



Mekong Sub-Regional  
Project to Combat Trafficking  
in Children and Women



International  
Labour  
Office

## An ILO-TICW Project Overview in Lao PDR:

### The situation:

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is, primarily, a source area for victims of trafficking and labour and sexual exploitation. With a relatively low per capita income, and more than half of the population below the age of 20, Lao PDR lacks economic capacity to provide employment for this large demographic entering the workforce. As a result, many young Lao people cross the border to neighbouring Thailand in search of work. An ILO supported study by the Lao Government has found that nearly 7 % of households in three border provinces had family members working in Thailand. While this cross-border migration is not necessarily undesirable, the means by which many young Lao people migrate (e.g. in an undocumented or 'illegal' status) has left them vulnerable to abuse by human traffickers and disreputable employment agencies along the way and in Thailand. (see 'research findings')



### Prevention framework:

The Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women – Phase II (ILO-TICW) works in five provinces of Lao PDR through its partnership with the Ministry Of Labour's Office for the Eradication of Child Labour and Child Trafficking (CLCTO). The project also works closely with the Lao Women's Union and the Lao Sustainable Community Development Promotion Association (LA).

Lao PDR ratified ILO Convention 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) and Convention 138 (Minimum Age for Employment) in March 2005. As an IPEC project, working within the framework of the ILO, project provides technical assistance to the Government in its counter-trafficking work with special emphasis on the relevant implementation of these two core conventions.

In Phase I (2000-03) the project carried out research and interventions in three provinces - Savannakhet, Champassak and Khammuane. During Phase II, the project expanded its work into a total of five provinces, adding Bolikhamxay and Sayabuly. Whereas the work in Phase I was carried out in selected pilot villages, the task for Phase II is to replicate the lessons learned and good practices in villages in five provinces.

#### ILO-TICW: Working with Stakeholders and Partners in Lao PDR

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) has ratified two key ILO Conventions which help create a legal framework to combat human trafficking. ILO Convention 182 (to eliminate the worst forms of child labour) and Convention 138 (setting minimum age for employment) were ratified in March 2005. A separate Memorandum of Understanding between the ILO and the Lao Government was signed in January 2005 enabling the project to continue its activities through 2008.

Partnerships have been forged with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW), at national, provincial and district levels. The project has also helped to establish a National Steering Committee on Trafficking, bringing together key stakeholders from a wide range of ministries, mass organizations and workers' and employers' organizations. Project interventions have also led, in part, to a Governmental decree creating a foreign labour unit in MoLSW that will regulate out-migration.

Map courtesy UNIAP

#### Socio-economic Overview

##### Demography:

Total Population: 5,900,000

20 % (U) 80% (R)

Population under age 20: 54%

##### Education:

Adult literacy rates: 77% (M) 61% (F)

Primary enrolment: 88% (M) 82% (F)

Secondary enrolment: 38% (M) 32% (F)

Total student enrolment: 1,200,090

##### Economy:

Total GNP per capita: \$390 USD

Percentage below national poverty line: 27% (U) 41% (R)

##### Unemployment: n/a

Sources: National Statistic Centre, Yearbook 2001; Min. of Education, Yearbook 2001, World Bank 2005, UNFPA 2005, UNDP 2003, CIA World Factbook 2006, UNESCO (UIS) 2002-03, UNESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2004

# ILO-TICW Phase II – Lao PDR

## The workplan (2006 – 2008)

### Building the knowledge base..

In a major piece of recent research, the ‘Lao PDR Migration Survey’ (2003), supported by the ILO-TICW project, discovered approximately half of the migrant children who entered Thailand from neighbouring Lao PDR provinces of Savannakhet, Champassak & Khammuane had lost all contact with their families back home. This raised the very real possibility that they had encountered human traffickers during their migration. Thailand was the destination for the vast majority of family members migrating (80%).

The survey of nearly 6,000 households also discovered:

- 7% of households had family members on the move
- Nearly three-quarters of all migrations had occurred recently – within 3 three years – suggesting acceleration
- More than one-in-five migrants were under age 18 - more than two-thirds of them were girls

### Advocating and raising awareness..

In early 2006, the project began to work closely with the Government, the Office to Eradicate Child Labour and Trafficking (CLCTO) and other UN and international NGO partners in a special programme to train Lao-language mass media personnel about human trafficking and the link to ill-prepared migration. The efforts were aimed at Lao-language publications to build the capacity of their reporters and editors – many of whom had never covered these issues before.

Ultimately the move was aimed at raising the awareness of the general public – readers, listeners and viewers – about trafficking, its link to ill-prepared migration, and the need for improved prevention measures. Audience penetration however remains relatively low, with few people reading newspapers (except for middle-class residents in the capital). With 1 TV for every 19 people in the country, and with no reception in many of the most vulnerable areas, radio has been chosen by the project as the best medium to reach target audiences in the provinces (1 radio receiver for every 7 listeners). (UNESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2004)

The Lao Women’s Union is also being supported in its drive to establish national and provincial level ‘mobile’ awareness raising teams to teach people from vulnerable areas about the risks of trafficking and ill-prepared migration and offer means to better protect and prevent themselves from being abused.

Lao Children Speak Out on Counter-Trafficking Measures:	
<p>At an ILO-TICW co-supported forum in 2004, more than 30 children from six provinces in Lao PDR expressed concerns about cross-border trafficking and the causes that lead children and young people to migrate in search of work. The children identified various needs such as better awareness-raising at village level about the dangers of ill-prepared migration, and the trickery sometimes used by job agents to lure young people away from their families.</p> <p>The children also identified a need for more schools and local job creation to encourage youngsters to remain closer to home and thereby make them less vulnerable to human traffickers.</p> <p>They also encouraged teachers at the village level to learn more about human trafficking and pass that information on to their students.</p>	<p>Some of the young delegates expressed concern over the consequences faced by some returnees, which can include fines and obligatory stays at reintegration facilities.</p> <p>The children suggested volunteer groups be set up to help with awareness-raising campaigns to prevent trafficking, but they also called for the mass media to play a greater advocacy role – something now underway (as of early 2006)</p> <p>The final days of the forum were spent in dialogue with senior Government representatives who listened to the ideas and hopes of the children on solving the issue of human trafficking in Lao PDR.</p> <p>Five of the children were chosen to attend the sub-regional Mekong Children’s Forum on Human Trafficking which took place the following month in Bangkok and helped to draft a Sub-regional list of recommendations to counter trafficking.</p>

## **Building capacity to tackle the problem..**

While the project does not try to discourage migration, it is working with the Government of Lao PDR to help better manage the process of labour migration in order to reduce the risks of trafficking and labour exploitation of children and women. In this regard, it supports the efforts of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare's, Office to Eradicate Child Labour and Child Trafficking (CLCTO). The CLCTO is the project's focal point for the National Steering Committee on counter-trafficking.

The project operates simultaneously at village, province and national level to coordinate capacity building activities. It has supported cross-border initiatives between Lao PDR and Thailand to implement Memoranda of Understanding on employment cooperation and human trafficking.

## **Providing targeted assistance and support..**

Poverty is a major factor in the sudden and ill-prepared migration of young Lao people and the trafficking and labour and sexual exploitation that can result. Therefore, project activities are designed to offer alternative income generation to communities vulnerable to ill-prepared migration and to boost their skills.

The ILO-TICW project is supporting the creation and expansion of Village Development Funds (VDFs) across the five target provinces. Working closely with Lao partners such as the Lao Women's Union and Lao Sustainable Community Development Promotion Association (LA), as well as with SEED-WEDGE (ILO-TICW's sister project to promote gender empowerment and entrepreneurial skills), these VDFs are now operational in more than 120 villages.

They offer villagers a chance to borrow small amounts of money to invest in small entrepreneurial ventures, such as pig raising or small-scale manufacturing. It offers an alternative to migration by giving them a chance to stay home and work within their own communities. The borrowers are also offered courses in skills training to better manage their new investments and ensure their success (e.g. animal husbandry skills to ensure the pigs are cared for and deliver offspring). Rather than just a straightforward micro-credit scheme, the VDF also requires that members save money as well – thus developing a sense of accomplishment and local ownership. One of the main objectives of the ILO-TICW project is that its interventions should be sustainable. The VDFs are managed directly by the villages themselves and many are already well on their way to self-sustainability.

## **Collaboration and partnerships:**

In January, 2005, the Government of Lao PDR authorized an extension of the Memorandum of Understanding with the ILO for a continuation of the project's work which runs until 2008. In March 2005, the Government ratified ILO Conventions on eliminating the worst forms of child labour, C.182 (which include trafficking), and a Convention outlining the conditions for minimum age of employment, C.138.

At the national level, ILO-TICW Phase I lessons learned and good practices are now being mainstreamed through the Rural Development Project into Lao PDR's National Plan of Eradication of Poverty.

ILO-TICW Phase II is also working with the International Organization of Migration (IOM) to provide technical assistance to Lao PDR and Thailand relating to their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on employment migration. Through support of a separate MoU with Thailand, the ILO-TICW project is also collaborating with the Lao Government and other agencies to raise public awareness about the Government's response to trafficking.

## **Working with Employers' and Workers' Associations:**

Phase II of this project places a greater focus on the identification of solutions to trafficking in children and women from a labour policy perspective and a greater role for Employers' and Workers' Organizations in addressing trafficking in children and women is actively encouraged.

The Project Advisory Committee (SURAC) has been expanded with new memberships extended to the representatives from Lao PDR's main Workers' and Employers' Associations.

One of the ILO's comparative advantages is its tripartite structure of stakeholders (Governments, Employers & Workers). The ILO-TICW project will continue to enter into dialogue with workers and employers representatives in Lao PDR to consider further ways to work together to prevent human trafficking and exploitation of young Lao people.

**For further information, please contact the Lao PDR country team:**

National Project Manager  
ILO-TICW  
015 Phonkheng Road,  
PhonxayVillage, Xaysetha District  
Vientiane Municipality, Lao PDR

Tel/Fax: 856 21 412 335  
E-Mail: kolakot@laotel.com

**Or visit the sub-regional project Website:**

[www.childtrafficking.net](http://www.childtrafficking.net) 



International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)