

SIREN human trafficking data sheet

STRATEGIC INFORMATION RESPONSE NETWORK

United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP): Phase III

VIENTIANE, LAO PDR

MARCH 2008 (v. 1.0)

Country information

- ❖ **Population:** 5,6 million (77% rural)¹.
- ❖ **Ethnicity:** 66% of the the population belongs to the Tai-Lao ethno-linguistic family².
- ❖ **GDP per capita:** US \$375 (3.7% growth from 1990 to 2003) compared to \$2,305 in Thailand.
- ❖ **HDI**³: 0.557, which places Lao PDR on 132nd place out of 177 countries (steady increase since 1985).
- ❖ **Education:** Primary school enrolment 86%, but only 62% completed full primary schooling. These figures are generally lower for girls, and persons from ethnic minorities and rural areas.
- ❖ **Fertility rate:** 4.8 children compared to 1.9 in Thailand, 2.3 in Vietnam and 1.8 in China.
- ❖ **Labour force:** National labour force is projected to increase by 1,325,000 workers, or nearly 45%, in the next 15 years.
- ❖ **Neighbouring countries:** Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

What is human trafficking and why is it a problem?

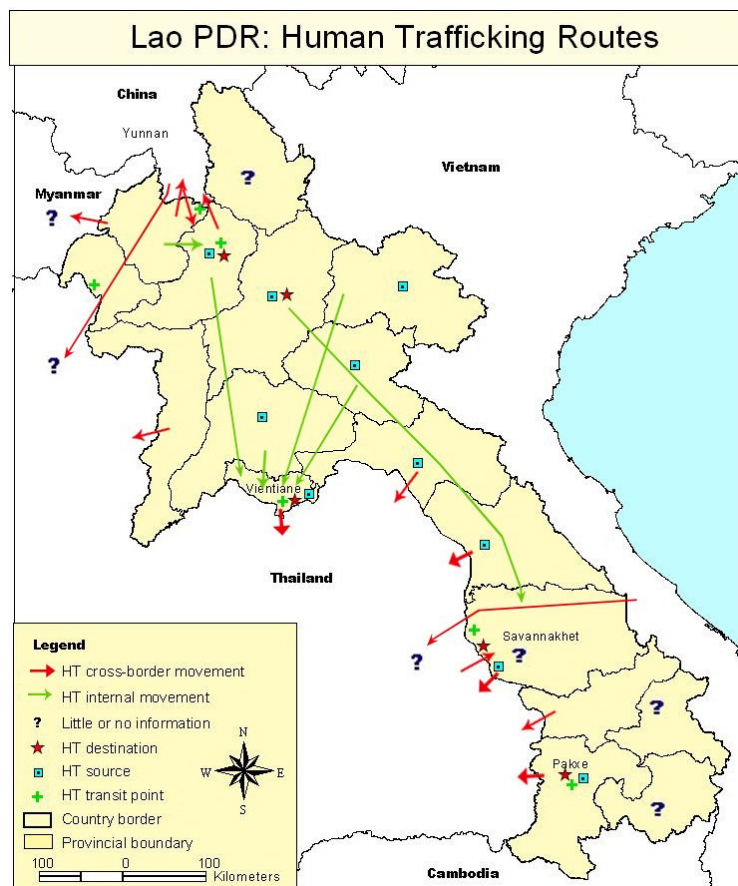
- ❖ Human trafficking is a serious violation of human rights. It involves the illegal trading of women, children and men for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation⁴.

What is the human trafficking situation in Lao PDR?

- ❖ Human trafficking is closely linked to rising legal and illegal labour migration⁵:
 - There is a long history of migration to Thailand due to proximity, cultural and linguistic similarities, and better economic conditions.
 - In July 2004 there were 181,614 Lao migrants registered in Thailand, but there may be an additional 80,000 unregistered⁶.
 - More women than men migrate (55%: 45%), and the vast majority of Lao migrants are from the lowlands of the country⁷.
 - Most migrants are 17 to 25 years of age, but 21% of migrants interviewed in a major survey were only ten to 17.
 - Most cases of human trafficking start as voluntary movement or migration⁸.
- ❖ Lao PDR is mainly a source country for human trafficking and the main destination is Thailand. Trafficking of Laotians to Myanmar and China for the purposes of buying and selling brides has also been reported⁹. So far, trafficking from China and Vietnam into sexual exploitation in Lao PDR¹⁰ or through Lao PDR to Thailand¹¹ seems less prevalent. Internal trafficking is found to be common, but it receives less attention than cross-border trafficking¹².

Where do Laotian trafficked persons come from and how are they exploited?

Source provinces within Lao PDR	Destination sites within Lao PDR and abroad
Cross-border human trafficking into Thailand	In Thailand and other countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Provinces bordering on Thailand along the Mekong have the highest rates of migration and official cases of human trafficking. However: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In some areas of high migration rates there are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Based on reports from trafficked persons and their families, human trafficking occurs in the areas of: prostitution (35%), domestic labour (32%), factory work (17%), and fishing boats (4%)¹³.



<p>well-established informal networks that act as a safeguard.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved road infrastructure around the country may reduce the importance of proximity to the Thai border. <p>❖ From 2001-2007, 772 (73%) out of 1056 repatriated persons from Thailand to Lao PDR were from the southern provinces of Khammouan, Savannakhet, Salavan and Champasack.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Bangkok, Samut Sakhon and other surrounding provinces are some of the main exploitative sites¹⁴. ❖ Nong Khai province, across the Mekong River from Vientiane, has a high concentration of sex work. It is one destination point of human trafficking for migrant children from Lao PDR¹⁵. ❖ Trafficking through Lao PDR to a third country also occurs¹⁶.
Internal human trafficking	In Lao PDR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Trafficked persons are mostly from northern Lao PDR and almost always female. ❖ Despite the absence of actual numbers, the general impression is that prostitution of children is a wide-scale problem. This labour, involving mostly girls, usually entails selling and serving drinks and entertaining customers, cooking, cleaning and washing, as well as prostitution¹⁷. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Trafficking into factory work in Vientiane and for purposes of sexual exploitation has been documented¹⁸. ❖ Risks of HIV/AIDS and human trafficking are associated with major high-way projects¹⁹, such as the North-South and the East-West Economic Corridors. This involves the provinces of Bokeo, Luang Namtha and Savannakhet²⁰, but also others.

Who is being trafficked in Lao PDR, and what are some of the vulnerability factors?

- ❖ Human trafficking is a tragic violation of human rights that affects women, men and children of Lao PDR. Trafficked persons experience various difficulties ranging from physical and mental health issues, to economic difficulties, and social reintegration issues. Girls and women may face more problems with the authorities upon their return, due to the suspicion of having been engaged in sex work in Thailand²¹.
- ❖ According to the first national survey on human trafficking, in 2004, the typical profile²² of a trafficking person in Lao PDR is:
 - Girl between 12 – 18 years of age (60%) originating from rural areas, but not the most remote.
 - Mostly from the Lao or Tai ethnic group from the lowlands of Lao PDR, but with proportional over-representation of persons from Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups.
 - The number of trafficked persons from resettled villages is disproportionately high.
 - Often-cited vulnerability factors are poverty, lack of education, awareness and employment, or dysfunctional families. But:
 - It is often a combination of factors that makes a person vulnerable to trafficking. It can also be that a lack of relevant educational opportunities, and not a lack of education, is a vulnerability factor.
 - Often it is not the poorest of the poor that are trafficked, but poverty may be a risk factor because of its association with low status in the community²³.
 - The lack of labour rights and law enforcement in the domestic sector adds to the vulnerability of women and girls. They are not provided with working contracts even they go through legal channels²⁴.

What is the scale of human trafficking in and from Lao PDR?

- ❖ No universally accepted estimate of the number of trafficked persons exists in Lao PDR. One source puts it at 21,816 trafficking cases from rural areas in Laos to Thailand over the last ten years²⁵.
 - This means that 1.4% of the total Lao migrant work force in Thailand is considered to be at high risk.

Who are the perpetrators of human trafficking in Lao PDR?

- ❖ There is generally limited information about the perpetrators of human trafficking. The focus has generally been on the recruiters or the brokers, but less on the ones who own the factories, brothels, fishing-boats etc. where most of the exploitation takes place. In other words, in the counter-trafficking sector there has been more focus on the trafficking aspects related to movement compared to exploitation taking place at the destination sites.
- ❖ The recruiters for either internal or cross-border trafficking are often familiar to the persons and there is little difference in the methods used for either internal or cross-border trafficking²⁶.
- ❖ It is important to note that there are various types of recruiters ranging from those who knowingly send persons in to exploitative situations and others who feel responsible for the wellbeing of the persons who use their services²⁷.
- ❖ Trafficking networks are often well structured and work across the borders through the use of brokers.

What is being done in Lao PDR, and who is doing it?

- ❖ Counter-trafficking interventions to combat human trafficking are currently being carried out by:
 - **Government of Lao PDR and mass organizations:** Key ministries include Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Ministry of Public Security (including Lao Bar Association), National Steering Committee, COMMIT Task Force, Lao Women’s Union and Lao Youth Union
 - **Inter-governmental organisations:** IOM
 - **UN agencies and projects:** ILO/IPEC, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNODC and UNIAP
 - **INGOs:** AFESIP, ARTIP, CARE, Child Wise, Concern, Friends International, Norwegian Church Aid, Oxfam Quebec, Save the Children Australia, Village Focus International, and World Vision
- ❖ **Prevention** activities are implemented mainly in source areas mainly along the Mekong River towards Thailand. The target groups are for the most part young people in rural areas, but also authorities at various levels. This work includes awareness-raising campaigns on human trafficking and safe migration, education and capacity building, creation of child protection networks and poverty alleviation projects through micro-credit schemes. In addition, there are efforts to support the continued implementation and improvement of the legal labour recruitment channels within the framework of the Lao-Thai MOU on Labour Cooperation.
- ❖ **Protection** measures involve activities taking place in relation to Laotians trafficked to Thailand or within the country. This work consists of identification, rescue, rehabilitation, legal proceedings, repatriation, reception and reintegration. In Thailand, this involves a multi-disciplinary approach from police, social workers, lawyers, international agencies and interpreters. There are efforts to strengthen this approach in Lao PDR too, particularly with regards to the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked persons. There are two shelters for trafficked women and children in Lao PDR, both located in Vientiane. Lao Women’s Union and AFESIP each runs one shelter providing counselling, vocational training, access to education and legal assistance.
- ❖ **Prosecution** involves investigations by the police, the criminal justice system and other government institutions, INGOs and UN agencies in both Thailand and Lao PDR. In Lao PDR there is a dedicated Anti – Trafficking Division with Anti – Trafficking Units at provincial level. The international agencies are particularly involved with training and capacity building of front-line officials, prosecutors and judges, as well as the strengthening of the legal framework.
- ❖ **Policy** is led by the Government of Lao PDR, in cooperation with UN agencies and INGOs active in the counter-trafficking sector. Lao PDR is currently in the process of approving its National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking. This is in line with its commitment under the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT), which brings together the six Mekong countries in the fight against human trafficking.



What else is being done in Lao PDR for persons who have been trafficked?

- ❖ MLSW²⁸ runs a transit centre for trafficked persons returning to Lao PDR from shelters in Thailand:

Year	2001-2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Number of trafficked persons repatriated	288	245	259	264	1056

- The total number of girls and women repatriated from shelters in Thailand to Lao PDR was 999, 95% of the total number of trafficked persons.
- 903 persons were under 18 years of age, which constitutes 85% of the total number of persons.
- Savannakhet province was the origin of 44% of the repatriated persons, or 461 persons out of 1056.
- It is broadly accepted that the official returnees only represent a small portion of the actual trafficked persons.

What is happening to the traffickers in Lao PDR?

- ❖ From 2005-2007, 27 cases of cross-border trafficking have been investigated, of which 14 led to convictions. These cases involved 139 trafficked persons. There are currently 38 persons suspected of human trafficking²⁹.

What are the guiding principles behind counter-trafficking efforts in Lao PDR?

- ❖ Key laws, policy documents, and international conventions in Lao PDR include:
 - *Penal Code*, including Article 134 on Human Trafficking
 - *Labour Law* (Second edition, 1994)
 - *Palermo Protocol*³⁰ (2000)
 - *Lao-Thai MOU on Labour Cooperation* (2002)
 - *Law on Development and Protection of Women* (2004)
 - *Lao-Thai MOU on Human Trafficking* (2005)
 - *COMMIT MOU on Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in the Greater Mekong Sub-region* (2005)
 - *National Plan of Action against Commercial and Sexual Exploitation against Children, Lao PDR* (2006)
 - *Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children* (2006)

What else needs to be done to combat human trafficking in Lao PDR, and why is it so important?

- ❖ Building on and strengthening safe channels of labour migration should be a key priority in Lao PDR, as most human trafficking takes place in the context of seasonal and longer-term labour migration through unofficial channels.
- ❖ The 'demand' side (law enforcement, policing, awareness raising etc.) of human trafficking should be strengthened without neglecting current work to curb 'supply' (awareness, education, job creation etc.).
- ❖ Research, impact assessment, and monitoring and evaluation on human trafficking should be further strengthened in the counter-trafficking sector.
- ❖ Interventions to combat human trafficking directly support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), by addressing factors that contribute to an individual's vulnerability to trafficking such as poverty (MDG 1), lack of basic education (MDG 2), and lack of gender equality (MDG 3). Furthermore, interventions can also work to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS (MDG 6).



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¹ NSC, UNDP, 2006. *National Human Development Report: International Trade and Human Development*: 2.

² Pholsena, Vatthana & Ruth Banomyong, 2006. *Laos: From Buffer State to Crossroads?*: 174.

³ The Human Development Index (HDI) is based on three equally weighted variables: life expectancy at birth, a combined measure of literacy and education enrolment, and per capita income in purchasing power parity (PPP).

⁴ UN, 2000. *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Woman and Children*.

⁵ The World Bank, 2006. *Labor Migration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. Synthesis Report: Phase I*: 7.

⁶ IOM, 2004. *Infosheet_LM[1].pdf*; <http://www.iom-seasia.org/>.

⁷ ILO & NSC, 2005. Raw data from 2005 surveys.

⁸ Wille, Christina, 2001. *Thailand-Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand-Myanmar Border Areas, Trafficking in Children into the Worst Forms of Children Labour: A Rapid Assessment*: 3.

⁹ MLSW and UNICEF, 2004. *Broken Promises Shattered Dreams*: 8.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, 2007. *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

¹¹ Huguët, Jerrold W. & Varamon Ramangkura, 2007. *The Long Road Home*: 17.

¹² MLSW and UNICEF, 2004. *Broken Promises Shattered Dreams*: 9.

¹³ Ibid: 26.

¹⁴ Beesey, Allan, 2004. *From Lao PDR to Thailand and Home Again. The Repatriation of Trafficking Victims and Other Exploited Women and Girl Workers*: 16.

¹⁵ ILO/IPEC, 2001. *Thailand-Lao PDR and Thailand-Myanmar Trafficking in Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labour: A Rapid Assessment*: 3.

¹⁶ Mekong Migration Network & Asian Migrant Centre, 2005. *Resource Book. Migration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region*: 71.

¹⁷ MLSW and UNICEF, 2001. *How I Got Here. Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Lao PDR*: 4.

¹⁸ MLSW and UNICEF, 2004. *Broken Promises Shattered Dreams*: 35.

¹⁹ ADB, 2006. *Country Strategy and Program. Lao People's Democratic Republic 2007-2011*: 91

²⁰ Haughton, James, 2006. *Situational Analysis of Human Trafficking in the Lao PDR. With emphasis on Savannakhet*: 9.

²¹ Doussantousse, Serge & Bea Keovongchit, 2006. *Migration of Children and Youth from Savannakhet Province, Laos to Thailand*: 23.

²² MLSW and UNICEF, 2004. *Broken Promises Shattered Dreams*: 8.

²³ MLSW, UNICEF & UNIAP, 2004. *TRACE: Trafficking from Community to Exploitation. Lessons Learnt Through TRACE*: 39.

²⁴ UNIFEM, 2007. *Gender Concerns in Migration in Lao PDR*: 7.

²⁵ Haughton, James, 2006. *Situational Analysis of Human Trafficking in the Lao PDR. With emphasis on Savannakhet*: 31 & 35.

²⁶ MLSW and UNICEF, 2004. *Broken Promises Shattered Dreams*: 9.

²⁷ MLSW, UNICEF & UNIAP, 2004. *TRACE: Trafficking from Community to Exploitation. Lessons Learnt Through TRACE*: 52.

²⁸ According to data from MLSW (2007). However, many other trafficked persons are not registered, have disappeared or returned on their own.

²⁹ According to data from Ministry of Public Security (2007).

³⁰ *UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and the Supplementing Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*.