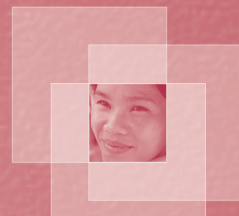




Meeting the Challenge

Proven Practices for Human Trafficking Prevention
in the Greater Mekong Sub-region



International Labour Organization

LAO PDR

INSTITUTIONAL REINFORCEMENT

How bolstering a government agency
better protects children

THE PROVEN PRACTICE:

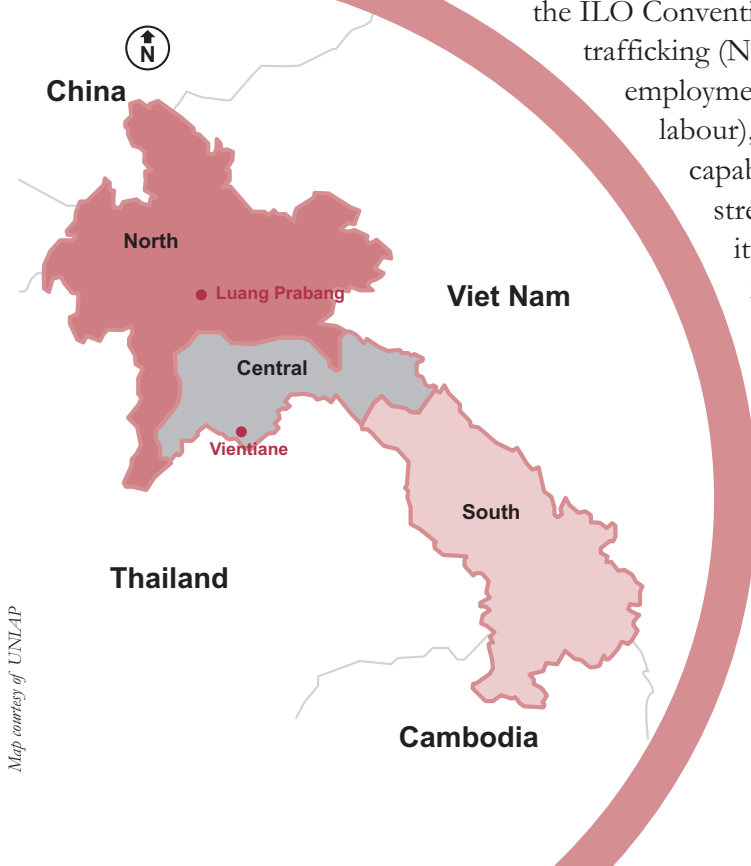
Following through on the creation of a government unit to build up political commitment as well as the capabilities and dedication of ministry staff to better respond to issues of child labour and trafficking.

Strengthening the role of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in action against child labour and trafficking in Lao PDR

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE:

Tens of thousands of young people migrate from Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand, typically on a seasonal basis. Many of them start as voluntary migrants but are tricked, cheated or forced into trafficking situations somewhere along the way. Other children are found working in the worst forms of child labour in Lao PDR. By the late 1990s, the Government recognized it needed new approaches to confront child labour within its borders and trafficking of its citizens abroad. The Government's labour-based responses to these problems have been led by the Ministry of Labour and

Social Welfare (MOLSW), making it a ministry crucial to the protection of children and women. However, as part of the process to sign the ILO Conventions most relevant to child labour and trafficking (No. 138 on minimum age for admission to employment and No. 182 on the worst forms child labour), the Government acknowledged that the capabilities of the MOLSW needed strengthening to cope with the issues under its mandate as well as the coordination and information sharing among all agencies and departments at the national and provincial levels.



Map courtesy of UNLAP





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THE RESPONSE:

With support from the International Labour Organization's International Programme to End Child Labour (ILO-IPEC), a Child Labour and Child Trafficking Office (CLCT Office) was set up within the MOLSW in 2001 to coordinate interventions for confronting the child labour problem, including the trafficking of children. The Lao Government ratified ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 in 2005. In 2002, the Lao and Thai Governments signed a memorandum of understanding on labour migration and another one in 2005 on combating human trafficking, especially women and children, and looked for ways fulfil the collaboration. The Government of Lao PDR is also a member of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) and signed the COMMIT Ministerial Declaration and corresponding MOU in 2004.

Within Lao PDR, the Government looked to improve its management system for regulating migrant labour and assisting trafficking victims.

In early 2004, the ILO's Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (ILO-TICW) began supporting the CLCT Office financially and technically as the key coordinating body on labour-based solutions to child labour and trafficking within and beyond the MOLSW. As such, the CLCT office could help the Ministry develop and implement action plans on trafficking in children and women at the national, provincial and district levels. The support from the ILO-TICW project concentrated on:

- **Knowledge base and advocacy** so that CLCT Office staff have a clear understanding of the scope of child labour and child trafficking in Lao PDR. The CLCT Office then could better assist the MOLSW in advocating with other government agencies, mass organizations and non-government organizations as well as the children and women at risk of child labour and trafficking.
- **Legal frameworks, policies and plans** so that the CLCT Office can better assist the MOLSW in assessing needed improvements of current laws as well as increasing their “legal literacy” and general understanding of ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182.
- **Coordination and collaboration** between Steering Committees that were established at the national, provincial and district levels and monitoring the implementation of the ILO-TICW project in all targeted provinces.

THE PROCESS:

The CLCT Office now acts as the secretariat for the Ministerial Steering Committee for the ILO-TICW project on counter trafficking and as the liaising base between ILO-IPEC, partners and local implementing agencies. The Head of the CLCT Office is a member of the drafting committee for the national plan of action on human trafficking for the period 2007–2012, which is the first ever on trafficking.

Through interventions from the director of the CLCT Office, the national plan now includes several ILO-specific approaches to trafficking prevention, such as safer migration and policies on recruitment, increasing people’s understanding of safe migration with information packages, offering pre-departure training, strengthening labour-monitoring practices (both internally and with the Thai Government), and developing alternative opportunities (with the public and private sector, including micro-credit schemes and other programmes to increase household income and provide financial safety nets).



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Activities to reinforce the CLCT Office's capacity for information distribution have included:

- Accessing available research and other sources of information on child labour and trafficking;
- Updating all members of the MOLSW and the Ministerial, Provincial and District Steering Committees on the child labour and trafficking situation through information meetings, field visits, campaigns and other awareness-raising activities;
- Encouraging stronger involvement of workers and employers in the protection of workers' rights and interests and anti-human trafficking activities at national and local levels, such as trainings and information dissemination on child rights, child labour and workers' rights.
- In 2006, ILO-TICW initiated with the Government, the CLCT Office and other UN and international organization partners,¹ 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 up the skills 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.



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¹ UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, Asia Regional Trafficking in Persons Project and the National Communication Association

Activities to enhance the CLCT Office's work on improving legal frameworks and policies have included:

- Promoting the realignment of national laws to conform with ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182;
- Helping draft or revise laws and regulations related to human trafficking, migration, child rights, child labour and workers' interests;
- Facilitating the process to establish the national plan of action on trafficking in children and women at the national, provincial and district levels;
- Encouraging staff of relevant departments or mass organizations (Women's Union, Youth Unions and National Front for Reconstructions) and members of the Ministerial, Provincial and District Steering Committees to mainstream child labour and trafficking issues into their programmes and policies and regularly reporting on their progress;
- Organizing regular meeting on child labour legislation, policies and programmes;
- Organizing training programmes to deepen the understanding of UN and ILO Conventions on child labour and human trafficking.

Activities to better coordinate between the Ministerial, Provincial and District Steering Committees have included:

- Finalizing the details on the functions of the CLCT Office;
- Organizing and facilitating regular Ministerial Steering Committee meetings;
- Providing ongoing technical support to the Provincial and District Steering Committees on ending child labour and trafficking;
- Coordinating, reporting and evaluating activities in the area of child labour and human trafficking to and between the Ministerial, Provincial and District Steering Committees, UN agencies and international organizations;
- Preparing quarterly reports to the Ministerial Steering Committee on the progress of the overall national programme to combat child labour and trafficking;



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- Facilitating the Lao PDR contribution and participation to sub-regional conferences on child labour and child trafficking.

Activities for better monitoring of projects have included:

- Developing mechanisms and work plans for monitoring;
- Conducting regular field visits and meeting with district and provincial persons, particularly to discuss ways to improve coordination and communication;
- Ensuring that the monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems between Ministerial, Provincial and District Steering Committees and the ILO-TICW project is functioning and that regular reports are being prepared;
- Assessing quarterly progress reports from implementing agencies;
- Participating in the midterm evaluation of the ILO-TICW project.

OUTCOMES:

- The CLCT Office has become the centre for improved coordination and the sharing of information on child labour and ILO-TICW work on human trafficking from local, district, provincial and national levels as well as between them.
- The CLCT Office is an active member of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT) Task Force and was a member of the drafting committee for the National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking.
- Regular publication of information and stories on human trafficking in Lao-language newspapers and on national and provincial television and radio programmes.
- Anti-child labour campaigns launched to commemorate the World Day Against Child Labour in 2006 and 2007.

In praise of the project, Onevong Keobounnavong, Director of the CLCT Office, offered: “I can say proudly that the Child Labour and Child Trafficking Office built up gradually thanks to the technical and financial assistance from ILO and advice from the Ministerial Steering Committee chair. The staff, including myself, were equipped with a deep understanding of human trafficking, child labour, child rights and better knowledge of project management. I am happy to see Lao PDR ratify ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 in 2005. The TICW prevention strategies are now being mainstreamed into national strategies, namely the National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking.”

ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- The MOLSW continues to struggle with its weak capacity.
- The public's understanding of human trafficking is still low.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Having a chairperson on the Ministerial Steering Committee committed to the purpose of the anti-child labour and anti-trafficking work made a significant difference in how he paid attention to and followed up with the work carried out by the Child Labour and Child Trafficking Office.
- Regular monitoring to target project areas provided management staff technical and financial reporting skills as well as increased awareness on the human trafficking problem.



LAO PDR

