

► Subsistence farmers

January 2023

In Lao PDR, subsistence farmers (those who are engaged exclusively in own-use production) form a substantial group. It is estimated to comprise some 1.5 million people, or 53 per cent of the working-age population and is classified as being outside the labour force. Taken as a whole, they are thus larger than the 1.4 million people making up the non-civil-servant workforce. They are important to note for two main reasons.

- In practical terms and in reality, they may be difficult to distinguish from economically active farmers. They are also likely to engage in economic activity at certain times during the year, for example in the agricultural offseason. This means that the estimated size of this group will vary depending on when the survey was administered. Data collection for the 2017 LFS was administered between mid-July and the end of August 2017, which was during the agricultural season.
- Due to their characteristics, they are very likely to need some form of social protection or assistance; subsistence farmers are concentrated at the poorer end of the income distribution—38 per cent fall into the bottom national income quintile and some two-thirds fall into the bottom two income quintiles. Average monthly income for subsistence farmers is around two-thirds of that of the economically active labour force. 14 per cent of subsistence farmers also have outstanding debt, a slightly higher proportion than for the active labour force proper as a whole (13 per cent). 100 per cent of subsistence farmers are estimated not to be covered by social security.



This ILO Brief is part of a quantitative research of the labour force and enterprise landscape in Lao People's Democratic Republic to better understand the nature of informality and design tailored social security policies. The research received financial support from the ILO/Korea Partnership Programme and was conducted by Oxford Policy Management.

In partnership with



Contact details

ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

United Nations Building Rajdamnern Nok Avenue Bangkok
10200, Thailand

Ms Loveleen De
Mr Thongkeck Xiong
Ms Nouththong Alounthong

Programme Manager
National Project Coordinator
National Project Coordinator

T: +66 2288 1234
F: +66 2280 1735
E: BANGKOK@ilo.org

E: del@ilo.org
E: thongleck@ilo.org
E: alounthong@ilo.org