAWP are easily coerced into working while ill or injured and accepting long working hours, poor housing, unsafe working conditions and transportation, more so than immigrant workers with citizenship. SAWP workers, they conclude, are a particularly vulnerable workforce because their right to remain in Canada and their possibilities of return depend on the continued sponsorship of their employer.

The precarious position of migrant labour in Canadian agriculture is further exacerbated by what Preibisch and Hennebry (2012) call the 'forced rotation' between Canada and the country of origin on an annual basis. The repeated movement in and out of Canada effectively excludes SAWP workers from settlement and rights that are linked to a permanent right of stay (Allen and Axelsson, 2018). The rise of temporary worker schemes replacing permanent migration has led to a situation where labourers' bargaining power overall has been weakened (e.g. Basok, Bélanger and Rivas, 2014; Preibisch and Otero, 2014; Sharma, 2006). Thus, while the SAWP ensures that temporary workers share many of the same rights as do-

mestic workers, they often struggle to exercise them (Basok, 2002; Hennebry and Preibisch, 2010; Preibisch and Otero, 2014; Verma, 2003). The rise in temporary migrant workers in agriculture follows a general trend in Canada where the country's historical privileging of permanent migration is increasingly replaced by temporary migration programmes (Rajkumar et al., 2012).

Provisions of the SAWP ensure that migrant workers are paid no less than domestic workers but deductions are allowed to partly reimburse employers for travel and visa costs, to cover the costs of administration of the programme, and for medical insurance and employment insurance. The SAWP allows employers to deduct the cost of meals from the workers' salaries. Even though many workers return year after year, their skills and seniority is not recognised, and workers are consequently paid the same regardless of their previous experience (Verma, 2003).

There has not been much focus on the cost side for seasonal workers. Research on Canada's SAWP, which is the most studied group of seasonal workers, has not focused on the costs of migration, although it is widely known that employers in SAWP share the costs with the workers. For example, employers pay part of the workers' international travel costs (Preibisch and Hennebry, 2012; Verna, 2003).

## Endnotes Chapter 2.

1. KNOMAD. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) are the largest contributors to the trust fund. Within the World Bank, KNOMAD is located in the Development Indicators Group of the Development Economics Vice-Presidency (DEC) ([www.knomad.org](http://www.knomad.org)).

2. According to Lillie and Wagner (2015) companies are involved in so called "regime shopping" by choosing the regulatory regime that enables them the best alternative. They give a number of examples of what that could involve: in practice, this can imply physically moving the transactions to a different territory by opening up an office or factory there, or incorporating a new company in another territory with a view to transacting business (such as managing employment contracts) under the law of that territory, even if the actual activity takes place elsewhere. It can also mean moving between different forms of regulation in the same geographic space, such as between labour laws governing temporary agency work or between metalworking and construction collective agreements (Lillie and Wagner, 2015: 157-158).

3. SAWP workers may be transferred to another farm with permission from the Canadian government (Verma, 2003).



### 3. Background: the Thai-Swedish case of wild berry pickers

#### Seasonal migration: origin communities in rural Thailand

The Thai berry pickers working in Sweden migrate from north-eastern Thailand, which is the country's poorest region and which traditionally has been characterised by small-scale rice farming (Buch-Hansen, 2001; Panya, 1995). During the last decades, many farmers have found it necessary to search for alternative sources of income. According to Panya (1995:3) "a household often engages in diverse activities centred around that which gives the highest cash return". More often than not, this would be the case during those times of the year when the rice is growing, and work at the farm is relatively less intense. Next to farming, the workers remaining in one Thai village in the north-east were also engaged in everything from construction work to the making and selling of small Buddha figures (Hedberg, 2015). An alternative source of income has been labour migration, either internally or internationally (Mills, 2012). According to Panya (1995), internal migration to Bangkok or intra-regional migration was, in the 1990s, by far the most common migration pattern among villagers in north-eastern Thailand. Other workers move overseas, often to perform contracted labour for a two-year period in countries such as Taiwan, Singapore or South Korea (Chalamwong et al., 2011; Department of Employment, 2010).

International migration streams are often highly gendered, with a majority being men (Chantavanich et al., 2010). Among women, however, there are also those



moving to Western countries within transnational marriages, including Sweden (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009; Webster and Haandrikman, 2016). This migration process means substantial flows of remittances to the sending household, and has even been referred to as the “daughter duty” (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009). In Sweden, too, the migration of Thai women to marry Swedish men has been common, to the extent that Thai is the most common nationality among foreign spouses wed to Swedish men (Haandrikman, 2014).

It is relevant to point out that the women who initiated Thai berry picking in Sweden were found among these marriage migrants (Hedberg, 2016). One Thai woman residing in the north-Swedish inland, invited her relatives from Kaeng Khro in Chaiyaphum, north-eastern Thailand, to pick berries. When the villagers noticed the economic gains that were possible through this process, it escalated over the years and the information about the process was spread across the villages in the district in Chaiyaphum. The Kaeng Khro region is still the main sending region for Thai berry pickers.

## The wild berry industry in Sweden

Thai berry pickers work within the Swedish wild berry industry, which is a highly globalised commodity chain, annually distributing around 10,000 tons of wild bilberries around the globe (Hedberg, 2013). The wild bilberry plant is one of the most common plants in Sweden, and many hours of exposure to the Swedish summer sun has made the berries rich in antioxidants and competitive on the world market. The main part of the berries is used for health products, particularly in East Asia (Japan), as well as in the US and Europe (Jonsson and Uddstål, 2002). Wild berry picking in Sweden relies on the Swedish Right of Public Access (Allemansrätten). This right, stemming from an old custom, allows people to pick berries and mushrooms on public and private land. This makes the Swedish berry industry unique in two ways; first, the berries are made available for free to use for commercial purposes, and second, it gives everyone present in Sweden the right to pick berries (Wingborg, 2016).

A number of companies in Sweden invite workers to pick berries. Workers arrive in Sweden through two separate systems. One system comprises workers from non-European countries who arrive on work permits assigned by the Swedish Migration Agency. Another system comprises workers from European countries (mainly Bulgaria and Ukraine) who work as berry pickers in Sweden. They travel freely within the EU<sup>1</sup>, without work permits or formal association to an employer. Hence, they are not covered by regulatory frameworks on labour migration.<sup>2</sup>

The work is seasonal, and mainly performed between July and September. The short season makes wild berry pickers particularly vulnerable in terms of recouping the costs of migration. This can be compared to other channels for seasonal labour migration as in Canada's SAWP, which permits migrants to work for up to eight months of the year and workers may transfer between farms to extend their stay (Verma, 2003).

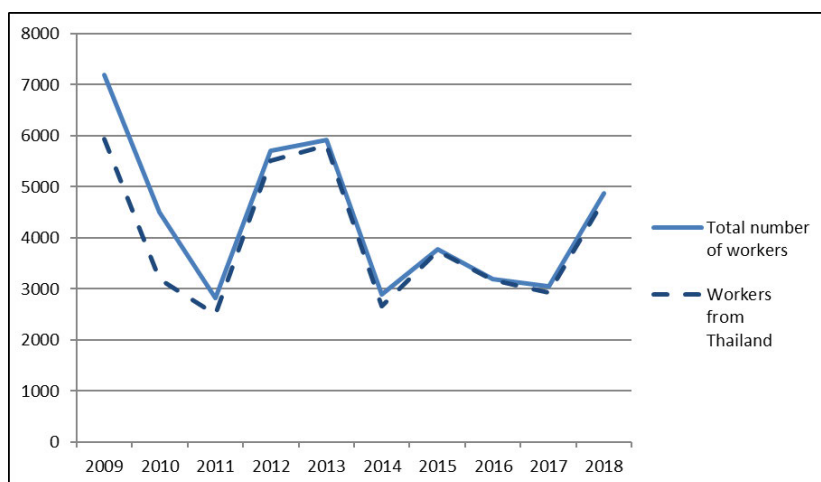
Moreover, what affects the precariousness of the workers is the complex balance in the industry between the supply of berries in the woods and the demand for berries from the merchants. Since the berries are wild, and growing under natural conditions, it is hard to predict exactly when the work can start. On the other hand, the tickets from Thailand to Sweden must be booked long before the access for berries that season is known. Although the timing of blooming of the berries can be checked beforehand in spring, changes in the natural conditions can still affect the yield severely. The summer of 2018, for example, involved all-time high temperatures with little rain, causing a decline in bilberries by around 10-20 percent of a normal year (Aftonbladet, 2018). However, since merchants can store berries in large freezers, a higher demand for workers may still arise in the years when the freezers are empty. The demand for pickers in Sweden is also affected by how many wild berries are supplied internationally, for instance by Russia and Ukraine.

The supply of berries in the world market, together with the regulatory system in Sweden, has shaped the demand for workers. The industry decides the number of workers they want to hire and applies for work permits from the Swedish Migration Agency. The number has often tended to be around 3,000 workers annually (Figure 1) but in 2015, the year when our survey was undertaken, slightly more (3,741) Thai

berry pickers received work permits. This represented 98 percent of all workers from third countries in the industry. In 2018, the number of Thai berry pickers rose again increased to 4,775 due to an increased demand for berries in the world market and low quantities in storage.

The supply of workers, on the other hand, depends on the general attractiveness to the Thai migrants of the berry-picking work. Although, in general, the reputation for the work is good in many villages (Hedberg 2015), there are also indications that this can change. The declining trend in the price for berries could, according to Wingborg (2016), contribute to difficulties in recruiting workers in the future.

**Figure 1: Foreign agricultural workers admitted to Sweden from 2009 to 2018.<sup>3</sup>**



Source: Swedish Migration Agency, 2019.

In 2009 there were heavy protests among the workers, due to a combination of the high number of workers, relatively low access to berries in the woods, and the low protection of workers. This led to a decline in workers in 2010, in combination with a number of regulations in the mid-2000s (see below), which influenced the number of workers (Figure 1). In 2015, when there were fewer berries in the northern parts

of Sweden, where most workers are present, some companies solved the problem by moving the workers within Sweden, from the camps in the north to alternative camps in the south (Wingborg, 2015). Other companies simply shortened the season for the workers in order to avoid paying them the guaranteed wage (see Box 3). According to Wingborg (2015) it is a problem that the length of employment is not regulated in the contract.

## Recruiting migrant workers – from social networks to commercial intermediaries

In contrast to the SAWP, which regulates access to Canada's agricultural industry through bilateral agreements between Canada and countries in the Caribbean and Mexico, migration for work in the Swedish wild berry industry grew out of **social networks** that were established between areas in north-eastern Thailand and the rural north-Swedish inland in the 1980s. At that time, Thai women immigrants in Sweden started to invite their relatives to pick wild berries in Sweden to supplement their incomes, as outlined in 3.1. These wild berry pickers travelled to Sweden on tourist visas. They picked wild berries and sold them to local wild berry wholesalers (Hedberg, 2016; also see Box 3 on payment in the wild berry industry).

From around 2007, Thai **staffing agencies** replaced these social networks. This was the result of a series of attempts at regulating the Swedish wild berry industry, which had long been plagued by poor working conditions. In 2005, the Swedish Migration Agency decided that a work permit was required for all non-European Economic Area (EEA) wild berry pickers. The same year, a tax review by the Swedish Tax Agency concluded that wild berry picking should be considered as work and should be taxed accordingly. In a bid to avoid paying employer contributions, Swedish wild berry companies outsourced the employment of wild berry pickers to Thai staffing agencies. Swedish authorities accepted this solution and wild berry picking was exempted from the requirement to pay tax as long as the pickers were employed by a staffing agency based outside the EEA (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018; also see Box 1 on migration intermediaries). The berry companies could hence lean on the

so-called “183-day rule”, stating that an employee can be exempted from paying taxes in Sweden if the person is hired from an international employer and the work performed in Sweden does not extend 183 days (Ministry of Finance 2018).<sup>4</sup>

The introduction of staffing agencies has fundamentally changed the conditions under which Thai wild berry pickers now work and the costs they incur. Rather than working as free-moving, irregular workers on a tourist visa, they are now employed in Thailand by Thai-registered staffing agencies that ‘post’ their workers to Sweden to work in the wild berry industry.<sup>5</sup> Each staffing agency has a contract with one or several Swedish wild berry companies. The Thai staffing agencies recruit workers, often by relying on extensive social networks in the areas in north-eastern Thailand where the majority of the wild berry pickers live, and organise their work permits, exit clearance, pre-departure training and their transportation to Sweden. The Swedish partner organises food, accommodation and transportation for the workers in Sweden, and guarantees that the workers are paid (see box 3).

### Box 1: Labour migration intermediaries

Most migrants rely on the services of a wide spectrum of migration intermediaries to find employment in another country and organise different stages of their migration. Migration intermediaries include, for example, recruitment agencies and informal social networks. In some instances, labour-supply companies may act both as employers and as intermediaries (Kuptsch and Pang, 2006).

Recruitment agencies and social network actors fulfil different roles at different stages of the migration process. Recruitment agencies are often involved in matching of employers and workers, and the organisation of migration from one place to another (Sporton, 2013). Social networks, by contrast, are often used as a source of information about jobs and a way of finding employment for migrant workers who otherwise might struggle to find a way into the labour market due to language barriers, for example (Sumption, 2009).

Recruitment agencies are particularly significant when a new labour migration channel between two places is first established, but are thereafter reduced in importance when social networks are established (McCollum et al., 2013). Social networks were key in establishing seasonal labour migration between Thailand and Sweden but over time these networks were gradually replaced by staffing agencies; a type of labour migration intermediary that is increasingly common in a range of lower skilled occupations (see e.g. Barrientos, 2013; Thörnqvist and Woolfson, 2012). Consequently, regardless of how many seasons an individual has worked in Sweden, s/he continues to rely on the services of staffing agencies, and pay their fees.

## Rising worker-paid costs to migrate

According to Xiang and Lindquist (2014), the intensified regulation of migration has tended to lead to migration being more intensely mediated. When the number of intermediaries involved in migration rise, the costs of migration tend to increase as well. For the services provided by Thai staffing agencies, Thai wild berry pickers pay a fee. This fee is far higher than the fees that Thai wild berry pickers used to pay to social network actors prior to 2007. Somewhat paradoxically, as noted in previous research, the Swedish government's attempt to regulate the industry and protect the interests of the workers has resulted in outsourcing of employment to Thailand and in higher, but perhaps more transparent, costs (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018; Wingborg, 2011).

A workforce which incurs heavy costs to engage in seasonal work in a foreign country has little bargaining power due to its temporary migration status, the need to maintain a good relationship with the employers, and the need to earn sufficient money to recoup the costs (e.g. Basok, Bélanger and Rivas, 2014; Preibisch and Otero, 2014; Sharma, 2006). The case of Thai berry pickers, however, also points to the importance of social factors in the migration decision. As an example, research has pointed to the importance of looking at Thai berry picking from a household perspective, where migration to Sweden can be seen as a “relatively sustainable household strategy” (Hedberg 2015: 141). The social costs for migrating to Sweden are relatively low, compared to other labour migration corridors, which usually last for one to two years, or more. In this case, the workers are able to travel for a limited time period of 70 days, which enables them to combine overseas work with family life, and which coincides with the growing season in the Thai agricultural year, when farm-work calls for relatively little effort.

## Endnotes Chapter 3.

1. Although from outside the EU, Ukrainian workers travel freely in Europe, usually crossing the EU border in Poland.
2. Since they are informal workers, their number is unknown, but it is estimated that they represent about 50 percent of the workers (Hedberg, 2015).
3. For 2009-2014 the workers fall under the occupational group "Agricultural, fishery and related labourers", and in 2015-2017 under the occupational group "Berry pickers and planters".
4. Note, however, that the European workers mentioned in 2.3.1 are outside these regulations and hence travel without staffing agencies.
5. The only case where Swedish companies have employed Thai workers directly in Sweden since the tax revision in 2005 relates to a spectacular case in 2010. The company, Lomsjö Bär, employed 160 Thai wild berry pickers for one season, without using Thai staffing agencies. However, when the company should have paid the workers, the owner of the company instead escaped to Thailand with 2.9 million SEK in his pocket. After two years, he was arrested in Thailand and charged for accounting fraud and tax offences in two companies. The workers received monthly payment (around 2,000 USD per month in 2010) as compensation and most of them returned to Thailand.

## 4. State policies affecting the seasonal migration system

### Thailand's policies to protect nationals going abroad for employment

Working overseas has been a strategy of the Thai government since the 1970s (Chantavanich, 2010). As a response to economic downturns in the countryside, migration flows have been facilitated, first to the Gulf States, and since the 1990s instead to Asian countries. The northern and north-eastern provinces of Thailand have been the main origin of these migration flows (Aimimtham, 2008). The largest numbers consist of men working as temporary contract labour in factories in Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea (Department of Employment, 2010).

Following an increase in the number of outgoing workers during the 1960s, in 1968 the Thai government passed the Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act. The act provides the framework that regulates the recruitment of outgoing Thai workers (Harkins et al., 2013). It describes pre-departure examinations and training, establishes an aid fund for overseas workers, and stipulates that jobseekers, employers and, when applicable, representatives of employment agencies must sign written employment contracts. The Thailand Overseas Employment Administration (TOEA), a division within the Department of Employment (DOE) of the Ministry of Labour (MOL), is the government agency responsible for outmigration. Its responsibilities include, for example, facilitating overseas employment, regulating the activities of private recruitment companies, and providing information to outgoing workers (Vanaspong, 2012).



The Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act comes with a set of rules regarding, for example, the fees that may be charged to outgoing workers (Chantavanich et al., 2010: 45). In general, the fees contain four elements and should not exceed the amounts below:

Chapter 1 Departure documents (29.3 USD)

Chapter 2 Medical examination (41.9 USD)

Chapter 3 Skill testing (14-27.9 USD)

Chapter 4 Services and recruitment fees (see below)

The right to charge a *service fee* enables the agencies to cover the costs for administration of transferring the workers abroad. This cost cannot exceed the payment of two months' work in the receiving country (based on the initial wage) for a contract that is one year or longer. For contracts that are shorter than one year the fee should be reduced 'pro-rata to the contract duration'.<sup>1</sup> The *recruitment fee* should cover the 'actual expenses of the recruitment process' (Chantavanich et al., 2010: 60), but should not exceed three months' wages (based on the initial wage). Costs could be related to, on the one hand, arrangements for the workers to be able to work abroad (costs for document certification, document translation, visa application fee, etc.) and, on the other hand, to the welfare system in the foreign country (such as health insurances, etc.). The agencies are not allowed to charge fees such as arrangement of passport, flight ticket, medical examination, skill testing, or linguistic or cultural preparations for work abroad. These are costs that the worker has to cover individually. However, according to Chantavanich et al. (2010: 61), 'the workers often pay a whole sum for services fee and other expenses, which is higher than the rate set by the law.'

These regulations of fees, however, do not apply to the Thai berry pickers in Sweden. As noted earlier, Thai wild berry pickers are employed by staffing agencies in Thailand and sent to work in Sweden. This arrangement of "posting" workers abroad is not covered in the Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the TOEA gives special permission to a smaller number of staffing agencies to send Thai workers to Sweden and Finland to work in the berry picking industry (Harkins

et al., 2013). There appears to be lack of transparency regarding the limits to fees that Thai staffing agencies may charge the berry pickers they employ.

In order to protect the interests of overseas wild berry pickers, the TOEA has introduced an administrative framework and procedures which draw upon the Recruitment and Job Seekers Protection Act and Sweden's regulations for wild berry pickers. According to an interview with the TOEA in February 2016, in order to obtain permission to send out wild berry pickers, Thai staffing agencies must, for example, demonstrate that they can cover two months of salary for every worker they intend to send to Sweden. The salary must be equivalent to the minimum salary set in Swedish collective agreements. They must also present a signed contract with a Swedish wild berry company that has agreed to buy the berries that the staffing agency's employees pick, and an employment contract for every worker specifying the salary the worker will be paid, the location of the camp where the worker will be based, the cost of travel, and information about how food and accommodation will be organised. In addition, they must present evidence that all workers have participated in the TOEA's pre-departure training, have gone through medical examination, and are covered by Thai accident and health insurance.

To make sure that the workers have received the guaranteed minimum salary, at the end of each season Thai staffing agencies must report to the TOEA how much they have paid each worker. However, these controls are based on self-reporting and there is no follow-up with the workers themselves.

Thailand has an established process for filing complaints by outgoing workers. According to a report by the ILO (Harkins et al., 2013, xi), most of the legal enforcement structures are in place but there are a number of problems with the implementation and the complaint process. These problems include "impunity of offenders through patronage and corruption; circumvention of laws by private employment agencies and migrant workers; and bias, capacity and resource constraints among authorities enforcing the law". Because of these problems, Harkins et al. (2013) conclude that it remains difficult for Thai migrant workers to receive a just and fair hearing of their grievances. Wild berry pickers have also struggled to claim their rights. Following the 2009 season, for example (see Box 2), upon return a group of

wild berry pickers formed a committee to file a complaint. After almost two years of negotiations, first, between the Ministry of Labour, who represented the interests of the workers, and the Thai staffing agencies and, later, in the Labour Court, the workers accepted a very low offer from their staffing agency (Vanaspong, 2012).

## Swedish policies to regulate conditions of work in the wild berry industry

The conditions of non-EEA wild berry pickers in the Swedish wild berry industry have drawn media and Parliamentary attention (see e.g. Box 2), which prompted Sweden to implement a series of regulatory changes aimed at protecting the interests of non-EEA wild berry pickers while they work in Sweden (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018). In Sweden, labour migration is regulated in the Aliens Act, which states under which conditions foreign citizens may reside and live in Sweden, including conditions for asylum, visas, and work and residence permits. The act was amended in December 2008 to facilitate labour migration. The new labour immigration policy is demand-driven and is open to all workers irrespective of their skill or educational level. There is no numerical limit on labour immigration from countries outside the European Economic Areas or a requirement to recruit only in shortage occupations. Consequently, Sweden's labour immigration has been labelled as one of the most liberal among the OECD countries (OECD, 2011).

## Box 2: The 2009 wild berry crisis

In mid-July 2009, almost 6,000 farmers from north-eastern Thailand arrived in northern Sweden to pick wild berries. This was approximately 2,500 more Thai nationals than had been contracted to work in the wild berry industry the previous year. The Thai wild berry pickers were contracted to work on a piece rate, which meant that they received a certain sum per kilo wild berries they picked.

In 2009, there was a lack of wild berries in Sweden's forests and the Thai wild berry pickers soon realised that they would not be able to pick enough berries to cover the costs of living in Sweden and repay the loans they had taken to cover the staffing agencies' fees. Following a demonstration in Luleå, a town in northern Sweden where at the time Thailand's Labour Minister was paying an official visit, several of the wild berry pickers returned home. At the end of the chaotic 2009 wild berry season, it was blatantly obvious that wild berry pickers were more or less unprotected in the Swedish labour market.

The Thai wild berry pickers' plight did not go unnoticed in Sweden. The exploitative working conditions in the wild berry industry drew a lot of media attention, and in the autumn of 2009, the issue was lifted to the highest political level. Following extensive parliamentary debate, a series of changes to Sweden's admission of non-EEA wild berry pickers, which in different ways sought to improve the working conditions in the industry, was introduced.

*Source: Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018.*

The Swedish Migration Agency is the government agency responsible for the implementation of the act. As noted earlier, farmers from north-eastern Thailand initially travelled to Sweden completely outside of the formal labour migration channel. However, work permits had been required to pick wild berries on a commercial basis between 1999 and 2000, and in 2005 this requirement was re-instated (Hedberg, 2015). Yet, until 2010, there was an administratively separate system for work permit applications from seasonal agricultural workers in the wild berry industry. For example, the Forest Berry Interest Association (sw. Skogsbärbranschens Intresseförening), a business organisation that was formed by the Swedish wild berry industry in 2002, was assigned a key role in the work permit application process, and the Swedish embassy in Bangkok, rather than the Swedish Migration Agency, determined the work permit applications from Thai wild berry pickers (Swedish Migration Agency, 2009a, 2009b).

Following a poor wild berry season in 2009, which left many wild berry pickers indebted, more stringent requirements were introduced (see Box 3). For the Swedish Migration Agency to grant a work permit, the following conditions now apply:

- The terms of employment, including the salary, must meet the requirements set out in the Agreement on Agriculture (sw. Jordbruksavtalet), a collective agreement between the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (sw. Svenska Kommunalarbetsareföbundet, SKAF) and the Federation of Swedish Forestry and Agricultural Employers (sw. Skogs- och lantarbetsgivareföbundet). The salary is set according to collective agreements (see Box 3), but must never be below 1,539 USD per month (for part-time work, for example). In the berry industry, the salary according to the collective agreement has been around 2,340 USD per month.
- The Swedish Municipal Workers' Union must have been given the opportunity to express its view on the terms of employment.
- Swedish wild berry companies that want to invite non-EEA citizens to pick wild berries in Sweden must present evidence that they have paid wild berry pickers appropriate salaries in previous years and demonstrate that they have enough assets to pay salaries for the current season, even if there is a lack of wild berries or if a worker is unable to meet minimum picking requirements. They must also organise transportation, food and accommodation for the workers, present evidence that they have informed the workers about the duties associated with the role, the terms of employment, the Swedish Right of Public Access (sw. Allemansrätten), and traffic regulations, and specify all costs that the workers will incur.
- Thai staffing agencies are required to register a branch in an EU member state and have staff present in Sweden during the wild berry season in order to bring their employees to Sweden.

### Box 3: Payment in the wild berry industry

There are two forms of payment in the Swedish wild berry industry. The first form of payment is on a **piece rate**, which means that wild berry pickers receive a certain sum per kilo of wild berries they pick. The price is set on the world market and consequently varies considerably from one season to the next. In recent years, the world market price has been in decline as the result of an increase in the global supply of berries and increasing competition in the industry. Payment on piece rate represents both an opportunity and a risk for workers in the wild berry industry who may return with substantial earnings if the wild berry season is good or with little earnings, or even indebtedness, if the wild berry season is poor or the world market price is low. Until 2010, payment on a piece rate was standard practice in the industry.

Payment on piece rate resulted in substantial losses being made by many Thai wild berry pickers in 2009, for example. This led to the introduction of a **guaranteed minimum salary** in 2010, when non-EEA wild berry pickers were included in the Agreement on Agriculture (sw. Jordbruksavtalet). Since 2010, Thai and other non-EEA wild berry pickers are consequently entitled to a monthly salary equivalent to the minimum salary in the Agreement on Agriculture. The guaranteed minimum salary according to the agreement has been:

- 2013: 2,246 USD
- 2014: 2,291 USD
- 2015: 2,340 USD
- 2016: 2,399 USD
- 2017: 2,447 USD
- 2018: 2,501 USD

If the berry company has not signed the agreement, something that is very unusual in the business, the Swedish Migration Agency has stated that the workers have the right to a monthly payment of **1,539 USD**.

In theory, wild berry pickers can combine the two forms of payment. The minimum salary should function as a safety net if they fail to pick enough berries, and if they are able to pick more berries than required, they should be able to supplement the guaranteed minimum salary by also working on a piece rate. However, there is much evidence that wild berry pickers are faced with the choice of either working for the minimum salary or on a piece rate, and that they opt to continue to work on a piece rate only in the hope that they will earn more than the guaranteed minimum salary.

*Source: Agreement on Agriculture, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016; Hedberg 2015, Wingborg 2016.*

Despite efforts to protect the interests of Thai wild berry pickers in Sweden, gaps remain in legal frameworks and complaint mechanisms. A regular worker who is employed in Sweden and who wishes to raise a formal grievance against his/her employer turns to the local trade union representative. The trade union takes action against the employer. This is linked to the long tradition of self-regulation of the labour market in Sweden. The social labour market partners meet, bargain, and settle disputes independently of the government. The collective agreement is the cornerstone of the Swedish model for industrial relations and has a special status in the Swedish labour market and in labour law, since there is no legislated minimum wage. Instead, salaries are set industry-wide and in local negotiations between the labour market parties. Anyone who breaches the collective agreement, for example by not paying workers the salary they are entitled to according to the collective agreement, is liable for damages (Fahlbeck and Mulder, 2009). This model, however, is not directly applicable to Thai berry pickers, since they are employed in Thailand and their work is regulated by both Swedish and Thai legislation. Importantly, while both Sweden and Thailand's regulatory frameworks seek to ensure that the wild berry pickers' salaries are at least equivalent to the salary in the Agreement on Agriculture, and require that staffing agencies inform their workers about the costs they will incur if they agree to work in the wild berry industry in Sweden, neither Sweden nor Thailand regulate the size of the fee that staffing agencies charge Thai farmers for the opportunity to work in Sweden. Moreover, the difficulties that Thai wild berry pickers encounter when trying to express grievances are due to their having to navigate two legal systems that deal with worker complaints in different ways (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018). As a consequence, the interests of these workers are more difficult to protect than those of many other workers.

## Endnotes Chapter 4.

1. If applied to the berry pickers in Sweden who are employed no more than 70 days on average, the service fee should not exceed one-third of a monthly wage. If calculated on the guaranteed wage offered to the workers by the Swedish trade union, the service fee would roughly equal 780 USD.
2. The regulations in the Job Seekers Protection Act recognises five channels of outward labour migration: (1) State recruitment; (2) Direct recruitment; (3) Licensed, private employment agencies; (4) Secondment, and (5) Internships or training programmes. Employment in Thailand is not included in these channels.

## 5. Study to inform policy

This study is based on original survey data collected in regions that are central for the recruitment of wild berry pickers in Thailand. Until now, knowledge based on quantifiable data has largely been lacking, and there is a need for knowledge about the extensive patterns of this particular migration process. The survey complements the qualitative information that has been gained in previous, information-rich studies with empirical information derived from interviewing former berry pickers in Thailand.<sup>1</sup> The survey covers 165 respondents, former berry pickers who reside in two provinces in north-eastern Thailand where most seasonal migrants to Sweden are known to originate.

In order to study and evaluate the costs and earnings of the berry pickers, one is faced with the question of which framework of comparison one should use. Using the empirical findings for assessing the fairness of this seasonal migration system in Sweden we are faced with two options. One is to compare the earnings of comparable Swedish workers with those of the migrants. Another is to compare the latter with those of similar seasonal migrants in other countries. A comparison with natives is, however, problematic since there are virtually no more Swedes working as berry pickers, and because berry pickers from Thailand incur costs which are not incurred by native workers. In this report we address the first problem by comparing the reported average earnings of the Thai berry pickers with the “guaranteed wage” mandated by the Swedish government. We make the assumption that the guaranteed wage reflects what policy makers consider as fair remuneration in Sweden. But the comparison cannot be completed since we have no comparable benchmarks for costs of recruitment and travel fees, which are markedly significant for the Thai workers.

Fortunately, we can draw on the findings of recent studies jointly commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank (WB) within the



knowledge hub KNOMAD on recruitment and migration costs incurred by workers in a number of important labour migration corridors. Mindful of the need for comparability, we undertook the survey in close cooperation with KNOMAD and ILO, using basically the same questionnaire and survey methodology. In order to understand the Thai-Swedish case, we also collected background information on how the migration process is sustained by social networks, and how the demographic characteristics of the workers in terms of individual characteristics (age, gender), socio-economic characteristics (educational level, work and income in Thailand), and family background (marital status, number of children) may have influenced decisions to migrate. At the same time, it should be noted that other KNOMAD studies focus on longer term labour migration than this report and, in consequence, that the costs associated with short-term, seasonal migration of Thai farmers to Sweden are not fully comparable to data from other studies. In particular, and as noted earlier, the Thai wild berry pickers have a much shorter space of time to recoup the costs they incur when migrating to Sweden. Additionally, unlike other migrant workers who stay in the destination country for years at a time, the Thai berry pickers are faced with the same costs for flights, visas and permits, pre-departure training and medical examination, and so forth, year after year.

## Objectives of the study

Through the survey the study aimed to obtain an empirical basis for investigating certain important questions and issues about this seasonal migration system in place in Sweden. How are the berry pickers recruited and what costs do they incur to find work and to live in Sweden? How many hours do they spend working and travelling to work? How much is deducted from their earnings for their accommodation, food, transport to work sites, and related expenses? Are they able to recoup their investment in going to Sweden, and are they able to bring home some savings? How do the worker-paid costs in migrating from Thailand to Sweden for seasonal work compare with similar costs in other corridors? Did most of the migrants earn an adequate return on their investment in seasonal migration and were there large differences among them? Can information on such differences suggest better poli-

cies to improve outcomes? Answers to these questions should help identify policy interventions which could reduce costs and prevent exploitative practices, if any exist, in the seasonal migration system. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to provide an extensive picture of the costs and earnings of Thai berry pickers in Sweden, to compare this with other labour migration corridors and also to provide relevant background information about the case regarding the recruitment process and the demographic and socio-economic background of the workers. The questionnaire used in the survey, patterned on the ILO/KNOMAD questionnaire, thus aimed to obtain information on:

1. What are the general characteristics (age, sex, education, occupation, marital status, number of children, previous migration experience) of the berry pickers?
2. How did they obtain information and how were they recruited and selected?
3. What costs were paid by the berry pickers and how did they finance these?
4. How much did they earn from their employment in Thailand prior to migration?
5. How much did they earn from berry picking in Sweden?
6. What expenses were deducted from their earnings for accommodation, food, transport, etc? and how much were their net earnings?
7. What were their working conditions? What were the typical working hours?

The World Bank provided access to the data generated in previous ILO-KNOMAD surveys of recruitment costs in a number of important migration corridors, as well as the use of the computer-aided survey solution system (CAPI), which greatly facilitated tabulation of survey responses.

## Sample survey

The interviews of migrant returnees were conducted in their home villages in Thailand during the months of April to June 2016. Thereafter, the interviews had to be interrupted since the season to pick berries in Sweden for that year had already started. The number of interviews completed by then was 165. The survey was undertaken by a local research team familiar with the region and able to speak the

local dialect. The prerequisite for taking part in the survey was that the respondents had been active as berry pickers in Sweden at any time, and the questions regarding costs and earnings related to the last time they had been in Sweden.

In the survey, a question was included about the last year of arrival in Sweden. Of the sample, the vast majority, or 82 percent, travelled to Sweden the previous year, 2015. Another five percent of the sample had travelled to Sweden in 2014, and the rest within the period 2006-2013. The season 2015 is regarded as a relatively normal season for berry picking, considering the number of berry pickers arriving in Sweden. However, at the beginning of the season there were fewer berries than usual (Wingborg, 2015). This caused a problem, since the berry companies, following their agreement with the Swedish Migration Agency, booked flight tickets before it was possible to know if the season would provide a good yield or not. To solve this situation, some Swedish berry companies let the workers wait in Sweden without letting their employment begin before the berries had matured, while other companies moved the workers within Sweden to areas with more berries (Wingborg, 2015).

The recruitment of berry pickers is geographically concentrated in certain districts in north-eastern Thailand. Out of the 165 interviewed berry pickers, 123 workers resided in the province Chaiyaphum and 42 in the province Udon Thani, located north of Chaiyaphum. In Chaiyaphum, the workers were from the district Kaeng Khro, the centre for berry picking migration, with the majority of the workers originating from one village (53 respondents). In Udon Thani, the respondents came from the district Ban Phue, particularly one village (38 respondents). The villages were selected based on knowledge gained within the previously mentioned qualitative research project (see note 15).

The interview team used the “snowball technique” to find respondents, with interviewed persons suggesting other interviewees. This interview procedure closely reflects the cumulative and networking nature of the migration process. One of the two centres for this study, Kaeng Khro in Chaiyaphum province, has been the “heart” of the seasonal migration to Sweden since its start in the mid-1980s. This was the place of origin for the Thai women migrants in Sweden who first invited

their relatives to pick berries in Sweden (see also section 3.1). From this district, the information about working as a berry picker was spread through social networks. In the other centre, Ban Phue in Udon Thani, the information on migration for berry picking spread through Thai staffing agencies (see also section 3.3).

Since the 2000s, the recruitment of berry pickers has been formally institutionalised through Thai staffing agencies. To the Thai authorities the staffing agencies are considered the recruiters of the berry pickers and thus are able to charge fees.<sup>2</sup> By agreement between the Swedish government and the Swedish berry industry, the Thai staffing agencies and not the Swedish firms are treated as the employers of the berry pickers (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018; see also section 3.3). However, social networks still play a large role in the recruitment process. First, the Thai women residing in Sweden have continued to act as brokers, using their previous informal links to berry pickers to provide workers to the staffing agencies. Second, the staffing agencies use social networks to recruit workers in the villages, through the use of local villagers who provide workers to the staffing agencies. The use of social networks accounts for why one of the firms, which we call Staffing Agency 1<sup>3</sup>, is over-represented in the sample of our study. In the sample, six staffing agencies were identified as sending more than 90 percent of the workers. Staffing Agency 1 represents as much as 46 percent of the sample and it has been one of the main agencies to send workers to Sweden since the formalisation of the migration process began. It will be noted that other agencies are under-represented in the survey.<sup>4</sup> The second largest agency, Staffing Agency 2, accounts for only 18 percent of the sample. This aspect is important, since the qualitative research project has shown that the conditions of berry pickers in Sweden (including working hours, formulation of contracts, social conditions in Sweden, etc.) are strongly affected by which Thai staffing agency recruited them.

Given the history of this seasonal migration of berry pickers to Sweden, with most of the migrants recruited from only a few villages by a few staffing agencies playing the dominant role, the use of snowballing technique based on a small sample appears justified. As will be shown later, the survey revealed a great deal of homogeneity with respect to the profile of respondents, the costs they incurred, and the

earnings they made from their employment abroad. This is hardly surprising given the known concentration of the target population and the strong role of social networks in disseminating information on the migration processes involved and the conditions of employment in Sweden. The use of probabilistic sampling techniques and a much bigger sample would otherwise have been necessary had the target population been more geographically dispersed, or if no information was available on its distribution.

In order to give an international framework for comparison, the main results in the report are presented in US dollars (USD), where after they are given in Swedish crowns (SEK) and Thai Bhat (THB). In the survey, some of the costs are reported in THB and others in SEK, the following key for converting currencies has been used (based on the exchange rates on 1 September 2015):

- 1 USD = 8.45 SEK
- 1 USD = 35.78 THB

Our findings from this survey are often consistent with findings of the qualitative research project, *Grapes of Wrath? Global labour mobility in the wild berry industry affecting rural development in Sweden and Thailand* (Swedish Research Council FORMAS). Under the framework of this research, intensive fieldwork was conducted in both sending and receiving areas: in Sweden in 2011 and 2013, and in Thailand in 2012, 2013 and 2016. We conducted interviews with state officials both in Sweden and Thailand, Swedish trade union representatives, wild berry merchants, wild berry companies, local managers, and representatives of Thai staffing agencies. We also visited the villages in north-eastern Thailand from where farmers travel to Sweden to work in the wild berry industry on a seasonal basis, and conducted around 40 interviews with wild berry pickers and supporting staff. Additionally, observations were conducted at the place of work in Sweden, both while the pickers were picking berries in the forest and while berries were scaled in the camp at the end of the working day. The information yielded from the qualitative research project informs the findings of the survey that is presented in this report.

## Endnotes Chapter 5.

1. Qualitative research has been performed during 2011-2016, within the research project *Grapes of Wrath? Global labour mobility in the wild berry industry affecting rural development in Sweden and Thailand* (Swedish Research Council FORMAS).
2. Costs are charged both by the Thai staffing agency and by the Swedish berry company. In the survey, the respondents were asked about who was their sending party and their receiving party; however, it was obvious that they had better knowledge about the former than the latter. Only 36 respondents gave information about their Swedish berry buyer, whereas all but one respondent answered the question about the Thai staffing agency.
3. The names of the staffing agencies are kept anonymous.
4. According to the Swedish Migration Agency, there are no official statistics available about the number of workers that are sent by each Thai staffing agency. However, according to Wingborg (2015), about one-third of the work permits in 2015 were received by the Swedish berry company that cooperated with Staffing Agency 1.



## 6. Survey findings

### Recruitment process

The survey confirmed what is already well known; that social networks have played a large role in the recruitment process. As many as 148 wild berry pickers (90 per cent) reported that they got to know about their job through relatives and friends (Figure 2). Only 16 workers found information through an individual recruiter/broker, a Thai staffing agency, or a previous employer.<sup>1</sup>

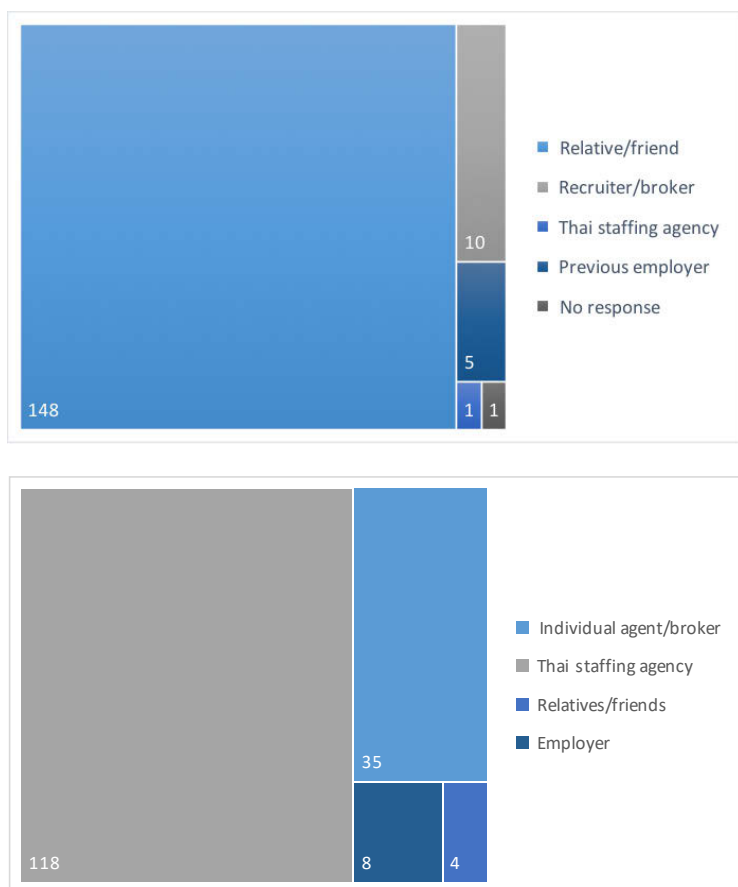
Social networks are evident in the villages, both between local brokers and workers, and among the workers themselves. The major staffing agencies, located in Bangkok or other major cities, have local recruiters in the villages in Thailand, who possess social links to the recruited workers (Hedberg, 2014; Carmo and Hedberg, 2019). Moreover, the workers spread the knowledge about work among themselves. It is common, for example, that sons accompany their fathers as berry pickers when they have reached the appropriate age (interview information). Information about berry picking also ‘travels’ by word of mouth between the villages through these social networks. People in villages with no berry pickers hear about berry picking through their friends and relatives in other villages. At the other end, several Thai women migrants who reside in Sweden have continued to act as brokers. In the current, formalised system, however, they act as brokers between Swedish berry companies and Thai staffing agencies. Moreover, the Thai staffing agencies and the Swedish berry companies have developed strong links between themselves.

In the case of Thai berry pickers who come to Sweden, social networks have developed between the sending area and the receiving area since the mid-1980s, when the first Thai migrant woman in Sweden invited her relatives to pick berries on an informal basis. Due to the formalisation of recruitment processes the social networks, although still important, are not as visible as before. In the survey sample,



Thai staffing agencies arranged for almost all jobs, whereas relatives and friends accounted for only four out of 165 jobs (Figure 2). Swedish regulations require that the Thai workers are admitted on the basis of formal work permits. The staffing agency is the formal employer who also arranges the work visas.

**Figure 2: Source of job information (top) and distribution by type of intermediary (bottom).**

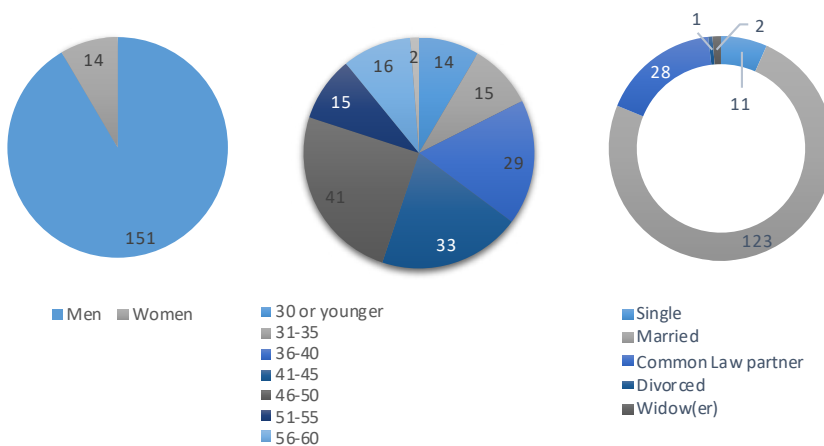


Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

# Profile of Thai berry pickers

The respondents in our survey have a homogeneous background. The typical berry picker is a married male, middle-aged farmer with low education and a family left in the sending region. More precisely, the survey shows that more than 90 percent of the workers were men (Figure 3). Berry picking is considered by the villagers as male work due to the physical endurance required (Hedberg, 2016). The workers were mostly middle aged, in their 40s. More than 90 percent were in a partner relationship (married or common law) and only seven percent were single.

**Figure 3: Gender (left), age (middle), and marital status (right) among the 165 respondents.**



Most of the migrants are self-employed farmers in rice and sugar, with only a basic education (Figure 4). Almost 60 percent had primary education, and another 26 percent had lower secondary education.

**Figure 4: Education (top), sector of work in Thailand (middle), and employment in Thailand (bottom) among the 165 respondents.**



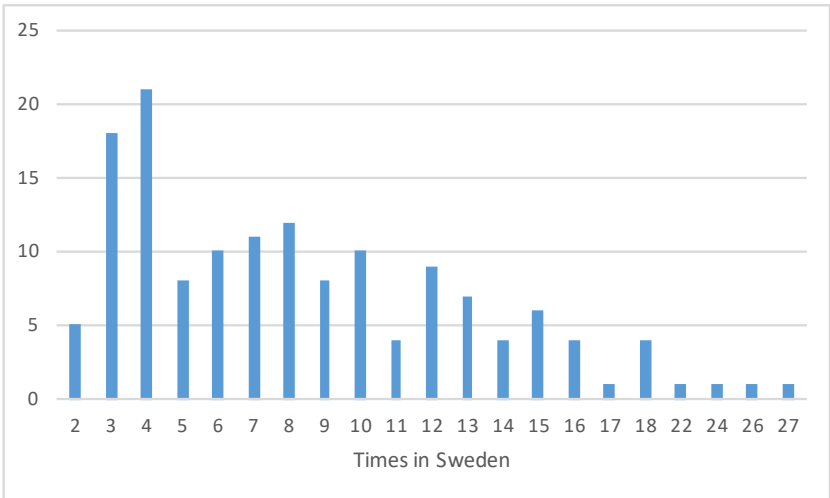
Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

## Circular migration experience

There are clearly perceived gains from repeated migration. Our survey confirmed that most of the workers have participated repeatedly in seasonal migration to Sweden (Figure 5). On average, the workers only stayed in Sweden for 70 days each season.

The vast majority (at least 88 percent) of the respondents had worked in Sweden twice or more (12 percent gave no answer), and among them 50 percent had worked in Sweden seven times or more. A handful had worked in Sweden a large number of times, the most frequent as often as 27 times. Circulation in turn strengthens the transnational social networks that sustain migration processes across time (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

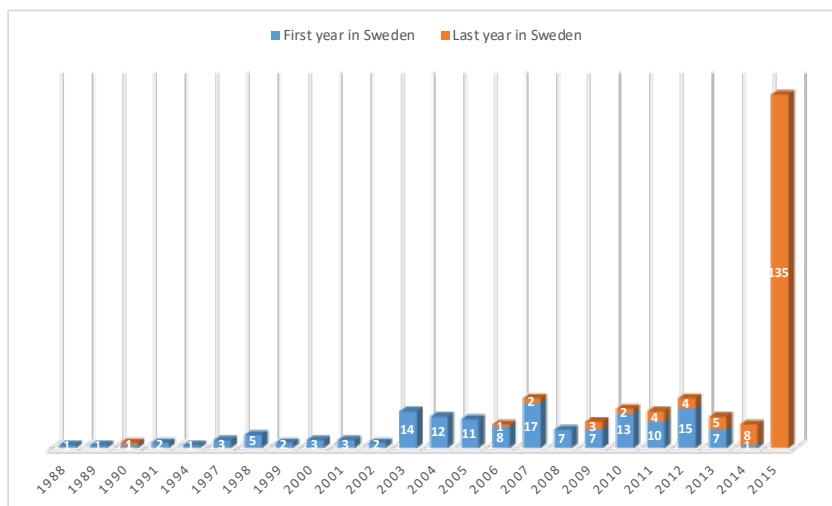
**Figure 5: Reported number of times that the workers have been in Sweden.**



*Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.*

One of the workers in our study was engaged in migration as far back as the early 1990s (Figure 6), which was also around the time when the first berry pickers were recorded to have travelled to Sweden (Hedberg, 2016). Recruitment increased notably in 2003, when 14 workers made their first visit to Sweden. According to the qualitative study, that was the time when the Swedish berry industry shifted to a more organised and large-scale way of recruiting Thai workers. The main bulk of the workers (135 respondents) had returned as recently as 2015, the last year possible to be included in the survey.

**Figure 6: The first and the last years of arrival in Sweden.**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

Prior to their work in Sweden, one group of the workers in the survey (29 respondents, or 17.6 percent) had been working in a country other than Sweden, most probably in another Asian country, which is most common in Chaiyaphum (Panya, 1995). On average, it was nine years between their first time of work in another foreign country and their first experience of work in Sweden. Only one worker had first worked in Sweden and then tried working in another foreign country. Some had worked two years in another foreign country (14 respondents) and then switched to work in Sweden. Some workers had worked four years or more (nine respondents), and one had worked as long as 15 years abroad. Twenty respondents worked once in a country other than Sweden, and only a few had done so two to four times. This indicates that once the workers had tried working in Sweden this was the foreign work that they preferred to continue in.

## Migration costs

The survey shows that berry pickers incurred substantial costs to work in Sweden. We distinguish three main categories of costs. The *first* cost relates to the agency fee (Table 1). This fee was relatively high and similar across the sample, with a mean value of 2,129 USD. The third quartile of the respondents paid only 51 USD more than the mean value.

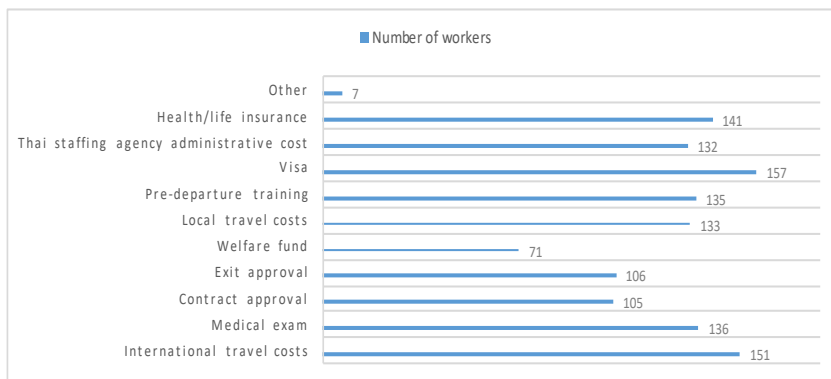
**Table 1: Recruitment and maintenance costs incurred by berry pickers (USD).**

	Agency fee	Daily cost (1 day)	Daily cost (70 days)	Other costs	Total expenses
Count	165	164	164	165	164
Mean	2,129	22	1,528	208	3,955
Median	2,096	21	1,491	140	3,902
Std. Deviation	128	3	183	232	568
% of mean value	6	12	12	112	14
Minimum	1,174	11	746	42	1,887
Maximum	2,376	33	2,320	2,446	6,258
Percentiles					
25	2,096	21	1,491	112	3,698
50	2,096	21	1,491	140	3,902
75	2,180	22	1,574	270	4,176

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

There is apparently a lack of transparency about the “agency fees” as the respondents were only able to identify the items these covered but not how much. The next figure (Figure 7) shows only a list of possible costs covered by “agency fees” and the number of respondents who mentioned them. We estimate that the cost of travel to Sweden (about 655 USD for a regular return air ticket Stockholm-Bangkok) represents about one-third of the average agency fees paid.

**Figure 7: Specific costs reported to be included in fees paid to agents.**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

The *second* cost relates to the expenses of the workers in Sweden, including food, accommodation, and access to a car (Table 1). The berry companies typically own a set of buildings that have been designed as camps for berry pickers, such as empty school buildings, located in remote Swedish areas with a demographic decline. Food is usually provided by Thai cooks, who are hired from Thailand, bringing parts of the food from Thailand, and who also reside at the camps. The berry companies also own a set of mini-busses, typically old and used, and they also hire a mechanic from Thailand to assist when the cars break down. In this way, the berry companies can keep down the daily costs. The mean value paid by the workers is around 21 USD/day, with a standard deviation of only 3 USD. However, a few workers paid significantly more than this, with a maximum of 33 USD/day. It is possible that the variation in daily cost can be accounted for by variations in how much the workers are paying for fuel in Sweden.<sup>2</sup> Since the average worker stayed 70 days in Sweden, we estimate that the average total cost in Sweden for one season would be 1,528 USD.

*Third*, the category “other costs” (Table 1) include the various items that the workers needed for their travel, such as shoes, clothes, luggage, medicines, berry-picking tools, food items, and cigarettes. The mean value for this cost was 208 USD, but with a high variance.

In the survey, a question was also asked about how much in total the worker had incurred and paid for in one season, representing the sum of the three costs reported above (agency fee, daily cost, and other costs).<sup>3</sup> The total expenses reported in the survey were on an average USD 3,955 (Table 1). The variance stems from differences in cited living costs in Sweden and from the “other costs”, and not from the fees paid to staffing agencies, which were fairly similar. Almost none of the respondents claimed to have been reimbursed for their expenses by their employers. Only a very few reported paying for other costs.

## Financing migration costs

Most of the berry pickers had to obtain loans to finance their migration. Working as self-employed farmers in rice-cropping, earnings in Thailand are often insufficient to meet basic needs. The respondents were asked how much they earned from their occupation in Thailand. The amounts reported varied widely, from no income to 932 USD a month (Table 2). Their earnings at home had an estimated mean of 266 USD per month, slightly higher than the median. The standard deviation was high, however.

**Table 2: Monthly earnings in Thailand (USD).**

Mean		266
Median		233
Std. Deviation		182
Minimum		0
Maximum		932
Percentiles		
	25	140
	50	233
	75	349

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.



Our qualitative research revealed why there are significant income differences. While the earnings from rice-cropping are modest, most farmers also earn additional income from growing sugar cane for export. Furthermore, many households have additional income from construction work or other occupations. Nonetheless, the reported earnings in the survey are low compared to estimates of FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). According to FAO (2008), an agricultural worker in Thailand would, in 2007, earn on average 300 USD/month.

**Table 3. Average borrowing to finance migration (USD).**

Count	144
Max	2,274
Min	555
Mean	1,671
Median	1,664
Std. Deviation	311
Percentile	
30th	1,664
70th	1,802
90th	2,038

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

The reported earnings in Thailand from the survey imply that the workers, on average, would have to work around eight months at home to pay the fee alone to the Thai staffing agency in order to work as a berry picker in Sweden. Most migrants funded their migration by borrowing money, and were dependant on making a surplus from their work overseas. Over 85 percent of the respondents claimed that they borrowed money to finance their migration. On average, they borrowed 1,671 USD, with relatively small variance (Table 3).

#### Box 4: The Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC)

Most berry pickers borrow money from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) in order to pay for their work in Sweden. The BAAC is a state-owned bank established in 1966 for the purpose of providing loans for investment in agricultural activities in Thailand. The BAAC lends money to farmers to cover the costs associated with picking wild berries in Sweden or Finland as part of a special project that was launched in 2010 to help farmers diversify their income. The background to this arrangement, according to the Assistant Manager of BAAC in Kaeng Khro, is that the workers used to pay quite high interest rates on loans to cover their expenses when travelling to Sweden. The average interest rate is between six and seven percent a year, depending on the customer's track record. If the worker decides to repay the loan within three months, the interest rate is three percent. Only BAAC customers may borrow from the bank, and their staffing agency must put down a 10 percent deposit for guarantee repayment. The BAAC runs background checks on all staffing agencies to ensure that they are legitimate companies that have been able to pay their workers in the past. The BAAC also requests information about the quality of the accommodation in Sweden, how the food will be prepared, and how transportation is organised. According to an interview with the Assistant Manager of BAAC in Kaeng Khro, it is very unusual for a worker not to be able to repay a loan.

*Source: Interviews with credit analyst and team leader at the BAAC Bangkok (2016) and the Assistant Manager of BAAC in Kaeng Khro (2013).*

In the survey, four out of every five migrants who borrowed money obtained loans from the BAAC in Thailand. Despite the common source of loans, respondents claimed to have paid varying interest charges for their loans, but generally less than four percent (Table 4). These were workers who had to repay their loans within three months, according to their loan agreement with the BAAC (see Box 4). Workers with a longer time for repayment paid higher interest rates.

**Table 4. Distribution of migrants according to interest rate paid on loans.**

Interest rate	Number of workers	Percent of total number of workers
0	6	4.2
1.0 - 2.0	42	29.2
2.0 - 4.0	64	44.4
4.0 - 6.0	9	6.3
6.0 - 10.0	17	11.8
11.0 - 23.0	6	4.2
Total	144	100.0

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

The BAAC requires that the borrower be an account-holder with BAAC, or they must put up collateral for the loan. For the respondents who answered the question about collateral, almost all claimed that they simply had to have a co-signer for the loan. Virtually no one lost the collateral they mortgaged.

## Average earnings from berry picking in Sweden

In the survey, the respondents were asked: “How much did you earn last season after deductions for sending company fee, accommodation, food and car, any other formal payments, and loan repayments?”

After the deduction of all costs, the mean net earnings from berry picking were reported to be 2,029 USD. The standard deviation, however, was as high as 1,418 USD, indicating high variance of incomes among the workers. Indeed, two workers even reported having negative net earnings, while one reported earnings almost four times the average (Figure 8). We consider the highest reported earnings (7,645 USD) as highly unlikely given the price of berries and typical productivity of berry pickers. It may simply be due to a reporting error. On the other hand, negative net earnings are entirely possible as in the case where the worker falls ill or is unable to

work for some days for other reasons, and the worker does not receive the guaranteed wage. When the upper outlier is removed, the mean value decreases to 1,960 USD, and the median to 1,719 USD (Table 5).

**Table 5: Net earnings of Thai berry-pickers in Sweden (USD).**

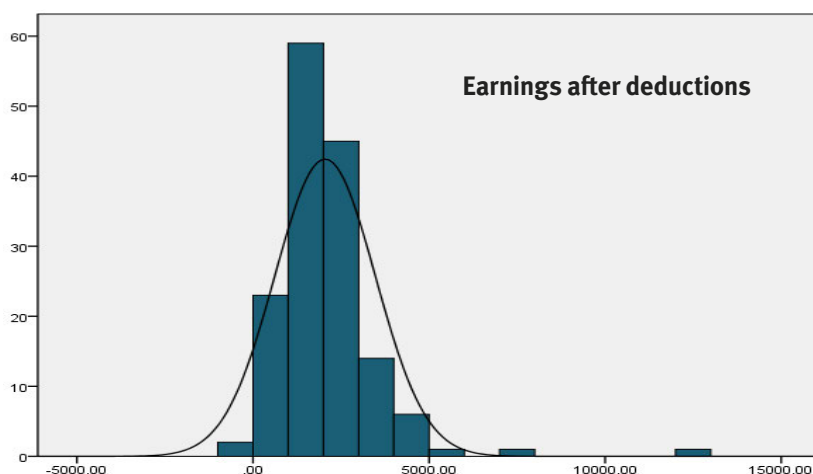
Earnings last season after deductions*	
Count	151
Min	-971
Max	7,645
Mean	1,960
Median	1,719
Std. Deviation	1,136
Percentiles	
25	1,387
50	1,719
75	2,662

\* Outlier excluded

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

The earnings reported in the survey are somewhat lower than the reported earnings in the qualitative interview study by Hedberg (2015), which ranged from around 2,773 USD to 5,546 USD. A so called “no-1 picker” reported earnings of 8,319 USD. The mean earnings in our survey are also lower than those found by the trade union Kommunal (2018) in its survey covering 22 berry pickers in 2016. According to this survey, which measured the workers’ expectation of earnings in the middle of the season, the mean value for one season would be around 2,600 USD and with a median of 2,200 USD.

**Figure 8: The distribution of reported earnings (USD) after deductions (n=152).**

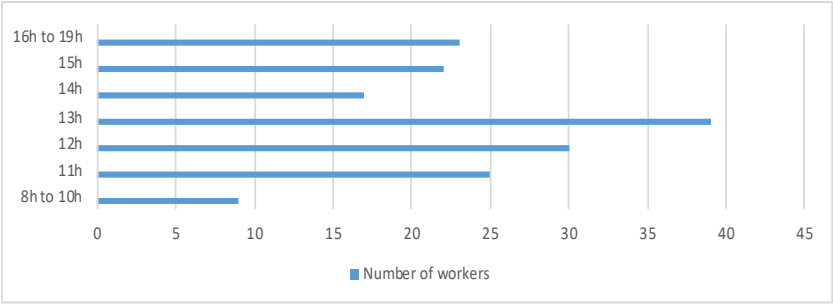


Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

## Working conditions in berry picking

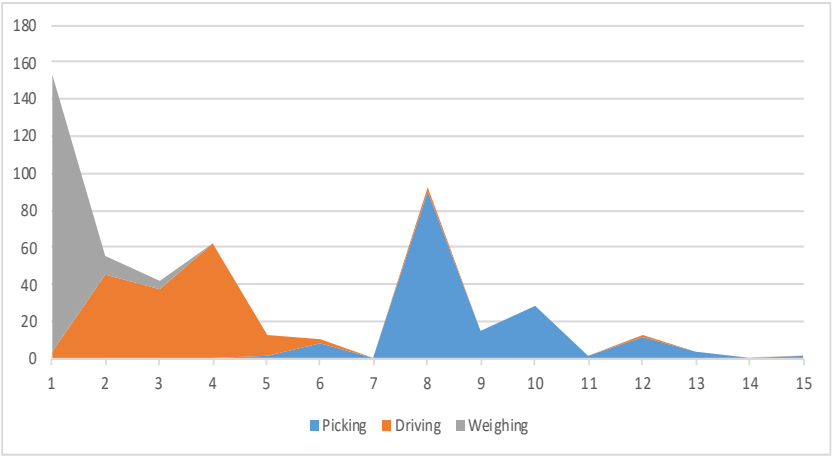
Long working hours are common among migrant workers in the agricultural sector. According to a survey of Mexican citizens who participate in Canada's SAWP, for example, work was on average 12 hours on weekdays and eight hours on weekends during periods of high production (Preibisch and Otero, 2014). Among the berry pickers we surveyed, eight out of 10 reported that they had only one day of rest each week, and the rest had two days. The working day, which can be divided into the activities of driving to and from work, picking berries and weighing berries, on average covered 13.3 hours in total (Figure 9). As can be seen in Figure 10, 54 percent picked berries for eight hours, and 38 percent for more than eight hours. Driving to and from the site for picking was an activity that, for the majority, took two to four hours, while the weighing of berries usually took another one hour a day.

**Figure 9: Distribution of berry pickers by hours worked (picking, driving and weighing).**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

**Figure 10: Distribution of berry pickers by amount of time (in hours) spent on each activity.**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

## Endnotes Chapter 6.

1. The strongly networked migration process might explain that almost no migrant in the survey claimed to have spent any time looking for their job in Sweden (not shown).
2. According to the collective agreement, the workers have the right to be covered for their travel to work. However, information rich studies indicate that fuel is an additional cost for the workers. As an example, one berry company mentions that they pay for 80 kilometers of driving each day. Since the workers often are driving far to spot the berries, the amount of fuel that they have to pay for themselves can be substantial, and explains why they sometimes choose to stay overnight in the car instead of driving back to the camp.
3. Daily costs and other costs adds up to a somewhat higher total. This could, among other things, be due to differences in the amount of days that the workers spent in Sweden. Moreover, it shows that the numbers given in the survey are taken from the memory of the worker, and there might be inconsistencies in the exact amounts. All in all, however, the general tendencies remain.

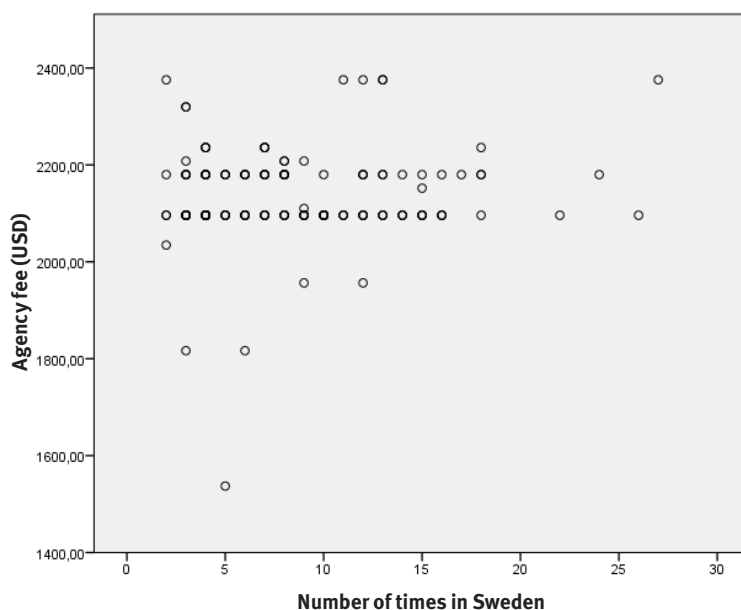
## 7. Analysis of survey data

### Determinants of agency costs

Relating the size of the agency fee to the number of times that the workers have experienced going to Sweden for picking berries, we found no relationship (Figure 11). Accordingly, the survey shows that the workers continue to pay high fees regardless of experience. This indicates that the fees charged have little to do with the service to find a place of work in Sweden, but rather with the annual travel arrangements. This includes costs for exit clearance, medical examination, pre-departure training, insurance cover, air travel, work permit and visa costs, along with so called “service fees” (see 4.1). It is reasonable to assume that workers who have already experienced going to Sweden to pick berries, not just once but repeatedly, will have less need for the services of Thai staffing agencies to find work or to organize their travel papers and book air tickets. With such experience and knowledge, it should be possible for repeat migrants to make their own arrangements and avoid incurring much of the costs that are covered by the so-called “agency fees”. In the conclusions, we discuss an alternative to the fee-charging staffing agency with an organisation of the workers themselves in workers’ cooperative (see Box 5).



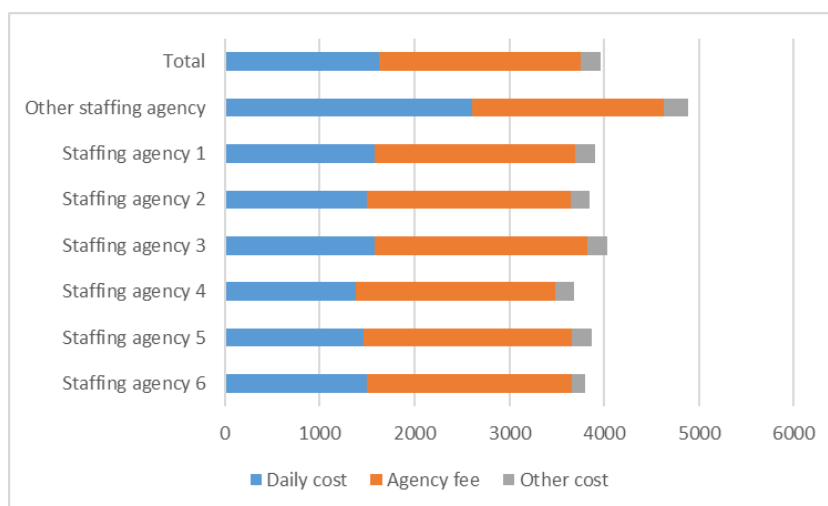
**Figure 11: Average cost paid to agent by number of times previously worked in Sweden.**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

Examining the distribution of total costs incurred by the migrants, it is also notable that the Thai staffing agencies charged very similar fees. Figure 12 shows how much the workers were charged for living costs and agency fees by specific agencies. The latter are not named because of a promise of confidentiality, but simply distinguished by number. The graph shows very small differences in the fees of the sending agencies. The main differences arise from the “daily living cost” paid to the Swedish berry company.

**Figure 12. The distribution of total expenses (USD, mean values) on Thai staffing agencies, divided into different types of costs.<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

## Determinants of earnings

### Guaranteed wage

The berry pickers were paid according to a combination of two payment systems (see Box 3). One is according to the collective agreement, which provides that the workers in 2015 had the right to 2,340 USD/month as a guaranteed wage. The other is according to the historical practice in the industry where the workers are paid on a piece rate. A combination of these two systems would mean that the workers are paid on a piece rate, per kilo berries they pick, but no less than what's equivalent to the guaranteed wage.<sup>2</sup> This system grants workers the security of the guaranteed wage, together with the opportunity to earn as much as they are able to pick. As we will discuss below, however, it is doubtful that this system works out in practice.

For workers to benefit from the combined payment system, they must sign a formal contract. According to the survey, all but two workers signed a formal contract with their employer before leaving Thailand. Based on the direct question, three informants even claimed that they had signed more than one contract for the job. However, despite the collective agreement, only 30 respondents (18.2 percent) claimed that they were promised earnings that were based on the combination of payments as outlined above (Table 6). Instead, 28 percent responded that they were promised payment on a piece rate only, while the majority responded that they were promised the guaranteed wage only.

**Table 6: Distribution of berry pickers by system of payment.**

	Number of workers	Percent of total number of workers
Payment per kilo berries picked	46	27.9
Guaranteed wage	89	53.9
Payment per kilo and guaranteed minimum wage	30	18.2
Total	165	100.0

The responses in Table 6 raise several issues. First, it states that at least 28 percent of the workers were not aware of, or did not count on, the guaranteed wage that they were promised. However, this number could well be significantly higher for reasons we discuss later. Second, it raises the issue of formal versus informal contracts. Based on interviews with workers and employers in the qualitative research project, it seems highly unlikely that the workers would travel to Sweden as berry pickers if they were able to earn what amounts to guaranteed wage only. In fact, the attraction of the work lies in the hope or expectation of earning significantly more.<sup>3</sup> The majority probably reported the right to guaranteed wage only because they signed the formal contract which said so, even if in fact they were hoping or expecting to earn more.

Information later obtained from the survey interviewer helps us to interpret the results. Apparently, the workers only agreed verbally to be paid the guaranteed

wage when asked by the staffing agency to choose from one of the two means of payment. This also came out from our qualitative research project. The interviewer explained that *“At first, the workers did not want to talk in detail with us, but after we have been around the villages for a while they shared with us more information”*.

The workers were informed that they needed to sign a contract to receive a visa for working abroad. However, the interviewer explained:

Many companies and the workers did not follow the contracts. [...] The workers, however, did not complain because they're fine with this arrangement for them to be able to go work abroad and they believed that they would earn more money by having 'payment per kilo of berries picked' (email conversation with the survey interviewer, 2016-06-13).

From the information shared by the interviewer it thus appears that many companies, in verbal agreements with the workers, did not follow the signed contract. It also indicates that the workers were falsely informed that they needed to choose between either a guaranteed wage or payment on a piece rate.

Based on this information, an alternative reading of Table 6 could instead be that 53 percent claimed to have received the guaranteed wage only because this is what they agreed to in their formal contract, whereas they have understood informally that they were to be paid on a piece rate. It is possible that as many as 4/5 (81.5 percent) of the workers actually opted out of the guaranteed wage, hence sidestepping the intention of the Swedish collective agreement to provide a guaranteed minimum wage as a safety protection. This illustrates that the economic risk in the berry industry is taken, in many cases, by the worker rather than by the companies (Wingborg, 2011).

According to the survey, most of the workers seem to be well informed about the amount of the guaranteed wage. The respondents believed that the guaranteed wage was on average 2,156 USD, or around 200 USD lower than what is stated in the collective agreement. Similar results were found when only recent workers, traveling to Sweden the last time in 2015, were accounted for. However, there were also single workers who believed that the guaranteed wage was substantially lower (min 850 USD) and the response rate for the question was low (114 respondents).

All the respondents who borrowed money claimed that the repayment of their loans was through deductions from their salaries from work in Sweden. According to the contracts, the Thai staffing agencies should pay the salaries on a monthly basis to the worker's bank account in Thailand (Wingborg 2016). Since the payments are made in Thailand, however, it is difficult for Swedish authorities to determine and insure that correct salaries are being paid. Only 73 respondents (43 percent) claimed that they were paid regularly. This might be explained by uncertainties in how the payment is made. For example, companies might first deduct fees and other expenses from the salaries, before payments are transferred to the workers' bank accounts in Thailand.

## Impact of gender, work experience and staffing agency on earnings

The earnings from work in Sweden varied to some degree between the sexes (Table 7). The mean for women was somewhat less than that for men but the median was much lower among the women. This could be explained by the considerably lower number of women than men, whose earnings had a higher variance. Whereas the earnings of men had a distribution similar to the normal curve, those of women were more widely spread, represented both at the low end and the high end of the earnings.

In the berry business it is commonly assumed that since the work is physically demanding it is better performed by men than by women (Hedberg, 2016). On the other hand, previous analyses of some berry firms' salary reports showed that the few women who were allowed to work in the business performed similar to, or even better than, men. It is likely, as suggested by other research, that a few women earned more than men because berry pickers worked in teams. It happens that members in the team distribute the tasks, so that the women pick berries, whereas the men carry the sacks, which are considered too heavy for women. This could be the case, particularly when members from the same household are working together. Unfortunately, information on whether the workers picked berries in teams was not collected.

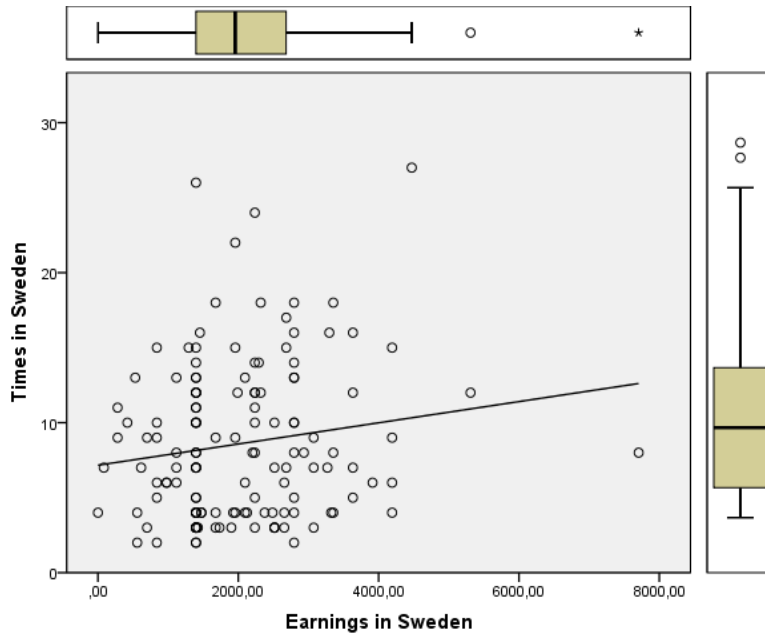
**Table 7: Reported net earnings (USD) according to gender.**

	Men	Women	Total
Count	138	13	151
Mean	1,983	1,903	1,976
Median	1,817	1,397	1,733
Std. Deviation	1,117	1,460	1,145
Minimum	-559	-978	-978
Maximum	7,705	4,192	7,705
Percentiles			
25	1,397	1,048	1,397
50	1,817	1,397	1,733
75	2,683	3,074	2,683

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

We next consider if earnings depend on the experience of the workers. The assumption is that experienced workers would already be familiar with conditions on the ground in Sweden and would know how they can be more productive, and hence earn more. This assumption was also confirmed by berry pickers in the qualitative interview study. It is possible to test this assumption since we have a wide distribution of Thai berry pickers based on the number of times they have worked in Sweden. However, the survey shows only a weak correlation between the workers' experience and earnings as shown in Figure 13, which relates the number of times in Sweden to the earnings after deductions. A Kendall's tau-b correlation was 0.095 and statistically insignificant (0.123). Similarly, the Spearman's test shows that there was no monotonic relationship between the variables (the correlation coefficient 0.134, significance 0.120).

**Figure 13: The correlation between the number of times in Sweden and net earnings (USD).**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

Lastly, we considered if choice of staffing agency affected the size of the earnings. As noted earlier, the sample was dominated by one Thai sending company, a factor which might affect both the earnings and the costs. We show in Table 8 a distribution of the workers by staffing agency and by size of net earnings.

**Table 8: Distribution of workers by size of earnings for each staffing agency.**

	Low earnings (Up to 1,000 USD)		Middle-low earnings (1,000 – 2,000 USD)		Middle-high earnings (2,000 – 3,000 USD)		High earnings (3,000 USD or higher)		Total	
	Number of workers	% of total number of workers	Number of workers	% of total number of workers	Number of workers	% of total number of workers	Number of workers	% of total number of workers	Number of workers	% of total number of workers
Staffing agency 1	6	7.9	34	44.7	28	36.8	8	10.5	76	100.0
Staffing agency 2	6	23.1	9	34.6	7	26.9	4	15.4	26	100.0
Staffing agency 3	4	33.3	4	33.3	1	8.3	3	25.0	12	100.0
Other staffing agency	4	33.3	1	8.3	3	25.0	4	33.3	12	100.0
Staffing agency 4	2	18.2	4	36.4	3	27.3	2	18.2	11	100.0
Staffing agency 5	2	20.0	5	50.0	3	30.0	0	0.0	10	100.0
Staffing agency 6	1	25.0	2	50.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	4	100.0
Total	25	16.6	59	39.1	45	29.8	22	14.6	151	100.0

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

The mean income from work in Sweden was around 2,000 USD (Table 5). According to Table 8, the workers earning above the mean value were mainly found within four of the staffing agencies (staffing agencies 1, 2, and 4 and other staffing agencies). A high proportion of the workers were sent by Staffing Agency 1, and within this agency, the workers were highly concentrated in the middle-income groups, with particularly few workers in the low-income group. The widest spread in earnings are among those employed by the agencies grouped under “Other staffing agency”, with a very high share of earnings both at the low end and the high end. We suspect that this group of staffing agencies include new or less established staffing agencies.

In sum, the size of the earnings varied between the staffing agencies. The earnings varied also to some extent between the sexes, with women workers being found



either at the high or the low end of the income spectra, whereas men were more evenly distributed. Experience from work, however, had a surprisingly low effect on the earnings.

## Impact of seasonal migration on family earnings

It is axiomatic that people would migrate for work only if their expected earnings are higher than the alternative income they can make at home (Fussell, 2010). The Thai farmers who take part in seasonal migration to Sweden do so to earn an income higher than what they know they can make at home had they stayed. We analyse this question by comparing the earnings from farming in Thailand to the net earnings from berry picking in Sweden, first in relation to the guaranteed wage in Sweden (according to the level of the collective agreement), and second, to their actual earnings in Thailand. All comparisons are done on a monthly basis (assuming that one month is 30 days and that the workers are staying 70 days in Sweden).

As discussed above, berry pickers are entitled to a guaranteed wage in Sweden, which many of the workers seem not to have opted for since it was considered to be too low compared to what the workers were aiming for. However, Kommunal, the workers union in Sweden, explained in an interview that they regard the level of the wage as reasonable given the nature of the work. Our survey found that average earnings in Sweden were indeed higher than the guaranteed wage, but only slightly (Table 9). On average they earned 195 USD more per month when working on a piece rate compared to what they would have earned according to the guaranteed wage. Under the collective agreement for 2015 the guaranteed wage was 2,340 USD, just slightly more than the average of total expenses reported by the workers (Table 9). The guaranteed wage insures that no worker would return without making a small amount of money (645 USD). However, with the expectation of earning more, the Thai berry pickers tend to take the risk and opt to be paid on a piece rate. The top earner earned 5.1 times more than the guaranteed wage, but the lowest earned 1,061 USD less than the guaranteed wage. When the guaranteed wage is calculated for the whole season, and after deductions of all expenses, it reaches a value of 1,505 USD  $((645 \text{ USD}/30 \text{ days}) \cdot 70 \text{ days})$ . As many as 46 percent of the workers (70

workers) actually earned less than the guaranteed wage, when all deductions were accounted for. This shows that almost half of the workers would be better off economically with the guaranteed wage than with payment on a piece rate.

**Table 9: Net monthly earnings based on guaranteed wage vs. actual net earnings (mean values).**

	Ratio	Difference
Guaranteed wage (2,340 USD) vs. total expenses (1,695 USD)	1.4	645.0
Earnings in Sweden after deductions (840 USD) vs. guaranteed wage after deductions (645 USD)	1.3	195.0
Top earning in Sweden after deductions (3,276 USD) vs. guaranteed wage after deductions (645 USD)	5.1	2,631.4
Min earning in Sweden after deductions (-416 USD) vs. guaranteed wage after deductions (645 USD)	-0.6	-1,061.1

Source: Thai Swedish survey, 2016.

**Table 10: The relationship between reported monthly earnings in Thailand and earnings in Sweden on a monthly basis (mean values).**

	Ratio	Difference
Mean earnings in Sweden (840 USD) vs. earnings in Thailand (266 USD)	3.2	574.0
Top earning in Sweden (3,276 USD) vs. earnings in Thailand (266 USD)	12.3	3010.4
Min earning in Sweden (-416 USD) vs. earnings in Thailand (266 USD)	-1.6	-682.1
Guaranteed wage (2,340 USD) vs. earnings in Thailand (266 USD)	2.4	2,074

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

Table 10 shows that the average worker earns around three times more in Sweden in one month than they would have done in Thailand, after the deduction of all costs.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the top earning noted in the sample was as much as 12 times more than a monthly income in Thailand. On the other hand, because of expenses involved, the worker who only earned the minimum income in the sample was definitely worse off than had he or she stayed at home. Some do take the risk in the hope of making a lot more. They reason that the earnings fluctuate over time and that they will earn better next season and with more experience, hence opting for payment on a piece rate might seem reasonable. However, as this study has shown, experience seems to make only a small difference to earnings. The guaranteed wage, which is more than two times higher than the wage in Thailand, would therefore be a more secure and sustainable option.

## Endnotes Chapter 7.

1. The daily costs are the costs for one season (on average 70 days).
2. The price per kilo varies between the years and also during one season. In the beginning of 2015, the earnings for bilberries were 0.83 USD/kilo (7 SEK, 30 THB); at the end of the season it was 1.3 USD/kilo (11 SEK, 47 THB). In 2016, however, the price was 1.18-1.66 USD and in 2018 it increased to 2.37 USD in mid-August, due to high demand and low supply (Johansson, 2018). The variation in price creates uncertainty among the workers, due to difficulties of knowing the earnings for one season.
3. According to a survey performed by Kommunal (2018) with 22 workers, they relished the hope to earn, on average, almost double the amount of what they expected to earn that same season.
4. As pointed out in section 3.1, because it is done during off-season, berry picking in Sweden complements and does not substitute farming at home. We should point out that for the alternative earnings in Thailand, had the farmers stayed home, we used the typical monthly earnings from farming that the respondents mentioned in the survey. It is possible of course that some farmers migrate to the cities to work as construction labourers during the off-season, which also might have increased the monthly income.

## 8. Comparison of cost of seasonal migration to Sweden with costs for other migration corridors

As we pointed in section 5, our assessment of the fairness of the seasonal migration system for berry pickers in Sweden would require comparisons with “benchmarks”, either established by the Swedish authorities, or drawn from comparative migration corridors elsewhere in the world. For the comparison of earnings with a Swedish “benchmark” we already analysed how the “guaranteed wage” established by the Swedish authorities actually works in practice based on the experience of the survey respondents. We saw that almost half of the berry pickers would have been better off had they opted for the “guaranteed wage”, but the workers tended not to take this option. In this section we focus on how migration costs for Thai berry pickers compared with those who went through other migration corridors. Fortunately, we have access to recent studies undertaken jointly by ILO/WB KNOMAD to estimate worker-paid migration costs in a number of important migration corridors in other parts of the world. One caveat with this comparison is, however, that these studies focus on longer periods of migration, usually a number of years. The case of Thai berry pickers in Sweden, with its particular cost structure, illustrates seasonal migration and is not completely comparable.

Comparing costs across countries is always problematic because people weigh costs relative to benefits. A worker who wants to migrate to a rich country where he or she can expect to earn 4,000 USD a month may be willing to incur a few thousand dollars in migration costs, but will not be willing to do so if he or she can only expect to earn a fraction of that amount. Similarly, he or she may be willing to pay

more for a job that lasts over many months or even years, compared to a job of only a few months (such as berry picking). For this reason, the ILO/KNOMAD has developed a “migration cost indicator” that expresses the cost as a proportion of monthly earnings.

ILO/KNOMAD calculated the **migration cost indicator**, *MCI* for each origin-destination country corridor as follows:

$$MCI = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{c_i}{y_i}$$

where  $c_i$  is the total recruitment costs paid by worker  $i$ , earning a monthly foreign wage of  $y_i$ . The MCI is therefore the average across  $n$  observations in that corridor of a worker’s recruitment cost, expressed as a multiple of monthly foreign earnings.

In this section we compare the seasonal migration of Thai workers in the berry industry with those of other migrant workers who were studied by KNOMAD/ILO. The KNOMAD migration cost surveys yielded information on earnings of the workers soon after arrival in the destination country and at the time of the survey. Earnings at the time of the survey were found to be generally higher than earnings upon arrival. In this study, earnings at the time of the survey were used to measure MCI. Data from the KNOMAD migration corridors are from 2016. As shown earlier, the majority of the Thai respondents worked in Sweden in 2015 as the latest point in time.

It must be emphasised that the Thai-Swedish migration corridor differs significantly from the others since the Thai berry pickers are seasonal workers who stay an average of 70 days per year. In the other migration corridors, most workers were contracted to work for longer periods, typically one to two years, although some moved back-and-forth between sending and receiving countries. The time issue is of particular importance when it comes to estimating the costs for migration, since naturally, a migrant working two years has a longer time frame to recover the costs than a seasonal worker does.

The MCI essentially estimated how many months of work abroad it required to recoup the costs incurred by the workers to migrate. The MCI for the other corridors is calculated based on earnings after deductions for taxes and social security contributions but *before* any deductions for employer-supplied accommodation and meals. This complicates the comparison of earnings with Thai berry pickers, since the Thai workers reported the earnings *after* all deductions and on a seasonal basis. In order to calculate the MCI, the following adjustments of the earnings for Thai berry pickers were made:

- 1) The seasonal earnings were adjusted in order to represent the earnings before the deductions of total expenses (Table 11, Row c). Total expenses include payments for food and accommodation, for transport to work sites, and what may have been charged by the staffing company for recruitment. It is very likely, supported by qualitative studies, that agency fees were all deducted from earnings and not paid in advance.
- 1) The seasonal earnings were adjusted to a monthly basis, estimating that one season was 70 days and one month 30 days (Table 11, Row d).

**Table 11: The calculation of migration cost indicator (MCI) for Thai berry pickers (mean values, USD).**

a. Total expenses	3,955
b. Seasonal earnings net of expenses	1,960
c. Adjusted seasonal earnings* (=a+b)	5,915
d. Adjusted earnings per month**	2,535
Migration cost indicator (=a/d)	1,6
* Seasonal earnings before the deduction of total expenses	
** Earnings per month estimated as an average stay of 70 days, and one month having 30 days.	

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

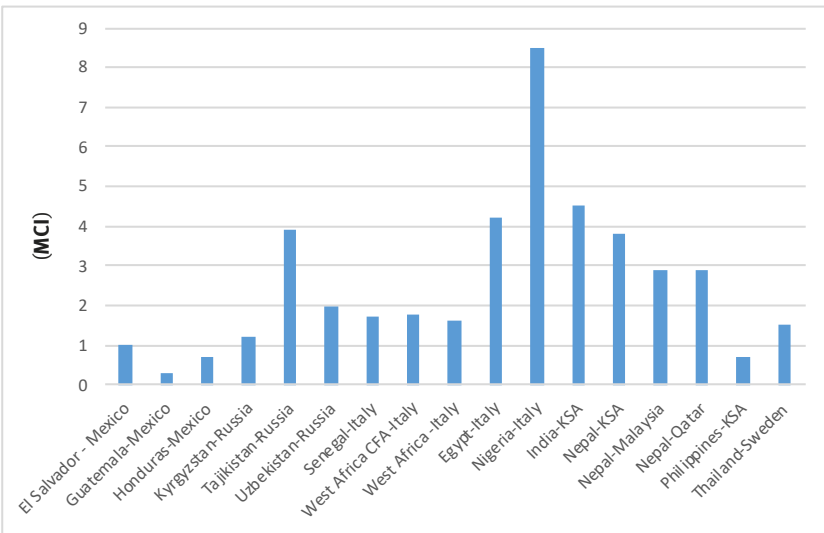
Table 11 shows that after the suggested adjustments, the Migration Cost Indicator for Thai berry pickers in Sweden was 1.6. This shows that the migration costs, on average, would take 1.6 months of work to recover. Considering the fact that the work is seasonal, and only lasts for slightly more than two months, this means that the workers only earn money that they are able to save during the last weeks of their stay in Sweden.

As can be seen in Figure 14, the costs for migrating to Sweden are by no means higher compared to other migration corridors. Thai-Swedish migrants, working on average 1.6 months to recover the costs, in this sense belong to the better cases. It is not unusual for the other migrant groups to work three to four months to recover their costs. However, Thai workers stay for only slightly more than two months, while the other groups usually stay for longer periods, often one to two years. Moreover, the Thai workers return annually, paying the same costs every year, whereas migrants working in some of the costliest migration corridors, such as Italy or Saudi Arabia, tend to stay for longer periods, and are frequently aiming for a more permanent settlement. Viewed from this perspective, the costs for berry picking seem much heavier than for migrants in other corridors who can expect to recoup their investment over many more months.

The studies performed within the framework of KNOMAD/ILO show considerable variation regarding costs and earnings among the investigated countries (Figure 14). On the one hand, migrants who were not under contract were investigated, in contrast to those covered by earlier surveys, who were almost all covered by temporary employment contracts for jobs in one of the Gulf States. The average cost in US dollars of migrating from Nigeria, from West Africa, and from Egypt is very high; much higher than the costs incurred by workers from Central Asia to Russia, and certainly much higher compared to what it costs Central Americans to cross over the border to work in Mexico. However, the difference between them is greatly reduced or mitigated when the cost is expressed in terms of how many months of work it takes to recover them. Much higher earning possibilities in Italy enabled the West Africans to recover costs in less than two months. On the other hand, workers who migrated under contract for work in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Malaysia, usually

for periods of up to two years, incurred generally higher costs than those migrating without a contract, both in absolute terms (in US dollars) as well as relative to their earnings, shown as the migration cost indicator.

**Figure 14: Migration Cost Indicator in 17 migration corridors.**



Source: KNOMAD/ILO surveys (2015/2016) and Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.





## 9. Migration viewed as part of households' survival strategies

In the foregoing sections we have examined the costs and benefits for Thai farmers of migrating to Sweden during their off-season in rice agriculture. This was important to identify possible areas for policy reform and to provide an understanding of the economics driving the system. In this section we analyse the same phenomenon from another perspective, namely the need for family security that motivates migration.

There is wide agreement among migration scholars and other observers that the decision to migrate is not an individual decision but that of the household (Massey et al., 1998). It is a household survival strategy to diversify its sources of income, and remittances, or the money that migrant workers send home to remaining family members, form an important part of that strategy. When migrants' remittances have the effect of widening income differentials between migrant and non-migrant households, remittances could even be said to stimulate further migration (Massey, 1990; Stark and Bloom, 1985).

The household perspective is obvious in the case of Thai berry pickers. The respondents in our survey have a homogeneous background with the typical berry picker being a married male, middle-aged farmer with low education and a family left in the sending region (see section 6.2). Almost 90 percent of the respondents had at least one child, and the majority of the children were 16-25 years old (Table 1, Appendix 2). The households see work in Sweden as a relatively sustainable household strategy compared to alternatives such as working in other countries or in construction in other provinces or cities in Thailand (Hedberg, 2015). Berry picking in Sweden is undertaken during low or off-season in rice farming, thus complementing

rather than replacing it. The seasonality of the work also makes the social costs for work in Sweden lower, such as the costs of being away from the family, etc. (Ahsan, 2014).

**Table 12. Reported use of money earned in Sweden.**

Used for	Frequency	% of usage	% of the workers (165)
Daily consumption	149	22.3	89.8
Investment in farming	132	19.8	79.5
Children's education	113	16.9	68.1
Investment in housing	87	13.0	52.4
Durable goods, e.g. TV	82	12.3	49.4
Savings	69	10.3	41.6
Investment in other	26	3.9	15.7
Own education	5	0.7	3.0
Other	5	0.7	3.0
Total	668	100.0	

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

As many as 90 percent of the Thai berry pickers reported spending some of their earnings abroad for their daily consumption, while 80 percent also managed to invest in farming, and 70 percent for their children's education (Table 12). It was also quite common to use some money for improvement of their houses, to acquire durable goods, and for savings.

The investment in children's education suggests that migration can lead over time to social transformation in rural villages. There is a strong motivation to create a future for their children outside of farming (and berry picking) (Hedberg, 2015). In the survey, although it was true of most families, spending on education was particularly notable among those whose oldest child was between 16-25 years (Figure 1, Appendix 2). The result is supported by findings from the qualitative research project, even if there were some who preferred to follow their fathers' example and

combine farming with berry picking in Sweden.

The changes in the lives of migrants' households very likely stimulated further migration from the villages. One of the first women in her village to travel to Sweden as a berry picker explained this mechanism and how it intersects with gender: at first, the work as a berry picker was seen with suspicion among the villagers, and as something that women did as a step in their efforts to find western husbands. On their return, however, the women invested their earnings in housing, buying a TV and a refrigerator. The interviewee claimed that upon seeing these changes, all villagers wanted to go, and subsequently the migration began to be dominated by men.



## 10. Concluding discussion and policy recommendations

The report gives evidence that Thai workers in the wild berry sector in Sweden incur substantial costs, whereas the earnings tend to be relatively low. In the survey, the total costs of a berry picker reached an average of almost 4,000 USD, spent in both Thailand and Sweden. After the deduction of all costs, the mean earnings from berry picking for one season were reported to be around 2,000 USD but with substantial variations. The specific arrangements behind the seasonal migration of berry pickers from Thailand, with the same individual workers returning annually to Sweden, makes the costs high and earnings modest in an international perspective. Each year, a worker pays the same high fees to a Thai staffing agency for a stay in Sweden for, on average, 70 days. When estimating the relationship between costs and earnings, the Thai worker in Sweden needs to work on average 1.6 months in order to recover the costs, and thus has only three weeks left of the season to be able to bring home some savings. The circular nature of this migration process, and particularly the short season for work in Sweden, thus creates the conditions for estimating the costs as high.

On the plus side, our study finds that seasonal migration can be beneficial to social and economic development in the sending region. Labour migration still brings money to the sending community by way of remittances, even though the earnings are low. The increased consumption by migrant families of locally produced commodities, and the priority they give to investing in their children's education, should lead to social and economic improvements in their communities and beyond. This speaks directly to the long-discussed policy agenda on migration and development, where it is argued that circular migration can stimulate development in the sending region (GCIM, 2005; Migration and Development Brief, 2017). From the social standpoint, seasonal labour migration appears to be sustainable even

when compared to long-term, contract migration. It is less disruptive of family life and hence does not entail a high social cost. It allows the workers to be more fully employed, combining the circulation of seasonal work in Sweden with their seasonal farm work in Thailand.

One main cost carried by the workers regards the costs to Thai staffing agencies. Previous research on brokers in labour migration has argued that recruitment agencies are most significant when a new labour migration channel between two countries is established. When social networks are created between the two countries the importance of recruitment agencies tends to be reduced (McCollum et al., 2013). In contrast to this view, the Thai-Swedish case shows that in certain instances the opposite applies. In this case, social networks were key in establishing a seasonal labour migration channel between Thailand and Sweden. These networks were later replaced by staffing agencies in order to avoid Swedish taxes (Hedberg, 2014). Accordingly, a direct effect of Swedish regulations, particularly the tax review in 2005 (see 4.2), has been that the workers are using Thai staffing agencies. Simply put, it is difficult to organise work on an informal basis in a highly regulated country such as Sweden, and regulation is also a way for the Swedish state to try to protect the workers. Moreover, the Swedish berry companies are reluctant to be the direct employer of Thai workers in Sweden due to the costs involved. Instead, the workers are, on paper, employed by Thai staffing agencies, who then “post” them to the work site in Sweden, a practice that has become accepted by all parties, including the authorities (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018). This is repeated each year, despite the knowledge that the majority of the workers already have of the workplace. Ironically, the state’s attempts to protect the workers, together with the employers’ interest in avoiding taxes, have led to high costs for the workers, since they need to travel repeatedly with costly staffing agencies.

Related and important issues when it comes to the costs and earnings of Thai berry pickers in Sweden are predictability and transparency. The costs associated with berry picking are predictable but not very transparent. This means that it is possible to know in advance how high the official cost will be, and there are only minor differences between the various companies, but it is difficult to know more precisely the

various components of the costs. This lack in transparency aggravates the ability to evaluate if some charges are fair or if they could be reduced. For example, it is not clear how high the agency service fee is, or if costs for such expenses as petrol used in driving to places for berry picking are actually paid for by the workers, contrary to what is approved within the Swedish collective agreement.

If the cost side is relatively predictable, what remains highly unpredictable for the workers is the size of their earnings. This is due to the uncertain combination of two systems of payment: on the one hand, the historical payment of the workers on a piece rate, and on the other hand, the guaranteed wage stated in a Swedish collective agreement. The practical solution to this, as given by the berry business, is that the workers will be paid on a piece rate, in order not to lose the ability to earn as much as they can, but that they will be protected downwards by the guaranteed wage set in the collective agreement. This would mean that the workers are paid according to how much they pick and the price of berries per kilo in the world market, but that no worker will earn less than the guaranteed wage.

However, there are many uncertainties with this system. First, the only payment that the workers are formally entitled to is the guaranteed wage set in the collective agreement. Since the workers generally aim for higher earnings – as much as the ‘top earners’ – most opt out of the guaranteed wage by verbal agreement with their staffing agency. Consequently, the workers run the risk of not earning enough to cover costs. In the study, almost half of the workers reported earnings that were lower than the guaranteed wage. The workers apparently are not well informed that they have a right to a guaranteed wage on top of the payment on piece rate. Second, the earnings are unpredictable due to large fluctuations in the price paid for berries, even within one season. This makes it difficult for the workers to know how much their efforts are actually worth. Over the years, the price of berries has been declining due to competition in the world market (Wingborg, 2016). Third, in order not to be obliged to pay the guaranteed wage when there is a scarcity of berries, some of the main Swedish berry companies resort to shortening the employment period for the workers who are already in Sweden (Wingborg, 2015). The employment period in their contracts appears to be flexible and depends on how much berries can be harvested.



In our assessment, the guaranteed wage at present fails to provide a safety net for the workers and should be set right. Due to the transnational nature of the work, with Thai workers being employed in Thailand but performing their work in Sweden, the situation is particularly complex (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2017). Swedish authorities and trade unions have repeatedly tried to change the system, with a view to protecting the workers and regulating their working conditions, but the limits to *national* sovereignty makes it difficult to regulate and reach into *transnational* employment relations.

Our study points to the need for Swedish and Thai authorities to continue seeking ways to improve the situation for Thai berry pickers, both unilaterally by way of national legislation, and transnationally, through improved bilateral cooperation. Ultimately, this would lower the costs and facilitate the recruitment process for all parties; the workers, the firms and the authorities.

First, in response to the current political discussion in Sweden on labour migration, it is vital to highlight the need to improve rather than abolish the current system. Though it is still unclear what will happen to the system, a memorandum from the Swedish Tax agency (2017) suggests that the so called “183-day rule” (see 3.2.3), which so far has enabled the berry industry to avoid paying taxes in Sweden, will be removed. If this is the case, the system that hires Thai workers through staffing agencies would probably be replaced by a more irregular and precarious system of European labour, employing those who can work in Sweden within the framework of the Schengen agreement (Sellen, 2018). Moreover, the Social Democratic Party, the largest party in the newly established coalition government, has suggested that unemployed people within Swedish borders should be hired before employing workers internationally (Social Democrats, 2018). It is unlikely that they will gain support to implement this idea in the parliament. In line with that, this report recommends that the system will be improved instead of removed.

In general, it is vital that the Swedish and Thai governments put pressure on the Thai staffing agencies and the Swedish berry companies to reduce the costs borne by the workers. Aside from setting a ceiling on recruitment fees for outmigration from Thailand, the Thai authorities should establish supporting systems and regulations

to ensure that this ceiling is not surpassed. Useful lessons may be learned from systems implemented by the Indian and other governments in the region to regulate overseas migration. Swedish authorities and the trade unions can support them by monitoring the costs that migrants pay to the staffing agency and by reporting their findings to their counterparts in Thailand. Thai authorities should also assure that the workers are receiving their salaries by demanding to see bank withdrawals.

A major point regards the normalised practice of using costly staffing agencies not only for new workers, but also for experienced workers who have travelled repeatedly to Sweden. It is clear that the current migration system, based on employment and “posting” by Thai staffing agencies, favours Swedish berry companies because it makes workers available at low cost, and on a flexible basis, and minimizes risks associated with fluctuating berry prices. A report on best policy examples regarding international labour migration states that “Employers should be able to hire workers directly without the need to go through private fee-charging job brokers” (Abella et al., 2014). In the case of Thai berry pickers, it is complicated to directly apply this logic. Even though they travel to the same work place in Sweden repeatedly, it would still be complex for them to annually arrange their travel and their work permit in Sweden on an individual basis. The Thai staffing agency might still play a role in making these complicated, annual arrangements, even for experienced workers.

Nonetheless, in this report we want to highlight that the workers could use their repeated travel experience in order to design a less costly alternative, where workers travel directly, without the involvement of a staffing agency. This alternative solution could be to encourage the workers to organise independent cooperatives to replace the staffing agencies (Box 4). These cooperatives should also be able to make all the necessary arrangements for their “posting” abroad as their employees. The Swedish authorities should encourage the establishment of such cooperatives in Thailand, and facilitate and support their linking with Swedish berry companies.

Another way forward could be to make the application system for work permits more efficient. The system with annually repeated application rounds for work permits, often for the same individuals each year, is ineffective and costly both for the workers, the firms, and the Swedish Migration Agency. An alternative could be

to apply for a work permit, which is limited to one year at a time, but that can be renewed across a longer timeframe as long as the actors fulfil their obligations. In practice, the work permit would be valid only for one season at a time, but if the migrant has performed his/her work and the employer has paid correct salaries, then the work permit could be renewed automatically for a certain time, such as a three-year period. Otherwise, the work permit could be suspended. This would imply efficiency and savings for all parties; both the Swedish state, the worker, and the firms. If this system were to be implemented, however, it must be against the background that Thai authorities can assure that the workers have received their entitled payment after each finished season. This must be assured by demanding to see bank withdrawals.

The workers should be able to benefit from existing policies to provide the migrants a safety net. This means not only strengthening the workers' right to at least the minimum wage as stated in the Swedish collective agreement, but also ensuring that they know and understand their rights. The uncertainties accompanying the parallel system of payment must be clarified to the workers. There should be no doubt that the guaranteed wage and the payment on a piece rate are complementary. It must be officially stated how these two forms of payment complement each other in practice. Policy makers and trade unions must play a bigger role in ensuring that the workers are fully aware of their right to the guaranteed wage, and how this can be combined with the payment on a piece rate.

The actual period of employment must be regulated in the contract so that employers are barred from shortening the season when there is a shortage of berries. It is also important that the workers are properly informed about the price for berries, and how much of the earnings go to various parties in the berry business.

### Box 5: Workers' cooperatives

In order to utilise the experience of the berry pickers' frequent travel to Sweden, the workers could organise a cooperative. In this way, they could travel directly to Sweden without the involvement of Thai staffing agencies. With some initial support (say from the Thai government) a workers' cooperative could perform the tasks and obligations usually assumed by the staffing agency, from acting as their labour-supply company and negotiating with the Swedish berry buyers, to recruiting and placing individual workers, arranging for their travel to and accommodation in Sweden, etc. The cooperative would be able to guarantee to the Swedish berry company the supply of a certain number of workers for the next harvesting season. Once established in Thailand, the cooperative could contact several travel agencies and invite them to bid for the chance to sell them tickets, with the offer of taking care of their visa applications. With a guarantee of a high number of tickets to Sweden and back, it would be interesting for many travel agencies to offer their services at beneficial rates. A reputable travel agency might offer the farmers cheaper options for travel and to benefit from discounts. Some may even help the farmers get "frequent travel" points.

If they feel it necessary, the cooperative could consider hiring a manager who will be able to deal with agencies and Swedish berry companies on their behalf. The manager reports to the Cooperative members and will act to get the best deal for them. He or she will take care of communicating with the Swedish counterparts, ensuring that the seasonal migrant workers have all the necessary travel documents, health clearance, exit permits from the Thai government, ticket, visa, information about Swedish labour laws, and minimum employment terms and conditions. He or she will make sure that the workers understand the terms of employment. The manager can also insure that first time migrants benefit from the experience and know-how of the more experienced ones.

On the Swedish side, one of the main berry companies has attempted to establish a Thai cooperative. However, according to the owner of the company, the idea was not supported by the Swedish Migration Agency and thus could not be implemented. This shows, first, that there is an interest in workers' cooperatives among some actors in the Swedish berry industry, and second, that an alternative system, based on cooperatives rather than staffing agencies, needs to be sanctioned by Swedish authorities. The issue of income tax and employer contributions would have to be resolved, and the Swedish Migration Agency would have to accept these cooperatives as employers of the workers. In order to implement the project in Thailand, SIDA may be able to help in establishing the seasonal migrant system based on a farmers' cooperative.

An added feature may be the establishment of a cost-efficient system for bringing the farmers to Sweden, housing them for a few months, and providing transport. The cooperative may also provide training sessions on labour rights and a post-employment evaluation of their experiences.

Lastly, migration is inherently a complex transnational issue. National borders set limits to how far national legislation can protect workers crossing national borders (Axelsson and Hedberg, 2018). Cooperation between the governments of Sweden and Thailand is crucial if the costs are to be reduced and if the earnings are to be made more predictable. In particular, it would be important to monitor the implementation of guaranteed wages on a transnational basis. On the Swedish side, this could be performed by the Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket) (see also Vogiazides and Hedberg, 2013). However, this would probably not be efficient without a cooperating partner on the Thai side, checking that the households are actually receiving the payments by demanding to see bank withdrawals. The transnational design of the labour migration process creates loopholes between the countries, enabling parties to transfer responsibilities and tasks back-and-forth between the countries. Thus, at the end of the day, what is necessary is a serious attitude among authorities in both Sweden and Thailand about the importance that the workers should be fairly compensated for their work.

In sum, improving the situation for seasonal labour migrants will require cooperation between the governments to reduce costs in both countries, enhance the transparency of costs, find an alternative to the system of staffing agencies, increase the predictability of earnings, and ensure that the workers are receiving the payment they are entitled to.

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# Appendix 1: Conceptual issues in measuring recruitment costs

A number of conceptual issues regarding recruitment costs have been raised and clarified in the KNOMAD/ILO surveys. In principle, “recruitment costs” can be defined to include all costs incurred by employers and workers in order to find each other and enter into an employment relationship. Employers will normally incur costs to find the right workers, either soliciting applications through advertising in newspapers, or engaging the services of agents who will look for and evaluate the suitability of applicants for the jobs. In contrast to recruiting within national borders, recruiting foreign or migrant workers can cost more because there are political, economic, and in some instances geographic barriers to movement, and because information about work opportunities is not as easily available or accessible to employers or to job seekers. Employers need to secure permission from national authorities to hire foreign workers. They may have to look for workers in a distant country they are not familiar with, or hire agents to do the searching, testing and selection of workers. Those selected will have to be issued visas to enter and be transported to the country and place of employment. Agents may also demand money from workers to link them to employers and to help them navigate official processes for exit required by their governments. They need to have passports and acquire visas, undergo medical examination to test their fitness, obtain police or security clearance, or undergo skills testing. *All these costs may be paid for by the employers alone, by the workers alone, or shared by both.* Exactly who incurs these costs is not determined a priori but often depends on the demand and supply of the skills involved, the policies of the governments of the countries of origin and of employment, and the characteristics of the jobs involved.



*Some costs are opaque.* Some components of recruitment costs such as the cost of travel documents, airfare, taxes and various official fees are easy to establish and verify, but other costs are opaque, such as how much is paid to recruiters for their services or how much goes into the pockets of corrupt border guards and immigration officers, or as illegitimate commissions to recruitment officers of some companies. Many transactions involved are highly informal and seldom covered by invoices or receipts. Workers may not be informed of exactly what costs are covered by the fees they are charged. Employers may advance payment for recruitment but eventually charge workers via deductions from their wages. Such charges may include interest.

*Some costs are spread across borders.* It is important to know at what stage costs are incurred since it may suggest where policy changes or interventions can be introduced. Are the costs incurred before the migrants leave their countries, or only upon employment? Some costs, however, are sometimes spread across borders, such as when employers advance the money needed to pay recruiters and other travel-related expenses, but the workers are charged through salary deductions once they start working. Some countries make this illegal however; hence it is relevant to know if the costs are in fact being incurred. The cost of transport to the place of employment may also be influenced by policies, either of the origin or the destination country government, such as when the workers are required to use a certain airline. The costs tend to be spread over the stages of migration. Recruiters' charges, for example, may include fees both to the local agent and the employer's agent abroad. Visa costs may be high, not because of official fees, but because of the practice of selling visas in some countries. The money may go to the pockets of the employer's own staff, to the pockets of the employer's recruitment agent at home, or to the recruiter in the origin country. The costs incurred while in transit are known to be significant, especially for those who use clandestine means to get to the country of employment. While in the destination country, interest payment may be incurred by workers who took out loans to cover the upfront payments.

Which of the costs incurred in searching for a job should be associated with a specific employment abroad? Job seekers will typically apply for work through many

agencies in the hope of expanding their chances of securing at least one job. They often fail. In the KNOMAD/ILO surveys, the decision was made to count only the cost of the search that led to actual employment, and excluded any failed attempts, even if from the worker's standpoint these are part of the same investment.

Some of the surveys covered workers who entered the country of employment through channels other than regular guest worker programmes (i.e. in particular the surveys in Italy and Mexico). For these workers the job search may last for many months and entail a variety of expenses.

In the KNOMAD/ILO surveys, recruitment costs were defined to mean “worker-paid recruitment costs”, including costs that may be advanced by the employer but later deducted from the salary. They include payments for recruitment regardless of when they are paid, prior to departure or upon employment, in the form of deductions from wages. For practical reasons training costs, even where the training is necessary to qualify for the job, were excluded but fees for “pre-departure briefings” required in some countries were included. All fees charged by and paid to the recruiter and/or job broker were included, as well extra expenses paid by the worker for visa costs, travel costs or airfare, medical examinations, exit clearances from the national authority, premiums for required insurance, pre-departure accommodation costs, travel taxes, informal payments or bribes. Also included were the *cost of borrowing* such as interest already paid and owed for loans from banks, money lenders or friends and relatives, as long as the loans were used to finance migration expenses.

*Worker-paid recruitment costs.* The survey of berry pickers and comparable surveys conducted by WB-KNOMAD and ILO in other migration corridors focused on relevant costs incurred by the workers, not by the employers. Because transaction costs arise in recruitment due to information weaknesses, barriers to movement, geographic distance, and other institutional factors, regardless of who pays for them, comparing costs in absolute terms for workers recruited under different arrangements poses problems. For this reason, costs are best expressed in terms of how many months of foreign earnings will be needed to pay for them.



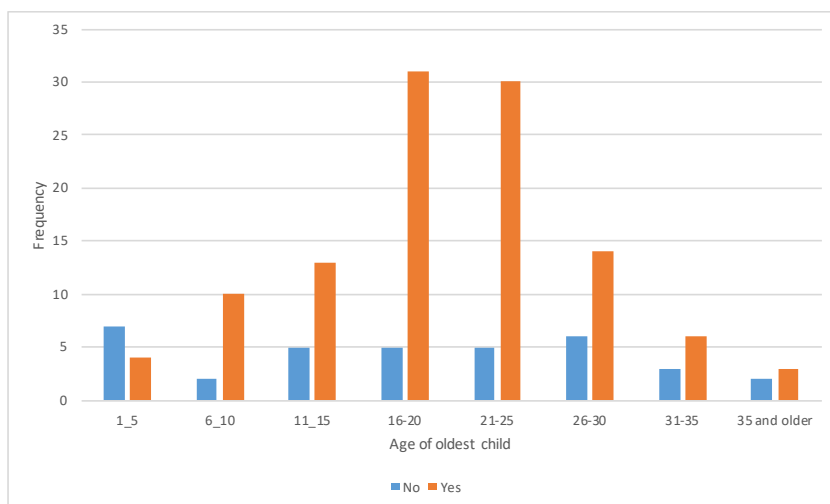
# Appendix 2: Parenthood and use of earnings in education

**Table 1, Appendix 2: Number of children and the age of children among the respondents.**

	Number of workers	Percent of total number of workers
Number of children		
0	19	11.5
1	31	18.8
2	96	58.2
3	17	10.3
4	2	1.2
Total	165	100
Age of children		
1-5	11	6.7
6-10	12	7.3
11-15	18	10.9
16-20	36	21.8
21-25	35	21.2
26-30	20	12.1
31-35	9	5.5
35 and older	5	3
Total responses	146	88.5
Total sample	165	100

Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

**Figure 1, Appendix 2: The use of earnings on children's education, based on the age of the oldest child.**



Source: Thai-Swedish survey, 2016.

# List of previous publications

Rapport och Policy Brief 2014:1, *Radikala högerpartier och attityder till invandring i Europa*, av Mikael Hjerm och Andrea Bohman.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2015:1, *Internationell migration och remitteringar i Etiopien*, av Lisa Andersson.

Kunskapsöversikt 2015:2, *Politiska remitteringar*, av Emma Lundgren Jörum och Åsa Lundgren.

Kunskapsöversikt 2015:3, *Integrationspolitik och arbetsmarknad*, av Patrick Joyce.

Kunskapsöversikt 2015:4, *Migration och företagens internationalisering*, av Andreas Hatzigeorgiou och Magnus Lodefalk.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2015:5, *Svenskt medborgarskap: reglering och förändring i ett skandinaviskt perspektiv*, av Mikael Spång.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2015:6, *Vem blir medborgare och vad händer sen? Naturalisering i Danmark, Norge och Sverige*, av Pieter Bevelander, Jonas Helgertz, Bernt Bratsberg och Anna Tegunimataka.

Kunskapsöversikt 2015:7, *Kategoriernas dilemman*, av Per Strömblad och Gunnar Myrberg.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2015:8, *Valet och Vägen: Syriska flyktingar i Sverige*, av Emma Jörum Lundgren.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2015:9, *Arbetskraftsinvandring efter 2008 års reform*, av Catharina Calleman (red.) och Petra Herzfeld Olsson (red.).

Kunskapsöversikt 2016:1, *Alla tiders migration!*, av Dick Harrison.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2016:2, *Invandringens arbetsmarknadseffekter*, av Mattias Engdahl.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2016:3, *Irreguljär migration och Europas gränskontroller*, av Ruben Andersson.

Kunskapsöversikt 2016:4, *Diaspora – ett begrepp i utveckling*, av Erik Olsson.

Kunskapsöversikt 2016:5, *Migration within and from Africa*, av Aderanti Adepoju.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2016:6, *Invandring, mediebilder och radikala högerpopulistiska partier i Norden*, av Anders Hellström och Anna-Lena Lodenius.

Kunskapsöversikt 2016:7, *Invandring och företagande*, av Martin Klinthäll, Craig Mitchell, Tobias Schölin, Zoran Slavnić och Susanne Urban.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2016:8, *Invandringens effekter på Sveriges ekonomiska utveckling*, av Bo Malmberg, Thomas Wimarck, Jani Turunen och Linn Axelsson.

Kunskapsöversikt 2017:1, *De invandringskritiska partiernas politiska inflytande i Europa*, av Maria Tyrberg och Carl Dahlström.

Kunskapsöversikt 2017:2, *Hatbrott med främlingsfientliga och rasistiska motiv* av Berit Wigerfelt och Anders S Wigerfelt.

Avhandlingsnytt 2017:3, *Vägen till arbete. Utrikes föddas möte med den svenska arbetsmarknaden*, André Asplund, Caroline Tovatt och Sara Thalberg (redaktörer).

Policy Brief 2016:4, *Integration och tillit – långsiktiga konsekvenser av den stora invandringen till Norge*. Denna Policy Brief sammanfattar NOU 2017:2 om *”Integrasjon og tillit – Langsiktige konsekvenser av høy invandring”*.

Kunskapsöversikt: 2017:5, *Invandringens historia – från ”folkhemmet” till dagens Sverige* av Mikael Byström och Pär Frohnert.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2017:6, *Invandring i medierna – Hur rapporterade svenska tidningar åren 2010-2015?* av Jesper Strömbäck, Felicia Andersson och Evelina Nedlund.

Rapport och Policy Brief 2017:7, *Valdeltagande och representation – Om invandring och politisk integration i Sverige*. Pieter Bevelander och Mikael Spång (red.)

Rapport och Policy Brief 2017:8, *Responsibility Sharing for Refugees in the Middle East and North Africa: Perspectives from Policymakers, Stakeholders, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons*. Susan F. Martin, Rochelle Davis, Grace Benton & Zoya Waliany.

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Rapport och Policy Brief 2018:5, *Familj, medborgarskap, migration – Sveriges politik för anhöriginvandring i ett jämförande perspektiv*, Karin Borevi.

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Policy Brief 2019:1, "Bridging the Gaps", Martin Ruhs, Kristof Tamas och Joakim Palme.

Rapport and Policy Brief 2019:2, *Smuggling, informella nätverk och diasporans engagemang*, Tekalign Ayalew Mengiste & Erik Olsson.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that migrant workers incur into heavy costs to get jobs abroad. Among other things, they pay for visas and often depend on intermediaries such as recruitment firms or job brokers. While the costs of labor migration for some groups of migrants and specific migration corridors have been studied internationally, not least by the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) network, this study adds to the literature on migration corridors an example from Sweden. Every year, around 5 000 berry pickers travel from Thailand to the northern parts of Sweden to work during the summer months. The large majority of these workers have been recruited by Thai staffing agencies, and have borrowed money to cover the fees. *Thai berry pickers in Sweden – A migration corridor to a low-wage sector* examines the system and regulatory framework that surrounds the berry pickers and the costs and earnings associated with going to Sweden are analyzed and put in a comparative framework of other migration corridors.

The study was conducted by Charlotta Hedberg – Associate Professor at the Department of Geography, Umeå University – Linn Axelsson – Research Fellow at the Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University – and Manolo Abella – Chair of the Technical Working Group on Labour Migration of KNOMAD World Bank

A photograph of two people in blue raincoats and boots picking berries in a forest. One person is in the background, carrying a white bucket, and the other is in the foreground, crouching and picking. The forest floor is covered with green and yellow berry bushes, and large tree trunks are visible in the background.

The Migration Studies Delegation is an independent committee that initiates studies and supplies research results as a basis for future migration policy decisions and to contribute to public debate.



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