

OWNING UP TO SAFE WORK

How employers learned the value in protecting young employees



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THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVE: Establishing cooperation with employers to remove children too young to legally work and protecting older children from hazardous conditions in the workplace.

Targeted action with employers

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: In a series of assessments on the worst forms of child labour conducted in 2005, workplace injuries were distressingly commonplace. In Songkhla province, for example, 30 per cent of the survey's child respondents reported they had been injured on the job. The main causes of injuries were attributed to overwork, heavy work or lack of sleep. The workplaces ranged from unpleasant to hazardous. In certain types of workplaces, workers pay for such basics as gloves and stools from their meagre earnings, or they do without, standing or squatting all day with raw, chafed hands. Wounds and skin infections were common where children were working with knives and raw seafood.



There was a need to encourage employers to ensure their workplace facilities are conducive to children's development, including access to health services and OSH protection.

THE RESPONSE: The International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and its Project to Support National Action to Combat Child Labour and Its Worst Forms in Thailand (the ILO-IPEC project) first focused on expanding employers' awareness on child labour laws and rights and the unacceptable conditions that children work in.

THE PROCESS: To strengthen collaboration with owners and employers of seafood/shrimp-processing and garment-producing businesses, the ILO-IPEC project organized a seminar in Bangkok and invited representatives from nearby provinces to create awareness on the current laws and regulations that govern the treatment of all workers, Thai as well as foreign migrants, working in Thailand, including the Labour Protection Act and international/national labour standards and human rights. The seminar sessions also discussed the social and economic impacts of labour exploitation, including forced and child labour. The participants entailed employers of Thai and migrant workers (including children) in seafood/shrimp-processing factories and representatives from NGOs and employers' and workers' associations.

National level

The Employers' Confederation of Thailand (ECOT) has been an active member of the National Committee on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and other previous child labour-related committees. During the ILO-IPEC project, ECOT proved a major ally in advocating for policy changes related to child labour. In particular, ECOT, most often represented by its Secretary-General, participated in discussions on the drafting of the National Policy and Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2009-2014) and contributed constructive insight for its development. The Cabinet's approval of the NPP in January 2009 is considered a milestone in keeping children out of harmful work situations (see the project note on policy for more information). ECOT is also a member of the just-established subcommittee for updating the hazardous work list (attached to the Labour Act).

The ILO's *Eliminating Child Labour: Guides for Employers* was adapted and translated into Thai for use in trainings with the employers. The manual, which is a set of three guide booklets, is designed to help businesses understand the negative impacts and take action against child labour. The three practical guides provide ideas, advice and examples for the prevention of child labour, the withdrawal of children from work and the protection of young workers from hazardous conditions. The three guides cover: "Introduction to the Issue of Child Labour", "How Employers can Eliminate Child Labour" and "The Role of Employers' Organizations in Combating Child Labour".





Samut Sakhon province

Employers from 98 seafood-processing enterprises participated in two meetings to brainstorm on how to promote the quality of life of their migrant workers that the ILO-IPEC Labour project organized with the Provincial Labour Protection and Welfare Office. In addition, the Provincial Labour Protection and Welfare Office arranged on-site training on child labour, migrant labour and the labour law for 300 employers or their representatives (three training sessions with 100 participants each).

Songkhla and Pattani provinces

The ILO-IPEC project in collaboration with the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand (PPAT), the Operation Centre for Providing Assistance for Women and Child Labourers, the Provincial Labour Protection and Welfare Office and the Federation of Thai Industries - Pattani Chapter organized a seminar to sensitize employers on the importance of working children's health care and well-being. The seminar highlighted how employers could reduce the problem of child labour and still protect their business interests.

An ILO booklet, *Working with Youth: Tips for Small Business Owners*, was translated into Thai and distributed to the partners and to employers during the seminar. The booklet was designed for owners and managers of small businesses who employ young workers (aged 14-17). It describes what an employer needs to know when hiring adolescent workers and how to improve their workplaces so it is “profitable, productive and safe”. The booklet was included in a *Safe Work for Youth Packet*, which also was adapted from a generic ILO document to the Thai situation.

Through the seminar, Planned Parenthood, which specializes in health and educational needs, HIV prevention and livelihoods development for young people, built a strong relationship with the Federation of Thai Industries - Pattani Chapter and small-scale local business owners in both provinces. This helped open the door of three premises for Planned Parenthood’s medical mobile clinics to provide blood testing to check adult and child workers levels of harmful substances and dispense relevant health information in their workplaces. With each visit - twice a month in 2009 - Planned Parenthood set up an exhibition of safe work health topics.

In Pattani, the provincial committee negotiate a memorandum of understanding with employers and human resource officers of fish docks and seafood - processing factories as well as with the Thai Federation of Industries - Pattani Chapter to curb the use of hazardous child labour. The MOU committed the signing parties to not hire children for hazardous work, to provide education and vocational training for child workers and to provide recreational areas and child care facilities around the port areas.

Planned Parenthood conducted a seminar on safe-work checklists for entrepreneurs of micro seafood-processing enterprises in both Songkhla and Pattani provinces. During the seminar, the participants were introduced to safe ways to use and dispose of trashy fish bits, proper water drainage, ventilation and workers’ seating, and how to prevent injuries among employees. The participants were provided the manual *Safety for Small-Scale Fishery Factories in Communities* to improve workplaces to make them safe for child workers. The Technical Committee from the Prince of Songkhla University and the Regional Safe Work Institute based also in Songkhla worked together to produce a draft of the safe work checklist that was then presented to the participating employers for discussion. After being finalized, the safe work checklist was printed and distributed for family-based seafood processing enterprises.

Tak province

Because plantation workers live on the farm where they work, having physical access to the plantations was crucial for the project. The Mae Sot Civil Society, an NGO run by a businesswoman, established a good working relationship with five owners of vegetable and flower plantations, which opened the front gate for



physical exams and blood tests (to determine chemical residue) and the removal of children too young to work or in hazardous conditions. The owners cooperated in improving work conditions in their farms. Some even started to refer children to nearby learning centres or schools; two of them agreed to allow the project to set up a learning centre for pre-school children after work hours. The employers also agreed to allow migrant workers to attend training seminars to become volunteers who monitor the situation of child labour.

After the seminar, one employer, Chaiwat Kongprasert, owner of the Kanjanasak plantation, commented: “We learned that child labour is banned by the whole world. Thailand also has the laws regulating child labour. I think, if this problem happens in our town, we should be the one who solves the problems, not the outsider who does not know about our context and complexity.”

After working with the ILO-IPEC project for several months, Mr. Chaiwat noted, “When parents go out to work, small kids, if staying at home alone, will be unsafe. So we tell our workers that there is a school nearby and encourage them to send their children to study there. For elder kids, whose family conditions critically call for their labour we are thinking about giving education to them after working hours.”

Another 11 plantation owners indicated interest in joining the project activities.

The plantation owners also participated in a field trip to another plantation that is a good role model for managing foreign migrant workers.

A “Good Farm” citation was created to be awarded to employers in Tak province who have improved the environment and working conditions for migrant workers and child workers.

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- Many workplaces, such as plantations, are quite isolated, and it is not easy for children to get to a learning centre without pre-arranged transport; their security remains a concern.

OUTCOMES:

- The seminar, Exploitation of Thai and Migrant Workers in the Seafood and Garment Industries in Thailand - Situation Analysis, Legal Implications and Effective Responses, drew 528 participants.
- 180 employers in Songkhla and Pattani provinces attended training workshops.
- 3 plantation owners and 182 worker families participated in the child labour survey and the blood testing in Tak province.
- 1,415 children (920 in Songkhla and 495 in Pattani) received blood testing services and safe work-related information.
- 128 employers (87 women) and workers in Songkhla and Pattani attended the workshop on the safe-work checklist.
- A total of 161 child workers in Samut Sakhon attended a weekend workshop on safe and decent work, their labour rights and their human rights.
- 160 household enterprises in Songkhla and 20 in Pattani received the safe work checklist.
- 5 “Good Farm” awards were awarded to employers in Samut Sakhon province and 5 in Tak province.

“Large companies in Pattani do not accept workers who are younger than 15. There are some workers who are between 15 and 18 years old. They are taken care of by the Pattani Provincial Office of Labour Protection and Welfare. The only concern we have so far is most employers are not familiar with the labour laws. They may not recognize that workers aged 15-17 are considered child labourers,” said Adisorn Klinpikul, the Human Resources Manager in a fish-processing factory and a member with the Federation of Thai Industry - Pattani Chapter. “We focus on how to improve the subcontractors, the micro and small

facilities that carry out fish sorting at the ports. They employ women and children. If we want to enforce the laws, we certainly can do it. The law is already in place. However, this approach will not yield a good result. It is by force and not by a voluntary commitment. Instead, we developed a labour guideline for micro and small facilities. This guideline will tell them how to administer the labour issues in a correct way.”

“I used to work and received 100 baht per day. I picked garlic and chillies. I don’t like working the middle of the sun. It is very hot. I sweat a lot and become very exhausted. Studying at school is much better,” says Thi Ha Jor, 15 in Tak province. “People come to visit us. They bring along snacks and organize fun games for us. This is very good. I like it a lot. I want to be here. I also got vaccines and blood test.”