



# **MIGRATION**



## In- and out-migration

Human migration is defined as the movement of people from one place to another with the intention of settling, permanently or temporarily, in a new location. Throughout its history, the Lao PDR has experienced diverse migration waves caused by wars, social and economic inequalities, and the lack of access to natural resources, education, and health facilities.

Due to the economic reforms of the 1980's and the subsequent flow of foreign investment into the country, the Lao PDR began improving its transport infrastructure and expanding economic activities throughout the 1990s. In the last two decades, the country's increasing efforts to integrate its own economy with economic activities and trade across the rest of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) has bolstered the development of large transportation networks and infrastructure. This economic integration with neighbouring countries, and more generally with global markets, facilitates the movement of goods as well as people within and between countries.

With the economic development experienced by the country in the last decades, urban and peri-urban areas are becoming increasingly important centres for the Lao economy. Although migration from rural to urban areas is a common pattern within the Lao PDR, most internal migration is from rural to other rural areas. Migrants are often young adults who move to other areas in search of better jobs, health services, and educational opportunities. Some are driven by personal aspirations and interests, while others are forced by the need to remit money back to their family. While migration for educational reasons is largely to urban areas, labour migration in the Lao PDR remains mainly a rural-rural phenomenon. Rural migrants are predominantly people employed in the construction, hydropower, agribusiness, and mining sectors. Some migrant workers in these sectors also come from neighbouring countries such as China, Vietnam, or Thailand, typically employed by contractors and investors from the same country. Many rural migrants in the Lao PDR, on the other hand, migrate to pursue work opportunities in Thailand, attracted by higher wages and the relative ease of border crossing.

In the PHCs of 2005 and 2015 alike, households were asked about migration at different intervals: lifetime migration, migration since the 2005 census, and migration within the last twelve months.

The Maps C1.1 to C1.4 show in- and out-migration at village level as well as the changes in the population migrating in and out since 2005. Both in-migration and out-migration are represented as percentages of the village population. The changes between 2005 and 2015 are calculated as the difference between the percentages of in- and out-migrants in 2005 and the percentages of in- and out-migrants in 2015.

### Spatial patterns in 2015

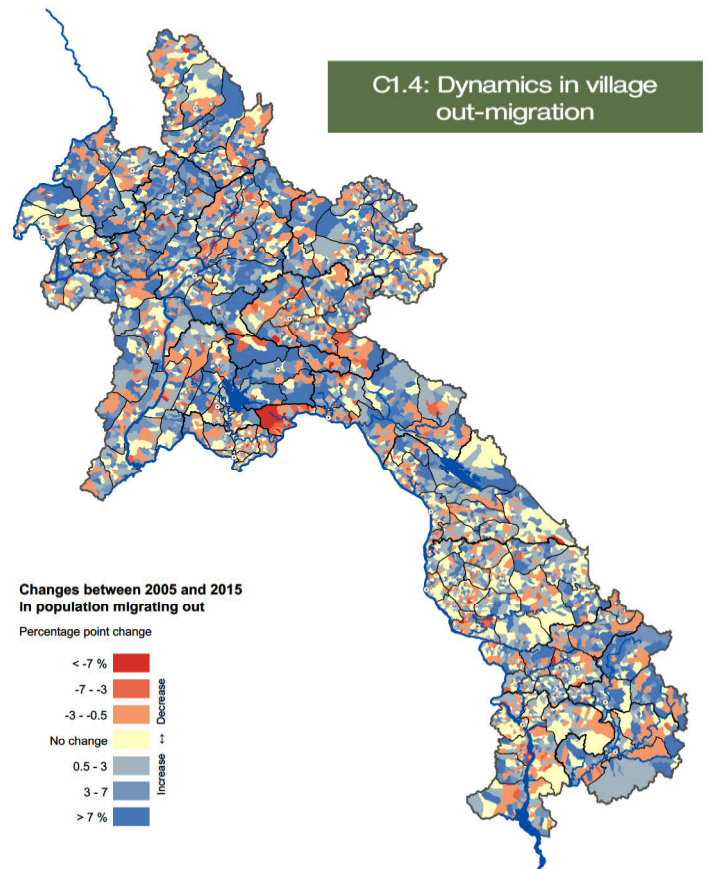
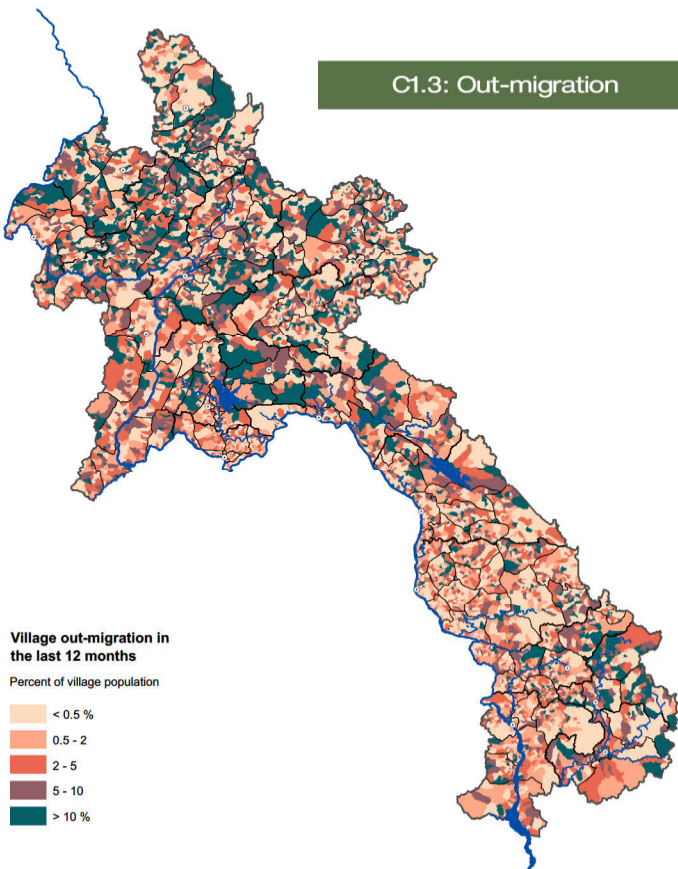
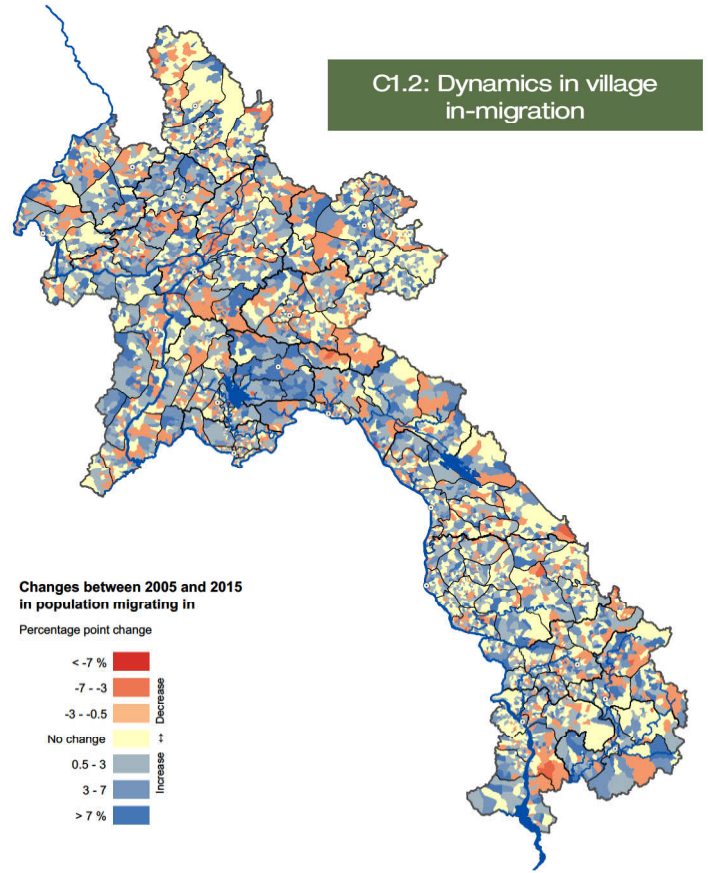
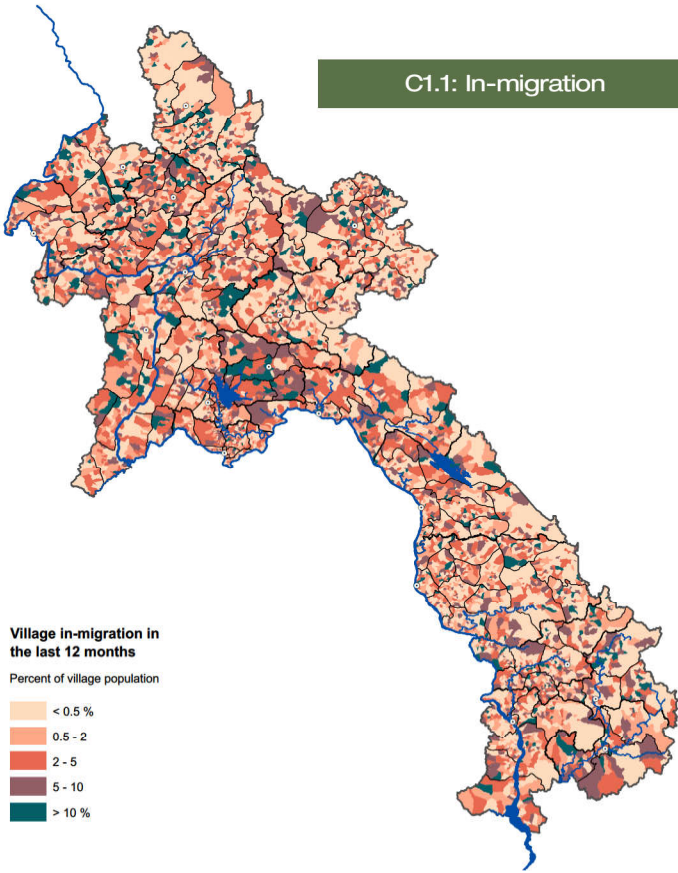
Map C1.1 represents village in-migration in the twelve months prior to the census in 2015. In some villages, the number of in-migrants exceed 10% of the village population. Xaysomboune, Oudomxai, and Attapeu in particular have experienced large numbers of in-migrants. Map C1.3 shows out-migration from villages in the same time period. Villages in the north of the country and in the southeast present higher percentages of out-migrants in relation to their population.

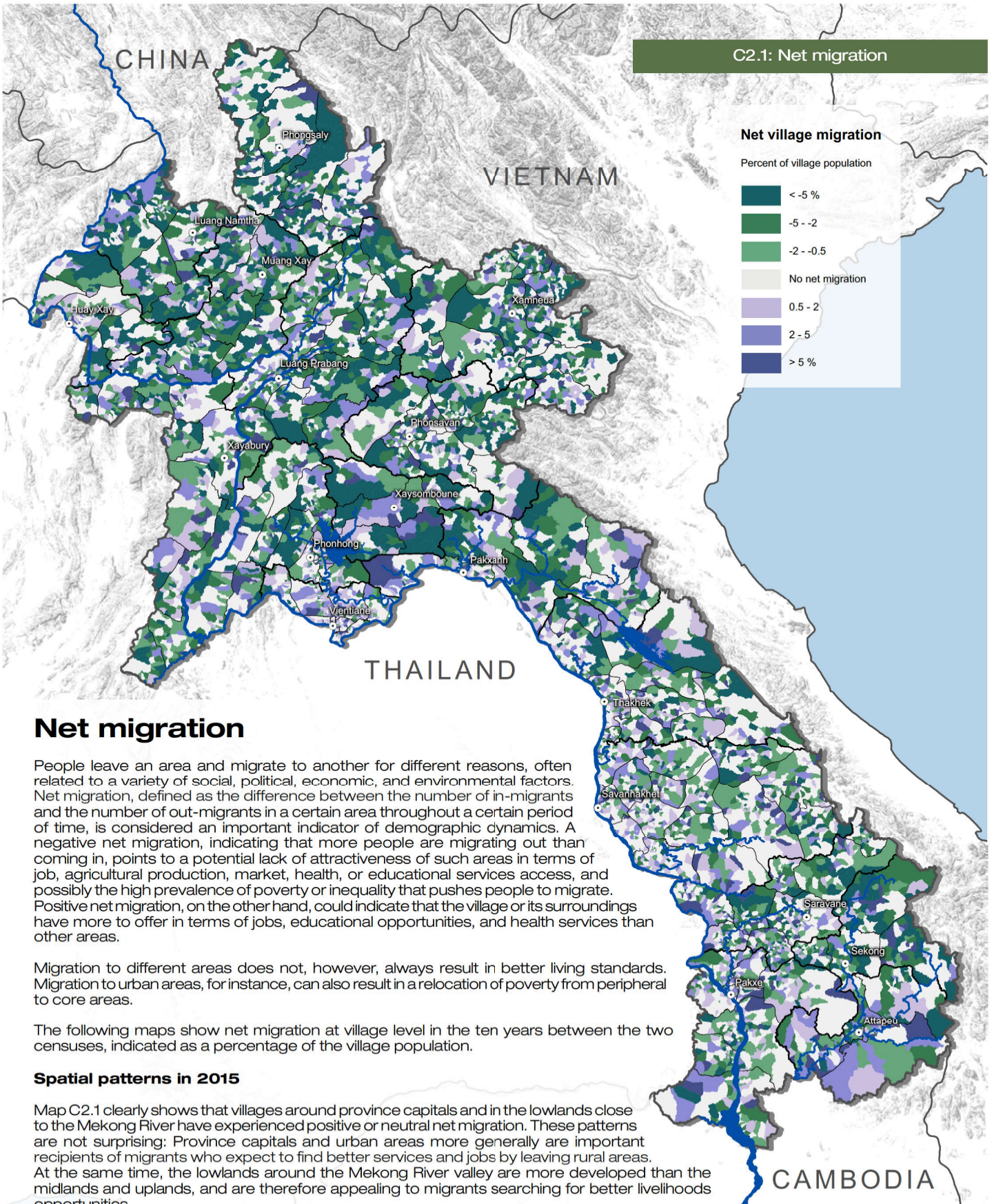
Provincial capitals and their outskirts show diverse patterns of in- and out-migration, indicating also the movements within these areas.

Interestingly, villages in Xaysomboune have high percentages of in-migrants as well as out-migrants. The high percentage of both in- and out-migration may be related to the unique history of the Province, which was established at the end of 2013. Following its establishment, many moved out, in, and within the province to work as government employees under the new administrative status of the province. Another important factor that contributes to migration in and out of the province could be the construction of the Nam San 3 B hydropower plant, which required the resettlement of multiple villages around the plant's construction site and the reservoir which the dam created.

### Dynamics between 2005 and 2015

Maps C1.2 and C1.4 reveal that between 2005 and 2015, the central and the northern regions saw an increase in population migrating out, while the south experienced less change. In terms of population migrating in, between 2005 and 2015, Xaysomboune and Xayabury experienced a significant increase. A significant decrease in out-migration is observed in the west of Borikhamxay. This may be due to the nearby location of the Nam Leuk Hydropower Project, a hydropower plant active since the beginning of the 2000s, which could have pushed people to migrate out of the area.





## Net migration

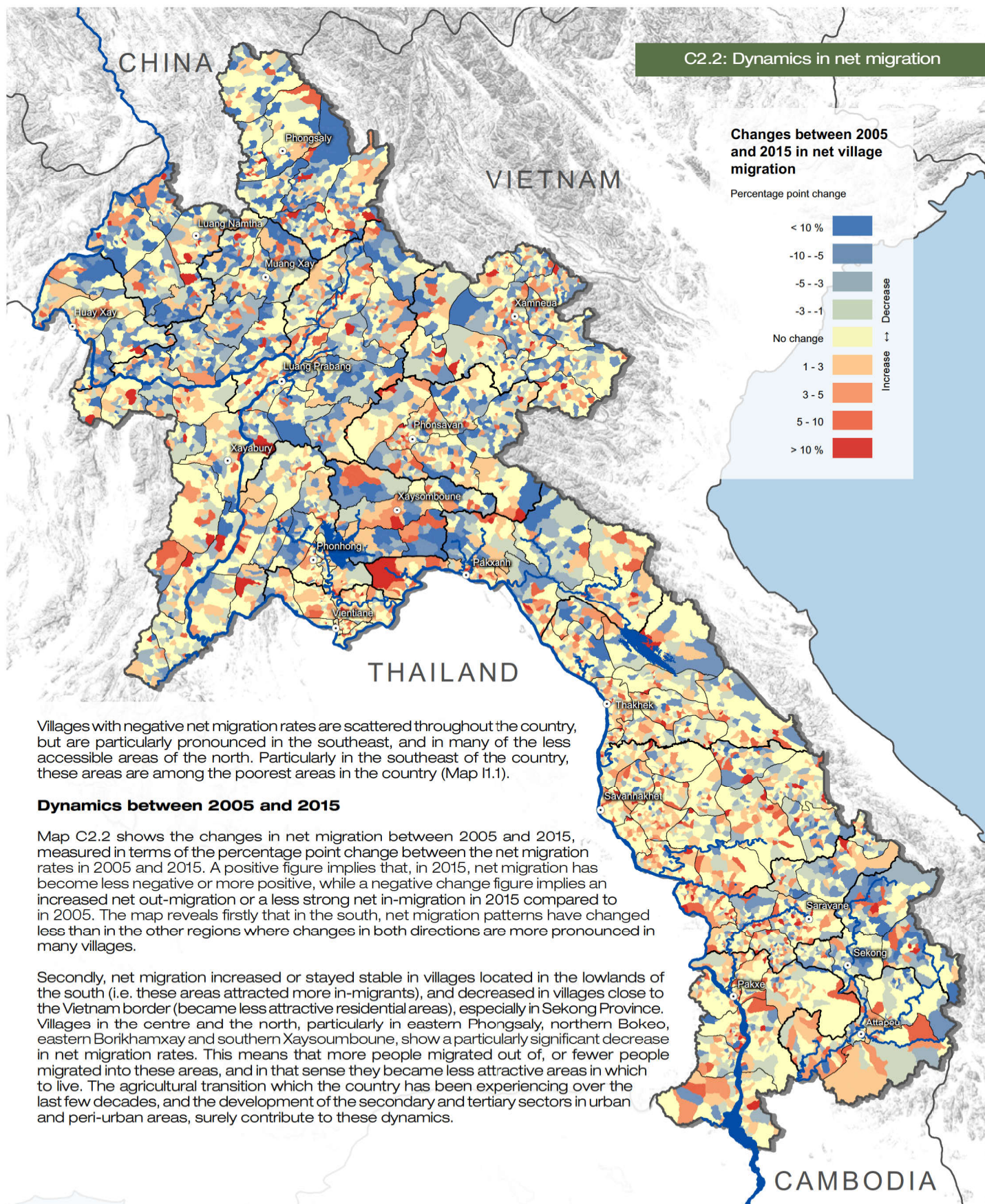
People leave an area and migrate to another for different reasons, often related to a variety of social, political, economic, and environmental factors. Net migration, defined as the difference between the number of in-migrants and the number of out-migrants in a certain area throughout a certain period of time, is considered an important indicator of demographic dynamics. A negative net migration, indicating that more people are migrating out than coming in, points to a potential lack of attractiveness of such areas in terms of job, agricultural production, market, health, or educational services access, and possibly the high prevalence of poverty or inequality that pushes people to migrate. Positive net migration, on the other hand, could indicate that the village or its surroundings have more to offer in terms of jobs, educational opportunities, and health services than other areas.

Migration to different areas does not, however, always result in better living standards. Migration to urban areas, for instance, can also result in a relocation of poverty from peripheral to core areas.

The following maps show net migration at village level in the ten years between the two censuses, indicated as a percentage of the village population.

### Spatial patterns in 2015

Map C2.1 clearly shows that villages around province capitals and in the lowlands close to the Mekong River have experienced positive or neutral net migration. These patterns are not surprising: Province capitals and urban areas more generally are important recipients of migrants who expect to find better services and jobs by leaving rural areas. At the same time, the lowlands around the Mekong River valley are more developed than the midlands and uplands, and are therefore appealing to migrants searching for better livelihoods opportunities.



Villages with negative net migration rates are scattered throughout the country, but are particularly pronounced in the southeast, and in many of the less accessible areas of the north. Particularly in the southeast of the country, these areas are among the poorest areas in the country (Map I1.1).

**Dynamics between 2005 and 2015**

Map C2.2 shows the changes in net migration between 2005 and 2015, measured in terms of the percentage point change between the net migration rates in 2005 and 2015. A positive figure implies that, in 2015, net migration has become less negative or more positive, while a negative change figure implies an increased net out-migration or a less strong net in-migration in 2015 compared to in 2005. The map reveals firstly that in the south, net migration patterns have changed less than in the other regions where changes in both directions are more pronounced in many villages.

Secondly, net migration increased or stayed stable in villages located in the lowlands of the south (i.e. these areas attracted more in-migrants), and decreased in villages close to the Vietnam border (became less attractive residential areas), especially in Sekong Province. Villages in the centre and the north, particularly in eastern Phongsaly, northern Bokeo, eastern Borikhamxay and southern Xaysomboune, show a particularly significant decrease in net migration rates. This means that more people migrated out of, or fewer people migrated into these areas, and in that sense they became less attractive areas in which to live. The agricultural transition which the country has been experiencing over the last few decades, and the development of the secondary and tertiary sectors in urban and peri-urban areas, surely contribute to these dynamics.

