

Title: Status Confinement: Older Shan Migrant Workers in Chiang Mai' Construction Camp

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Abstract

This paper presents a work-in-progress conceptual framework for understanding how migration status and documents shape experiences of confinement among older Shan migrant workers in Chiang Mai's construction camp, Thailand. Drawing on existing literature, NGO reports and informal conversations with gatekeepers, it develops the concept of "status confinement" as a relational condition produced through the intersection of legal precarity, spatial restriction and temporal uncertainty. This framing also builds on the insight that documents do not simply enable or obstruct mobility; rather, they move through significant relations and can generate violence, vulnerability, and control (Ghosh et al., 2026).

The paper highlights two dimensions of this confinement. First, temporality: many older Shan migrants have lived for extended periods in construction camps in Chiang Mai with limited clarity about future mobility or resolution of their status. This prolonged uncertainty produces a sense of being "stuck," as return remains constrained by ongoing conflict and instability in Myanmar (Jefferson et al., 2019). Second, spatial constraint: limited legal documentation restricts mobility within the province and channels migrants into precarious labor markets, increasing vulnerability to exploitation.

As an exploratory contribution, the paper seeks to refine the concept of status confinement and situate it within broader debates on migration governance and legal precarity. It also points toward future empirical research, including planned qualitative fieldwork, to examine how these dynamics are experienced and negotiated in everyday life.