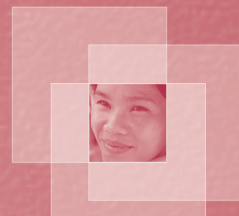




Meeting the Challenge

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



International Labour Organization

LAO PDR

KNOWLEDGE BOOSTERS

An intense training of key advocates on effective awareness raising

THE PROVEN PRACTICE:

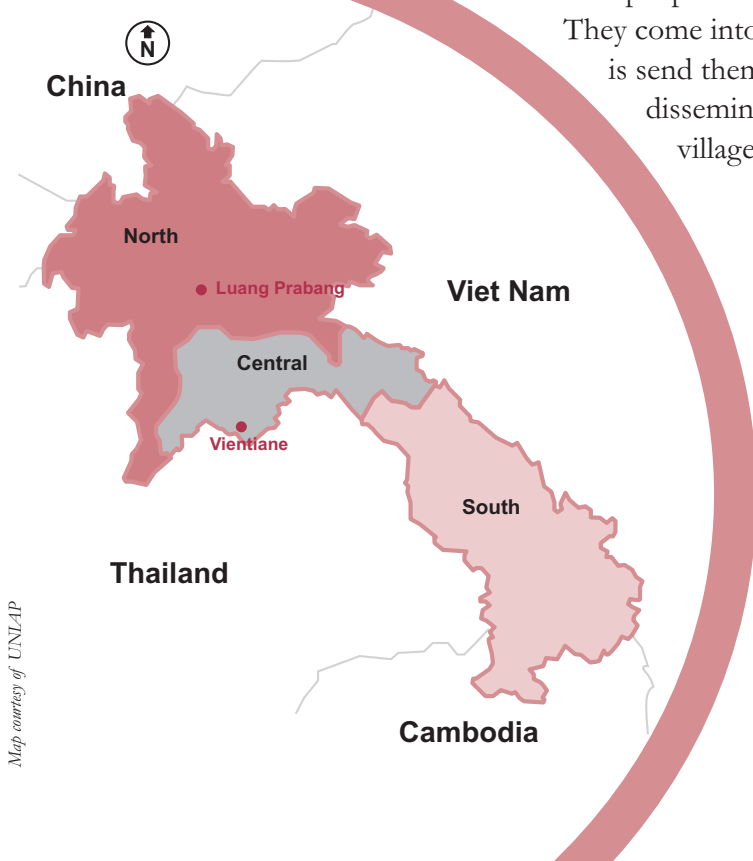
Arming a women's government organization that has wide-ranging reach and authority with advocacy tools and a deep understanding of human trafficking, which has enabled them to more concretely pass on vital protective knowledge to vulnerable groups as well as mainstream trafficking strategies within their regular duties.

Institutionalizing awareness raising in Lao PDR

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE:

Evidence indicates that the incidence of irregular migration into Thailand from its neighbouring Lao People's Democratic Republic is increasing. This is partly attributed to unrealistically positive images of life in the more economically developed Thailand that is not mitigated by information about the dangers, risks and vulnerabilities associated with migration in general and irregular migration in particular. Although the Lao Government regards human trafficking as a threat to its social security, there is also a lack of awareness among relevant provincial and district officials and staff of national laws and regulations on migration, labour protection and overseas employment, which ultimately inhibits the development of a protective environment.

"Lots of people ask about and want to get overseas work. They come into the district labour office, but all I can do is send them to the provincial office. It's important to disseminate existing regulations directly to the villages," explained a district official.



Map courtesy of UNLAP





The Lao Women's Union is a government organization with a comprehensive network of members and representatives at the central, provincial, district and village levels and has a mandate to advocate for women's rights and development needs as well as gender parity. It is to oversee directly or indirectly the implementation of all government policies and programmes related to women's development and gender issues. Thus, it is ideally situated to make a significant contribution to the tackling of the problem of trafficking in children and women. However, its officials admit that its senior ranks and other staff do not have the skills or genuine understanding to conduct awareness raising on human trafficking and migration issues effectively.

THE RESPONSE:

Through the International Labour Organization's Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (ILO-TICW), the Lao Women's Union (LWU) initiated a year-long drive to establish and train sustainable "awareness-raising" teams of government officials at the national, provincial and district levels. Each team was sensitized on trafficking-related issues, including national laws and regulations (particularly on immigration, employment and human trafficking) and relevant United Nations and ILO Conventions newly ratified by the Government, and groomed on how to effectively disseminate vital information, including communication skills. The teams were then mandated to spread protective information and messages within communities and the government agencies they represent.

THE PROCESS:



ILO-TICW staff and members of the Child Labour and Child Trafficking Office¹ consulted with the LWU on criteria for a central training and support team, the production of course materials and the training of trainers courses.

Training of trainers materials include a trainer's manual and an advocate's handbook (method and content), supporting teaching and outreach materials (methods, charts, posters) and leaflets. The training tools were revised from time to time, based on the experiences made while using them.

Then organizations and government departments with expertise and interest in legal mechanisms and trafficking prevention were approached to collaboratively plan and design the training.

To create the central team, staff within the Women's Rights Department of the LWU, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Public Security and the Non-formal Education Department of the Ministry of Education were first engaged in a five-day workshop, receiving skills in both awareness raising and as trainers. The initial training concentrated on trafficking issues, tools and resources. That central team consisted of seven trainers and one team leader (two from the Labour and Social Welfare Ministry, two from the Public Security Ministry and four from the LWU, including the team leader, and was predominantly female).²



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¹ Within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

² One of the team members from the Ministry of Education ultimately couldn't participate in provincial trainings and was replaced by another LWU staff person, though she did assist in developing the trainer's handbook.



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The team then identified and compiled suitable training materials and began developing other trainers among provincial and district authorities on:

- Technical knowledge on trafficking and safe migration, including women's rights and women's empowerment (Lao Law on the Development and Protection of Women's Rights); human trafficking concepts, dangers, examples and regulations; laws and regulations on safe migration as well as ways of reducing vulnerability while migrating; developing trafficking information networks and how to report cases or suspicions of abuse and the negative impacts of child labour.
- Training methods (practice and instruction on how to use and follow the curriculum and methods to effectively deliver courses/modules) and advocacy (how to share the information with communities, particularly through the media) on child labour, women's rights and women's empowerment, human trafficking, safe migration and trafficking information networks.

The provincial and district authorities in turn conducted trainings at the district and village levels, with ongoing support from the central LWU. Three provincial training teams were created (Sayabouly and Bolikhamxay provinces and Vientiane capital, each consisting of seven provincial and seven district members). Village authorities trained included representatives from the LWU, the Lao Youth Union, the Lao Front for National Construction, the Labour and Social Welfare Division, the Public Security Division, village leaders and teachers.

The objectives within the capacity-building training centred on:

- Enabling and encouraging the LWU and government partners to coordinate and directly address human trafficking in their work.
- Increasing the LWU's and partners' knowledge of issues, laws, regulations and other tools related to anti-trafficking efforts.
- Strengthening the LWU's ability to address the trafficking problem through advocacy (media) and by monitoring and evaluating the awareness-raising trainings at the district and village levels. This includes ensuring coordination and communication between the central, provincial, district and village branches of the LWU on trafficking issues by promoting institutional mechanisms.
- Strengthening the LWU's ability to conduct baseline and evaluation surveys to assess impact and influence awareness-raising activities.
- Strengthening communication and coordination between the LWU and the social welfare and public security ministries in responding to trafficking and problems that children and women experience.
- Promoting at the provincial and district levels awareness of the new national law on the Development and Protection of Women's Rights, gender issues related to exploitation and trafficking, the new revised National Labour Law and Immigration Regulations, ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182, and of the dangers of trafficking and irregular labour migration.
- Promoting the mainstreaming of child labour/human trafficking issues into the programmes of the LWU by conceptually linking child labour, migration, gender parity and human trafficking.

The objectives within the awareness training centred on:

- Disseminating information about human trafficking and safe migration to individuals who are vulnerable to trafficking or ill-prepared migration through existing channels and mechanisms (monthly district meetings and through the village bank management structure).
- Sensitizing on gender equality and gender issues related to sexual abuse, labour exploitation and human trafficking.
- Encouraging communication between district and village authorities with villagers about issues of trafficking and migration.



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OUTCOMES:

- A trainer's manual and an advocate's handbook and outreach materials (charts and posters) were produced.
- A central team of eight trainers, along with three provincial training teams with six trainers each and eight district training teams with six trainers each in two districts in Bolikhamxay, three districts in Sayabouly and three districts in Vientiane, totalling 74 trainers, have been established.
- LWU members and village chiefs in a total of 26 villages in eight districts with substantial numbers of irregular and undocumented migrants who have left the country have been trained so far.

Because the training teams consisted of government officers, they could use the training materials and new skills to spread the vital protection information on human trafficking to other locations outside the targeted project areas. This essentially represents an effective mainstreaming of human trafficking strategies into their office duties.

Beyond improving the LWU's capacity to train and increase its awareness-raising efforts, the training has strengthened links between the Women's Union and other key ministries and departments working in trafficking prevention, at all levels.

Tapping into existing communication structures (village chiefs and village LWU heads) and strengthening their skills has been an efficient and innovative way of sharing information about central-level changes with people throughout the country. This also addresses the lack of knowledge even within government structures about existing laws, regulations and agreements. Providing both the information, the mandate and support to share the information with authorities at the village level has been vital.

"In being developed as a trainer, I acquired a better understanding of human trafficking and my training skills are improved. Now, when I take part in meetings or workshops on trafficking, women's rights or related issues, I contribute my inputs and share experiences with other colleagues, acknowledged Ms. Chompheng, an LWU member of the central training team.



ONGOING CHALLENGES:

- Trainers trained at the district level require further support to strengthen their capacity in training skills and human trafficking knowledge and strategies.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Although the core trainers received only one training, repeatedly conducting trainings strengthened their understanding and knowledge of legal instruments and the relation to human trafficking. The repetition helped the trainers become more comfortable and confident in taking on a role of authority and sharing information as their training experience grew.
- By using people whose work entails implementing and/or overseeing the implementation of laws and regulations as trainers helps to significantly increase their knowledge and communication skills.
- By training and supporting government departments at all levels to learn about and communicate central-level legislative changes both encourages and speeds the process of getting the information out to people.
- A challenge to capacity building among government officials is that as an individual's skills improve, that person becomes increasingly likely to be shifted to a different position (with possibly different responsibilities). The loss of these individuals who have the knowledge on regulations and experience in information sharing also can affect the communication network between and among departments and organizations, central and village authorities.



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