



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



International  
Labour  
Office

## An ILO-TICW Project Overview in Thailand:

### The situation:

Thailand is a country of origin, transit and destination for victims of human trafficking. The abuses range from forced or coerced prostitution of young women and girls to labour exploitation of children and young women in small factories, farms, fishing boats and homes (domestic servitude). Many of the victims are undocumented economic migrants who become most vulnerable to abuse while moving internally and across borders.

Because of its relative affluence, Thailand draws hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from surrounding countries, and is by far the single most-favored destination of labour migrants in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). It is also a common transit point for people going to third countries in Asia and beyond. No official Government statistics exist on numbers of people trafficked into Thailand, but from what is known about recruitment procedures and the lack of effective monitoring or enforcement of working conditions in the informal labour sector it can be presumed that significant numbers of migrant workers in Thailand are indeed victims of trafficking.

The Royal Thai Government has taken steps to reduce migration-related trafficking by streamlining legal labour migration channels – a move that, among other objectives, is hoped will leave foreign migrants less vulnerable to exploitation. In 2004, nearly 850,000 foreign migrants took part in a registration process that gave them work permits and access to social security benefits such as health care insurance. However the registration system has significant gaps due to the relatively high costs of registration (for the migrant) and the bond or surety required by the potential employer. Registered workers are not allowed to change jobs and, in some cases, this has led to employers withholding salaries to cover the cost of the bond which they would forfeit if the employee were to leave. It's believed that there are actually many more unregistered migrants (est. 1.2 million in 2004) and due to continued confusion in neighbouring sending countries about where and when to apply for registration, it has been suggested the number of unregistered migrant workers entering Thailand could be rising.

Anecdotal evidence also points to an increase in trafficking of foreign migrants for sexual exploitation. Burmese, Khmer, Lao and ethnic minority girls/young women have been reported trafficked in border areas and into major urban centres and sometimes through Thailand to third countries such as Malaysia, Japan and destinations in Europe and North America.



### ILO-TICW: Working with Stakeholders and Partners in Thailand:

The project works with two main government bodies: the Ministry of Labour (MOL) and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS).

The project also works closely with the National Committee on Anti-Trafficking in Children and Women and coordinates its interventions with those of other UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs like Save the Children UK. It is also a member of the UN Inter-Agency Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women in the GMS.

Programmes directly benefiting those at higher risk of trafficking are carried out in target provinces by partner NGOs. The project works in collaboration with the Governors of three border provinces in the North and a dialogue has begun with Workers' and Employers' groups for their support in the fight against trafficking and labour exploitation of migrants. (map courtesy UNIAP)

### Socio-economic Overview

#### Demography:

Total population: 63 million  
(Urban: 31%, Rural: 69%)  
Population below 20 years: 32%

#### Education:

Adult literacy rates: 97% (M), 94% (F)  
Primary school enrolment rate: 87% (M) 85% (F)  
Secondary school enrolment: 64% M/F

#### Economy:

GDP per capita (2003): US \$ 7,595  
Population below national poverty line (1992):  
16% (rural), 10% (urban)

#### Unemployment (2003):

5.5% (15-19); 5% (20-24)

Source: UNDP HDI 2005, World Bank, CIA Government Publications, UNESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2004, UNESCO (UIS) 2002-3, ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 2004

## Prevention Framework:

In conjunction with the migrant registration process, and the draft of a new Anti-Trafficking Law, the Government has also signed a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements with neighbouring countries to counter human trafficking. It has also ratified both ILO Conventions, No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) and No. 138 (Minimum Age for Employment). The ILO-TICW project works in Thailand to support these initiatives through complementary capacity building workshops for Government officials dealing with trafficking and migration related issues, through trafficking-prevention public awareness campaigns directed at migrants and would-be migrants in both sending and receiving areas, and through alternative income generation and skills training in sending provinces.

## The workplan (2006 – 2008):

### Building the knowledge base..

Although the ILO-TICW project is working in both migrant sending and receiving communities where human trafficking is an on-going problem, it is placing a special emphasis on the demand side of trafficking in Thailand particularly as it relates to labour exploitation.

In 2005, comprehensive research began into the demand side of human trafficking in four labour sectors: agriculture, domestic work, fishing & fish processing, and manufacturing (small to medium size firms). The information gathered is being used to help develop a long-term strategy to counter demand for trafficking-related labour exploitation of migrant workers in Thailand.

But building a stronger knowledge base is only part of the plan.

### Advocating and raising awareness..

A sub-regional trafficking prevention campaign called ‘Travel Smart – Work Smart’ has been designed to raise awareness of young migrant and would-be migrant workers entering Thailand about the risks of trafficking and labour exploitation. Young trafficked victims have often complained that they were unaware of the dangers that existed and felt powerless to resist once they realized they had been tricked or cheated by a recruiter or employer. The Travel Smart – Work Smart campaign explains employment rights and arms young migrants with the information they need to help prevent their exploitation. It also provides them with advice on where to turn if they get into trouble and need help.

On the factory floors of Samut Sakhon, a major food processing zone, young migrant workers are also receiving on-the-job training about their employment rights and occupational health and safety advice.

In the streets of Bangkok, ILO-TICW is supporting a multi-partner initiative to address the demand-side of adult-organized child begging. An information campaign is underway to inform the general public about the gangs that control the children, explaining that the money they give the young beggars ends up in the pockets of adults and furthers the reliance of the children on their exploiters.

Since the beginning of Phase I the project has promoted the rights of children from at-risk areas calling for their inclusion and consultation in trafficking prevention work. In 2004, in collaboration with Save the Children UK and Thai NGO partners, a children’s forum on trafficking was held in Chiang Mai Province and a set of recommendations was presented by the young participants to their Government officials. 5 of the children later participated in a sub-regional forum in Bangkok.

### Building capacity to tackle the problem..

Meanwhile, the ILO-TICW project is working with the Royal Thai Government to support the implementation of cross-border agreements to prevent trafficking and streamline the legal labour migration process. Similarly, the project is working with Governors and other partners in migrant-sending provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Phayao to help establish a database of trafficking cases and at-risk groups. (see more below under ‘collaboration and partnerships’)

### Providing targeted assistance and support..

In these same areas, the ILO-TICW project is supporting the work of partners to provide skills training and alternative income generation to off-set premature migration. An Eco-Tourism Home-Stay project (which began with support of Phase I) continues in Chiang Rai where local villagers with few livelihood options are now taught how to become small guest house operators, offering an authentic home stay package to domestic and international tourists alike. Hill Tribe Tours is marketed by a non-profit organization and is now self-sustaining, with the number of Hill Tribe families participating in the program growing year on year.

Ethnic minority high school students are also being taught about the realities of life in urban areas and the tricks and coercion traffickers can use to entice them into exploitative occupations far from home. The students also take part in vocational skills training that will help them find work with a legitimate employer should they decide to migrate once they reach the legal age for employment.

## Collaboration and partnerships:

In Thailand the project works with two main Government Ministries – The Ministry of Labour (MOL) and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS). It also maintains a dialogue with Thai Workers' and Employers' Organizations.

The ILO-TICW project works with the MOL to help strengthen inter-provincial structures to prevent and combat migration-related trafficking. The project also offers its support in the broader role of implementation of ILO Conventions 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour) and 138 (Minimum Age for Employment). Thailand has ratified both Conventions.

The ILO-TICW project has partnered with the MSDHS to offer its support in the establishment of databases to map out and track trafficking cases and at-risk groups. A database system is being set up in the three northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Phayao. The ILO-TICW project established an office in Chiang Rai in 2004 to continue the good working relationship established with the Governors of these three provinces and carry out the work of various action programmes with the Anti-Trafficking Coordination Unit Northern Thailand (TRAFCORD) and Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand (PPAT).

A working relationship has also been established with a school in Chiang Rai Province where the students – primarily the sons and daughters of minority groups – receive anti-trafficking courses and vocational training to provide them with the skills they will need to support themselves and their families in the future.

Other partners include the Thai Coordinating Committee on Migrant Children (Thai-Cord), which is working to raise awareness about the additional vulnerabilities of migrant children whilst advocating for better protection and access to education and social services to secure their welfare. The Mirror Art Foundation carries out the activities of the Eco Home Stay project in Chiang Rai and the campaign to stop child begging in Bangkok.

Children working in the homes of others – particularly migrant children – are at a heightened risk of abuse, and are often found to be victims of debt bondage. Anti-trafficking work in this area was deemed a priority by the National Stakeholders' Ownership Exercise in May 2004. The ILO-TICW project is supporting the work of the Foundation for Child Development (FCD), which is advocating for behavioral and attitudinal change of the Thai public regarding the use of underage child domestic workers (CDWs). Whilst advocating for an end to child domestic work, FCD is also calling for legislative reform to ensure that all domestic workers of statutory age are treated as employees and their working conditions are in compliance with labour standards and child protection principles.

In Samut Sakhon and Ratchaburi, ILO-TICW partners with the Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN) that works to assist migrant children by encouraging them to get an education and teaching them ways to stay safe and out of the hands of human traffickers and exploitative employers.

ILO-TICW and another ILO education project, supported by APEC, are working together to further develop anti-trafficking curriculum across the Thai school system.

The ILO-TICW project works closely with the United Nations Inter-agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP). The UNIAP acts as the secretariat for a six-country plan of action to coordinate cross border anti-trafficking work by the various Governments. The ILO-TICW project offers technical support at the national level in several areas of the plan of action.

The project also collaborates and coordinates its work with other anti-trafficking partners such as Save the Children UK, International Organization for Migration, World Vision and ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Abuse and Trafficking).

## Working with Employers' and Workers' Organizations:

Phase II of the ILO-TICW project place an increasing emphasis on the involvement of Workers' and Employers' Organizations in responding to human trafficking and the exploitation of migrant workers in destination areas of Thailand.

The project works with representatives of the Thai Workers and Employers' organizations that participated in a special sub-regional advisory meeting in Bangkok in September 2005.

The participation of Thai Employer and Worker Organizations is an integral part of the Travel Smart – Work Smart campaign to prevent migrant workers and their families from trafficking and exploitation. The organizations are working to find common ground that will make life less vulnerable for migrant workers and their families by identifying and campaigning against the exploitative workplaces that threaten the livelihoods and profits of their own members.

**For further information, please contact the Thai country team:**

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



International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)