BRINGING IN THE BOSSES
How employers’ participation increased prevention work in receiving areas

THE EMERGING PROVEN PRACTICE:
Sensitizing employers to recognize their role in protecting young people from trafficking abuses by making respective members aware of migrant workers’ rights and the business case for providing decent work conditions.

Improving recruitment and employment of women migrant workers in Viet Nam

THE INITIAL CHALLENGE:
After shifting its Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (ILO-TICW) to a labour policy perspective, the International Labour Organization (ILO) wanted to include prevention activities that targeted destination areas for migrants. The project’s first phase in Viet Nam only concentrated on sending areas and young women trafficked across borders for sexual exploitation.

For the second phase, the TICW project aimed to maximize ILO’s comparative advantage of partnership with employers’ organization and to involve them in the project activity.

THE RESPONSE:
The ILO-TICW central Project Advisory Committee’s membership was expanded to include the Bureau for Employers’ Activities of the Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) as well as the Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) and the Union of Viet Nam’s Cooperatives.

In response to that participation, the VCCI developed a strategy for a proactive role in human trafficking prevention efforts that involved sensitizing its members to improve the recruitment and employment practices of female migrant workers in both national and cross-border markets.
THE PROCESS:

The ILO-TICW project first conducted various workshops to increase the awareness of central and provincial ministry officials on the vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation of migrant workers in Viet Nam’s urban centres and those who seek to work abroad. These workshops also introduced skills and concepts on how to better confront labour exploitation, enhance safe migration awareness campaigns, monitor projects and mainstream good practices from the ILO-TICW project into other national programmes.

The ILO-TICW project assisted VCCI to raise the awareness on the various dimensions of trafficking and labour exploitation and to cultivate a partnership with its member enterprises in prevention efforts and promote decent work opportunities for migrants.

In collaboration with ILO-TICW staff, the VCCI organized a workshop entitled “Role of Employers in Safeguard of Young Migration Workers” (September 2005). This was the first attempt to involve an employers’ organization in anti-trafficking work in Viet Nam. The participants were from key sectors, such as garment, footwear, handicraft and food processing industries, that attract the majority of young migrant workers.

Recommendations from that discussion included the sensitizing of employers on the need to protect young migrants, encouraging good business practices and setting severe penalty measures for violations of the Labour Code. These recommendations indicated a high level of readiness among employers to engage in this issue.

VCCI, on the basis of the recommendations, developed a ten-month programme (starting in March 2007) to advocate and provide relevant skills needed for its staff and members:

- First, the handbook entitled The Roles of Employers in Preventing Children and Women from Trafficking was developed by the Bureau of Employers’ Activities as a guide for employers. It provides an update of relevant legal knowledge and introduces prevention measures. The handbook also lists good practices on the recruitment and employment of female labour workers in enterprises.

- As a result of the training of trainer courses, a core group of 20 trainers was established, including eight from VCCI staff and 12 from business associations and women business clubs in Quang Ninh and Thanh Hoa.
provinces and in Ho Chi Minh city. Along with the employers’ handbook, they were provided updated information on the trafficking situation of children and women and decent work employment practices for migrant female workers. They are expected to become secondary trainers to enhance the awareness among the business community members on trafficking prevention.

- VCCI then selected 6 of the 20 trainers to run three training workshops for some 120 representatives from enterprises with many female workers in Quang Ninh and Thanh Hoa provinces and in Ho Chi Minh city.
- The VCCI also cooperated with the Labour Export Association to organize workshops to sensitize some 80 participants from labour export companies on the laws on sending Vietnamese workers for overseas employment on a contractual basis. The workshops also provided skills training for negotiating with foreign partners on recruitment contracts for sending workers abroad.
- A survey was conducted to analyse the situations of women migrant workers in Ho Chi Minh city. The survey highlighted issues in the recruitment and employment of female workers. It also analysed the difficulties that employers experience and included suggested actions for the next stage of the anti-trafficking work.

**ONGOING CHALLENGES:**

- The involvement of the VCCI in human anti-trafficking effort is a new development in Viet Nam. Government agencies and businesses are not fully aware of the role that employers can have in trafficking prevention and are still learning how best to maximize the potential.

**OUTCOMES:**

- A core group of 20 trainers, including staff of the VCCI, business associations and women business clubs of Quang Ninh, Thanh Hoa and Ho Chi Minh city, who have been trained will become trainers for subsequent training activities.
- Some 120 VCCI members gained awareness on trafficking prevention measures, which should lead to better recruitment and employment of female migrant workers.
- 80 representatives of labour export companies were sensitized on the laws on sending Vietnamese workers for overseas employment on contractual basis and on contract negotiation skills.
LESSONS LEARNED:

• 500 copies of the handbook The Roles of Employers in Preventing Trafficking are being distributed to VCCI branch offices and members.

“In the beginning, it was very difficult to approach employers on human trafficking matters,” said Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh, Deputy Director of the Bureau for Employers’ Activities. “They thought they were neither involved in the practice of it nor responsible for it – that it is the responsibility of the government agencies.” The training courses raised their level of responsibility, she said, adding that they are now well aware that creating a healthy and safe working environment with a comfortable salary will better attract and retain their labour force and contribute towards preventing human trafficking problems.

Employers are more concerned with improving the overall business environment, particularly removing the negative image on labour exploitation. Employers who want to be proactive and to participate in human trafficking prevention efforts and in creating a healthy labour environment can create a synergy, particularly when they coordinate their efforts.

• “Employers are very interested in this programme. They want to know how to retain their workers and how to make workers happy and stay with them in the long run,” said Nguyen Thi Hong Ha, Head of Division for Employers’ Activities of Branch of VCCI in Ho Chi Minh city.

• Policy statements from organizations carry significant clout and weight. Their messages on safeguarding the interest of employees (such as a well-treated worker is less likely to resign; low staff turnover means higher productivity and less investment in training) will help promote both ethical rationale and business efficient practices and that engaging in anti-trafficking programmes can potentially bring about considerable impact.

Despite its small scale, the ILO-TICW project has contributed towards improving the quality of work standards – a demand from trade partners while Viet Nam has acceded to the World Trade Organization, explained Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh. “It’s a very small project, but we have really been involved and gained considerable outcomes.”