



► **MOLSW and EU visit to SOLAR, Safe and Fair, and Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia Projects**

Champasak Province

19 May 2023



**Spotlight
Initiative**



**International
Labour
Organization**



Funded by the
European Union

▶ OVERVIEW

The high-level visit to Paksong District and Pakse City, Champasak Province, Lao PDR on 19 May 2023 will observe the activities under three projects:

1. Reducing Vulnerability in Lao PDR: Advancing Social Protection and Labour Rights and Entitlements in the coffee and tea sectors (SOLAR);
2. Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia (S2SR); and
3. Safe and Fair: Realizing Women Migrant Workers' Rights and Opportunities in the ASEAN region (SAF).

The projects are implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in partnership with the central and provincial departments of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) and with financial support from the European Union (EU).

Delegates will visit an organic tea production and processing facility that currently exports to EU markets and interact with ILO's local partners as well as tea and coffee farmers to understand their problems and how they have benefitted from the SOLAR project.

Delegates will also visit the Migrant Assistance Office and the Home of Dreams Shelter, managed by Village Focus International (VFI) with the support of the S2SR and SAF project. They will have an opportunity to hear about the services that VFI delivers to women and men migrant workers, including for survivors of trafficking and those employed in the fishing and seafood processing sectors. The Delegates will also directly interact with migrant workers to hear about their migration experiences and how they have benefitted from VFI's assistance.



PARTICIPANTS

No.	Descriptions	Name
Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare		
1	Minister	Madam Baykham Khattiya
2	Director General, Lao Social Security Organisation	Madam Keo Chanthavixay
3	Director General, Department of Employment	Ms. Anousone Khamsingsavanh
4	Head of Public Relations, Lao Social Security Organisation	Ms. Dongdeuan Chanthavong
5	Technical Officer, Cabinet	Ms Koungkham Sychantha

EU Delegation to Lao PDR		
6	Head of EU Delegation	H.E Ina Marčiulionytė
7	Attaché, Cooperation Section	Ms. Francesca Arato
8	Political Officer	Mr. Francois Pravongviengkham

International Labour Organization		
9	ILO National Coordinator	Mr. Viengprasith Thipphasoda
10	SOLAR Project Manager	Ms. Loveleen De
11	SOLAR National Project Coordinator	Ms. Noutthong Alounthong

▶ AGENDA

Time	Activity	Remark
18 May 2023	Arrival of MOLSW Delegation in Pakse	
19 May 2023 09.05	Arrival of EU Delegation at Pakse Airport	▶ ILO will receive EU at airport.
09.05 – 10.00	Drive to Paksong District ▶ Stop at cafe on the way for discussion: Minister and EU	▶ Van 1 for MOLSW. ▶ Van 2 for EU, ILO and Interpreter. ▶ Van 3 for ILO's SOLAR team will travel earlier and meet Vans 1 and 2 at Paksong.
10.00 – 11.45	Visit SOLAR Project at Paksong Tea Promotion Association ▶ Welcoming remarks by LSSO ▶ Speech by Minister ▶ Speech by Head of EU Delegation ▶ Remarks by Tea Association and walk through organic tea production and processing facility ▶ Interact with tea and coffee farmers	▶ Coordinated by Lao Social Security Organization and SOLAR. ▶ Interpretation available.
11.45 – 12.30	Drive from Paksong District to Pakse City	
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch at Sisouk Residence, Pakse	▶ Hosted by Champasak Governor
14.00 – 15.30	Visit VFI's Home of Dreams Shelter and Migrant Assistance Office in Pakse City ▶ Welcoming remarks by VFI ▶ Speech by Minister ▶ Speech by EU Ambassador ▶ Briefing by ILO ▶ Tour of the Shelter ▶ Interact with migrant workers	▶ VFI will present about its work in both Champasak and Salavan provinces. ▶ Interpretation available.
16.30	Departure of EU Delegation from Pakse Airport	

► PROJECT BACKGROUND

SOLAR

The SOLAR project (Reducing vulnerability in Lao PDR: Advancing social protection and labour rights and entitlements in the coffee and tea sectors) promotes labour rights and access to social protection and occupational safety and health for coffee and tea workers in Bolaven Plateau, Lao PDR. The project's beneficiaries are informal and vulnerably employed women and men working in the coffee and tea sectors in Bolaven Plateau. They usually work without proper contracts or social security coverage, and can be subject to labour rights and occupational safety violations as well as harassment in the workplace and households. SOLAR works with the government and social partners like MOLSW, LFTU, and Lao Coffee Association on one hand to improve the social protection and OSH system, service delivery, and outreach to workers; and with Oxfam, civil society, group leaders, and other grassroots stakeholders on the other hand to contribute to the development of collective mechanisms for workers to share their problems and concerns, organize and empower workers, and equip them to better realize their labour rights.

Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia

The programme addresses the sector-specific characteristics of work in the fishing and seafood processing sectors as well as the barriers and risks present in the migration system, which can lead to unsafe migration, decent work deficits, and labour rights abuses – including forced labour. The programme builds on the significant achievements of the EU-funded Ship to Shore Rights project (2016-2020) implemented by the ILO in Thailand, which was highly successful in achieving ratification of relevant international labour standards, improved enforcement of laws and expanded access to services for migrant workers in the fishing and seafood processing sectors.



Safe and Fair

The Safe and Fair Programme is part of the multi-year EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls. SAF is implemented by the ILO and UN Women, in collaboration with UNODC, led by the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The programme delivers technical assistance and support with the overall objective of making labour migration safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region. It engages with ASEAN Member States' government authorities; ASEAN institutions; workers' organizations; employers and recruitment agencies; civil society organizations; community-based organizations; families and communities; research institutions and academia, media networks, youth, and the general public and supports programming in the ten ASEAN countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam).



▶ ACTIVITY DETAILS

Visit to a Paksong tea farm

The delegates will visit Paksong District in Bolaven Plateau to observe tea farmers at work and understand more about how they have benefitted from ILO's support and the SOLAR Project.

The visit will take place at the Paksong Tea Promotion Association's new organic tea processing facility. It will start with welcoming remarks and an overview of SOLAR activities in Bolaven Plateau by the Lao Social Security Organisation (LSSO), followed by opening speeches by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and Head of the EU Delegation. After this, the delegates will have a short tour of the production and processing area. The Head of the Tea Association will give a brief background of the Association, tea processing, and how they have engaged with ILO and other partners under the SOLAR Project. The visiting delegates will then interact with 2-3 farmers who grow and process both tea and coffee at different times of the year. In the month of May, farmers usually work on tea crops and only spend limited time caring for the coffee plants.

The farmers have previously participated in **village dissemination meetings** organised by LSSO to inform households and train village leaders about the National Social Security Fund and National Health Insurance schemes (corresponding to Activities 1.1.1, 1.1.6, and 2.1.3 of the SOLAR Project).

Tailored posters and **radio spots** were produced for the advocacy. Furthermore, the farmers have participated in **Occupational Safety and Health training workshops** organised by the Agricultural Research Centre of Southern Laos, corresponding to Activity 2.1.3 of the SOLAR Project.

If time permits, delegates will visit the newly established Worker Information Centre at the Agricultural Research Centre of Southern Laos. This corresponds to Activity 1.1.2 of the SOLAR Project. In discussion with ARC and other partners and in alignment with the ROM review in September 2022, the project decided to set up Worker Information Centres in the three target districts. The Centres aim to



provide information to the farming households of Bolaven Plateau on their rights and entitlements under the Lao Labour Law, social security, and occupational safety and health. In future, the Centres will also include information on collective mechanisms and gender rights. The Centres have been set up at key locations that are close and accessible to farmers and the staff have been trained to provide this vital information in an easy, clear, and interesting way.

Visit to Village Focus International

In the afternoon, the delegates will visit the **Migrant Assistance Office** and the Home of Dreams Shelter, operated under the same roof by Village Focus International. The activities are supported by the Ship to Shore Rights South East Asia and the Safe and Fair programme to provide safe migration information and services to women and men migrant workers. This support includes distribution informational materials and **training on safe migration and labour rights**, legal assistance services to increase access to redress for labour rights abuses, support for sustainable reintegration, provision of services for deported migrants in crisis situations, services to women survivors of violence and victims of trafficking. As part of the visit, the delegates will participate in a round-table discussion to hear about the experiences of migrant workers who received support from Village

Focus International and the challenges they experienced while working abroad and upon returning home.

Lao workers migrate internationally in pursuit of better job opportunities, such as in the agricultural, construction, domestic work, fishing and seafood processing sectors. However, **ILO research** shows that many Lao migrant workers experience labour exploitation and abuse during their recruitment and employment. Women migrants experience heightened vulnerability to violence during the migration process, particularly for those employed in isolated and precarious occupations. With support from the EU through the ILO's migration programmes, the Migrant Assistance Office and the Home of Dreams are working to improve the protection of labour rights for migrant workers and deliver gender-responsive assistance services in cases of exploitation, violence and harassment for Lao migrant workers and migrant returnees.



▶ KEY MESSAGES

Social security

- ▶ We recommend and appreciate the EU Delegation highlighting to MOLSW and all participants the need to bring social security services closer to people living in rural areas, by expanding physical branch offices, mobile services that travel through villages on a periodic basis, or through online/digital means.
- ▶ We appreciate LSSO's commitment to piloting the first mobile service in Xaythany District last week and hope that over time, this can be expanded to more areas.
- ▶ We stand ready to support the amendment of the Social Security Law in the National Assembly next year and hope that the amendment will bring necessary reforms to make services more accessible (Note to EU: This is supported by ILO through the global EU-funded SP&PFM Programme).
- ▶ We hope that in addition to formal sector enterprises and self-employed workers, LSSO and MOLSW recognise the widespread nature of informal worker groups and cooperatives in the agricultural sector and explore the possibility of creating a separate provision for such groups and cooperatives to become members of social security.

Safe migration

- ▶ Safe Migration information needs to include accurate and updated information, including labour rights, social protection and occupational safety and health. Although encouraging regular migration is an important goal, this information should provide relevant support to migrants regardless of their legal status. Services related to women victims of trafficking and women migrant workers who have faced violence through multi stakeholder coordination are important.
- ▶ The work done to support safe migration for Lao migrants by the Migrant Worker Resource Centres (Bokeo, Bolikhamxay and Savannakhet) in Laos run by MOLSW and LFTU has been a critical step forward in expanding access to information and services. It is important to consider how these service providers can work in cooperation with civil society organizations, including Village Focus International to expand their reach and effectiveness.
- ▶ The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has indicated an indisputable intention to strengthen the labour migration governance regime in Laos through the suite of legislation that has been developed to regulate the process. If properly enforced, the Labour Law, Decree 245, Agreement 1050, Regulations of the Lao Employment Service Association and other instruments will make it more viable for Lao workers to migrate for work regularly and access labour and social protections – reducing their risk of exploitation and abuse.

- ▶ A well-implemented and accessible, gender responsive labour migration governance regime will not only protect migrant workers from hazardous and exploitative employment situations but also assist them to gain new skills, improve the standard of living for themselves and their family members and contribute to the social and economic development of Lao PDR.
- ▶ Looking at the legislative framework for recruitment of migrant workers through the prism of international labour standards and guidelines, the process of ratifying the Private Employment Agency convention (No. 181) would require a relatively small number of legislative reforms that could dramatically improve labour migration governance in Lao PDR. The Government should strongly consider ratifying C181 to take the next step forward in improving protection of Lao migrant workers during recruitment as it is mainly gaps in implementation that remain to be addressed. The ILO stands ready to provide any support needed by the Government and social partners to facilitate the process of ratification.



▶ SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

Worker rights

- ▶ As a tea and/or coffee farmer, what are your aspirations and dreams? What are the main challenges faced by you?
- ▶ What do you think are the main problems and needs related to your working conditions?
- ▶ As a farmer, how has this project helped you?
- ▶ For the Paksong Tea Promotion Association, how is the collaboration with project partners –public sector; private sector – cooperatives, worker groups and other associations; ILO and Oxfam?
- ▶ What are your plans and needs to grow the Association in the future?

Safe migration

- ▶ Why did you decide to migrate for work? Did you have enough information to make an informed decision about migration before you went abroad?
- ▶ How much did you pay to migrate? Were you able to afford the costs without going into debt?
- ▶ What was your job like while you were working abroad? Were the working conditions the same as you were promised before you left Laos?
- ▶ Did you have any problems with your employer while you were abroad? If so, did you try to make a complaint to seek remedies?
- ▶ What was the most challenging about returning home to Laos after migrating? Were you able to find a new job?
- ▶ Do you feel like you receive sufficient support to have a positive migration experience? What additional support do you think you needed?

▶ CONTACTS

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