

FACT GATHERING

How continuous research makes a difference



1

THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVE: A more comprehensive understanding of where children work and in what conditions, leading to informed policy making and better targeted programming.

Enhancing the knowledge base

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE: There always seems to be a lack of data to provide an overall picture of the child labour situation due to the limited scope of data collection and differences in methods of agencies. Typically, the data that different agencies collect tends to relate to their target group. As well, working children, particularly those in the worst forms, are often hidden, mobile or scattered in many areas making it difficult to find them. A close approximation on numbers, let alone exactness, is difficult to achieve.

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) commissioned several field studies to expand the factual understanding of the child labour situation in Thailand. The conclusions and recommendations generated from the research have been decisively constructive for awareness raising, policy advocacy and future programming.

THE PROCESS: The ILO-IPEC project worked with local NGOs and university researchers to study areas that had been little researched previously.

Overview of the child labour situation in six provinces

When designing programmes, ILO-IPEC emphasizes the importance of basing decisions on solid research. Thus, before the start of the ILO-IPEC project started, research institutions in six provinces known to have child labour problems were contracted to assess the situation: Rajabhat Chaing Rai University (Chiang Rai research), Chiang Mai University (Mae Sot), Chulalongkorn University (Samut Sakhon), Khon Kaen University (Udon Thani) and Prince of Songkhla University (Songkhla and Pattani). Thammasat University prepared the overall synthesis report.



The research found that the child labour situation was most severe in the following sectors: domestic work, child begging, service/entertainment, agriculture and fishing/fish-processing. The 2006 synthesis report *Assessing the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the Selected Provinces of Thailand: Chiang Rai, Tak, Udon Thani, Samut Sakhon, Songkhla and Pattani* revealed that although there has been significant progress in addressing child labour in Thailand, it remains a persistent problem. Of the 2,744 child labourers surveyed, 35 per cent were younger than the legal age of employment of 15 years. The majority of them worked more than eight hours a day, typically from 8 in the morning to 5 in the evening. A significant portion - 41 per cent - worked in the evening or at night or had unspecified working hours.

The largest proportions of the surveyed children regarded as in the worst form of labour were: 100 per cent of those begging, 72 per cent of those in domestic work, 49 per cent of those in entertainment/karaoke bars and 40 per cent doing agriculture work. The majority of those children were non-Thai or migrant children from neighbouring countries, although mostly from Myanmar (67 per cent). Only 16 per cent of the Thai children interviewed were considered as working in a worst form of labour. And 46 per cent of all the girls and 40 per cent of all the boys surveyed were also recognized as in a worst form of labour.

Following the synthesis report, various institutions and NGOs conducted specific research:

Trafficking and forced labour on fishing boats and fishing-related workplaces

1. The ILO-IPEC project helped the Mirror Foundation establish an in-depth information database on cases of forced labour and trafficking from field surveys and field investigations on the situation of children and adults working on Thai deep-sea fishing boats in various areas within Thailand and in foreign waters. Previously, there was a general perception that only foreign migrants were trafficked onto these boats. The Mirror Foundation is a Thai NGO working on community development and to combat all forms of exploitation, forced child labour and human trafficking.

The Mirror Foundation conducted the research study, finding 83 Thai victims (15 younger than 18) lured or abducted over a six-year period and enough indication of hundreds, or possibly even thousands more. The Mirror Foundation has used the information in campaign activities and to strengthen the anti-trafficking multidisciplinary network and referral services recently established in all provinces where migrants either originate or where they seek out employment. The Mirror Foundation also collaborated with the Provincial Social Development and Human Security Offices in 15 provinces (in the Northeast, the North, Tak province, Aranyaprathet and Poipet towns, which are sending areas of workers lured into deep-sea fishing) largely to follow up with victims but also to see what services are in place for educating would-be Thai migrants on the realities of looking for work in unknown places.

2. The Labour Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN) wrote a case study of its initiated police raid on the Anoma shrimp-peeling factory that engaged the newly established anti-trafficking multidisciplinary action team to help rescue 74 men, women and children who were forced to live and work long hours in the factory. The report chronicles the steps taken in coordination with police, NGOs and government agencies. It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the raid that resulted in the successful prosecution of the factory owner and manager (who were sentenced to eight and six years, respectively, in prison). The report also spotlights the anti-trafficking multidisciplinary action team's working together to conduct the raid, showing the roles and responsibilities. The aim is to encourage more raids on abusive workplaces and better protection of foreign migrant workers in Thailand. LPN is a Thai NGO working to protect the rights of migrants from Myanmar.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children

The Research and Development Institute of Khon Kaen University was asked to investigate the situation of commercial sexual exploitation of children in three under-researched provinces - Khon Kaen, Nong Khai and Udon Thani - major source areas for girls and women in prostitution within Thailand and abroad as well as major receiving areas for girls and young women primarily from Lao PDR. The research remains ongoing, but the researchers ultimately expect to conduct structured interviews with 100 child victims as well as 100 children who are vulnerable to being exploited, 30 parents of victims or vulnerable children, 30 people regarded as exploiters, such as customers, brothel owners, intermediaries and others, and 20 other informants, such as social workers and representatives of government agencies and NGOs.

The researchers are looking at the extent and conditions of child involvement in commercial sex situations and what patterns precipitated their ending up there. The final report will include profiles of child victims as well as exploiters and facilitators.

Child labour in the rubber value chain

ILO-IPEC first looked at child labour in rubber plantations years ago. Due to a government policy to boost the rubber production for export, rubber-growing areas have expanded to eastern and north-eastern provinces. Along with that growth there has been an increase in the number of migrants and their families working on rubber plantations. The understanding of the child labour situation clearly needed updating. The Institute for Population and Social Research within Mahidol University is working with partners to conduct a rapid assessment that covers rubber plantations in the southern Phang-nga and Songkhla provinces where plantations are highly concentrated.



Although the research remains ongoing, the researchers expect to ultimately conduct structured interviews with 430 children and their parents (or household heads) and in-depth interviews with 30-40 employers, plantation owners, government officials and NGO staff. They are looking to assess the living and workplace conditions and education facilities. That includes looking for any difference in working conditions and the overall economic and social context

between girls and boys, and children of different nationalities and ages. They are also looking at the proportion of children and adult workers in the plantations and the factors that draw children into working (employers, children's families, neighbors and communities, etc.). The report is to include details on the overall picture of the rubber-supply chain in Thailand (the various production stages) and examine how the overall value chain links to child labour. The researchers are also assessing the available support mechanisms (community, employer, informal networks, etc.) in place and what is needed.

The local partners involved in the research have a presence in the rubber plantations, providing services to children living and working there. The partners are:

- Foundation for Education and Development (FED), an NGO working to promote education, human rights and the development of a safe, working environment for people from Myanmar in Phang-nga province. The FED has set up eight learning centres in rubber plantations for children of Burmese migrants for around 500-600 children and maintains a good relationship with the migrant families as well as the plantation owners.
- The Department of Plant Science, Faculty of Natural Resources, Prince of Songkhla University, provides education and conducts research in the field of plant production and management, emphasizing species that are socio-economically important to southern Thailand. With their extensive experience in research activities with rubber plantation owners, they are helping the data collection among the workers.

- Stella Maris Seafarers Center (Baan Suksan) in Songkhla has worked with the migrant community since 1993, providing workers in the fishing industry temporary shelter, counselling services and legal assistance to those whose rights have been abused. Their extensive experience with the migrant community gives them good access to workers in the rubber plantations.

Financial crisis impacts on child labour

The impact of the global financial crisis on child labour is currently being studied in collaboration with the United Nations Interagency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) and World Vision. Specifically, the researchers are using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to look at how the current economic crisis in Thailand is affecting families with children - both Thai and migrant - who are already working or are vulnerable to dropping out of school to work, especially in the worst forms of labour, in Songkhla and Pattani provinces. The researchers want to identify trends in vulnerability, working conditions, how children are put into work and where and examine the effectiveness of protections that social services provide, covering such areas as education, public health, working conditions, wages, benefits and migrant registration, within the changing economic environment.



OUTCOMES:

- The report, *Assessing the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the Selected Provinces of Thailand: Chiang Rai, Tak, Udon Thani, Samut Sakhon, Songkhla and Pattani*, was finalized in 2006 and an unpublished summary of the findings is available upon request.
- The Mirror Foundation report, *Forced Labour of Thai Males in Deep-Sea Fishing*, was published in English and Thai in June 2010, presents what is known about the practices of illegal brokers targeting Thai males and where they operate in Thailand.
- The report by the Labour Rights Promotion Network, *Raiding Abusive Workplaces: Making a Strong Case of Trafficking and Forced Labour*, was published in English and Thai in June 2010.
- The research report on child labour in Thailand's rubber industry will be published towards the end of 2010.
- The report *Situational Analysis Research on Thai and Foreign Migrant Children in Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Selected Areas of Thailand: Khon Khan, Udon Thani and Nong Khai Provinces* will be published in English and Thai towards the end of 2010.
- The research report *Economic Crisis on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Situation in Thailand: A Case Study of Songkhla and Pattani* was published in June 2010.

Assistant Professor Dr. Penpisuth Jaisanit, Rajabhat Chiang Rai University, who coordinated the 2005 research component in Chiang Rai province, says the findings have fed into several applications. "Since we have the data from our child labour research, we try to raise awareness on this issue and include it in the courses offered by our university, such as bachelor's and master's degree courses, various training courses for organizations and government agencies, meetings and interviews with the media."

Some 113 representatives of public and private organizations attended the Mirror Foundation's national seminar on the findings of its field surveys in 2009. The findings were used by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to develop public policy and ways to address the problems. The Mirror Foundation set up a website www.notforsale.in.th with information regarding the forced labour and trafficking of Thai males onto fishing boats. The site received approximately 20,000 hits between January and June 2009.

The Mirror Foundation also initiated evidence-based awareness campaigns to attract media attention to educate the public. Newspaper, magazine, radio and television interviews were conducted. Mirror also produced a 45-second radio message for broadcast by the Provincial Operations Centres on Anti-Human Trafficking. The Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided the Mirror Foundation with a grant to produce additional information materials - posters, banners and copies of a documentary film for distribution.

The detailed record of the raid on a shrimp-peeling factory and the subsequent successful prosecution of the owner and manager prepared by LPN have been used by the commander of the Provincial Police Region 7 unit in trainings he has initiated with the police force to improve the track record of conducting raids and protecting migrant workers' labour and human rights.

