



BROKEN PROMISES SHATTERED DREAMS

A PROFILE OF CHILD TRAFFICKING IN THE LAO PDR

ตรวจช่องเม็ก
IMMIGRANT
国境関門
BORDER CROSSING
舟谷のりば

The names of all the people featured in the case studies have been changed to protect identity, however, place names remain the same.

The research was made possible through the dedication and commitment of the research team, led by the Chief Researcher Mr. James Chamberlain, Mr. Panh Phomsombath, Ms. Viengmala Vangmua, Ms. Phimpeng Oudone, Mr. Thavone Vixaysak and Mr. Khonesavanh Chittanavanh.

All photographs: Jim Holmes/UNICEF



This publication has been supported by

COOPERAZIONE
ITALIANA

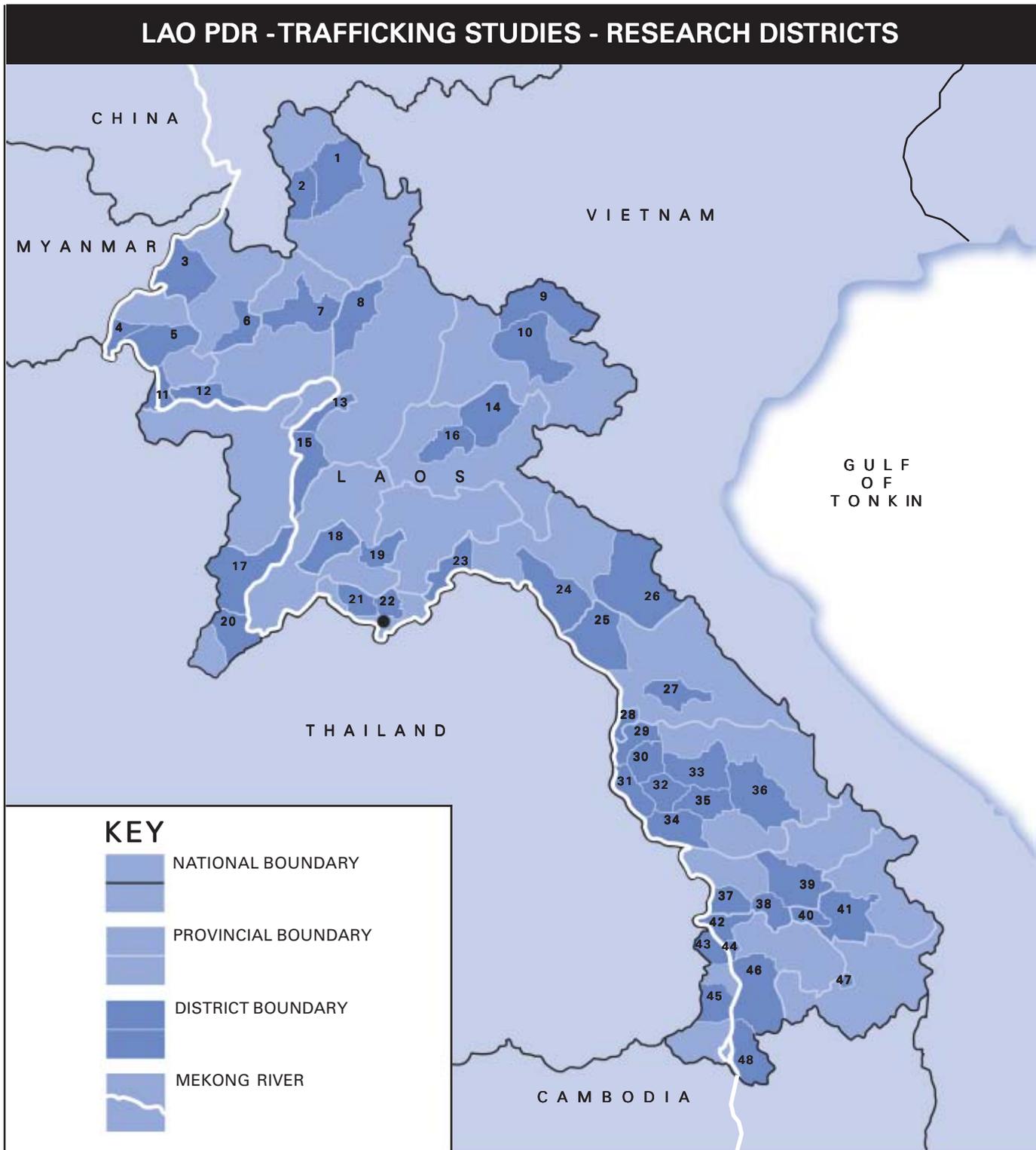
BROKEN PROMISES SHATTERED DREAMS

CONTENTS

FORWARD BY THE MINISTER..... OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL WELFARE	6
FORWARD BY UNICEF	7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
INTRODUCTION	11
PROFILES OF TRAFFICKING VICTIMS	18
TRAFFICKERS	22
TRAFFICKED SITUATIONS	26
MIGRANT LABOUR	38
THE TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCE	40
GONE FOREVER	45
CAUSES AND PERCEPTIONS	47
FAMILIES.....	51
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT	53
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56

LAO PDR - MAJOR CROSS BORDER TRAFFICKING ROUTES





RESEARCH DISTRICTS

1 PHONGSALI	25 HINBOON
2 BOUNNEUA	26 KHAMKHEUT
3 LONG	27 MAHXAY
4 TONPHEUNG	28 NONGBOK
5 HOUAYXAI	29 XONABOULY
6 NALAE	30 OUTOMPHONE
7 XAY	31 KHANTABOULY
8 NAMBAK	32 CHAMPHONE
9 XIENKOR	33 ATSAPHANGTHONG
10 XAMNEUA	34 SONGKHONE
11 PAKTHE	35 XAYBOULY
12 PAKBENG	36 PHINE
13 LUANG PRABANG	37 KHONGXEDO
14 KHAM	38 LAO NGARM
15 NAN	39 SARAVANE
16 PEK	40 THATENG
17 PAKLAI	41 LAMARM
18 HIN HEUP	42 SANASOMBOUN
19 KEO OUDOM	43 PHONETHONG
20 KENETHAO	44 PAKSE
21 NAXAITHON	45 SOUKHOUMA
22 XAYTHANY	46 PATHOUMPHONE
23 THAPHABAT	47 SAMAKHIXAY
24 PAKKADING	48 KHONG

FORWARD BY THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL WELFARE

The Government of Lao PDR is committed to the protection of children's rights, and is concerned with the vulnerability of Lao children to internal and cross-border trafficking. To demonstrate its commitment to its children the Government of Lao PDR has signed a number of international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

Combating the exploitation and abuse of Lao children is an important and crucial priority and action is being taken to address the root causes, to provide protection through strengthened policy and law enforcement and to support the recovery and reintegration of victims of trafficking.

This study, which profiles the phenomena of child trafficking, provides insight into the underlying factors and causes of trafficking. It identifies trafficking routes and methods, and those actively involved and whose complicity fuels the crime of child trafficking. It also documents the experiences of child victims and families whose lives have been irrevocably changed because of trafficking. It is hoped that through a shared understanding of trafficking and its impact on Lao children, their families and society, greater action will be mobilized to address the underlying causes and prevent further exploitation and abuse of our children.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is working with partners in Government and the international community to implement programmes to protect Lao children from all forms of exploitation, abuse and violence. Eliminating the trafficking of Lao children is a priority for the Ministry and we will continue to work towards this end as a matter of urgency.

FORWARD BY UNICEF

Trafficking in persons is a criminal act that violates fundamental rights of children, exposing them to exploitation, abuse, and violence. Trafficking threatens a child's long-term development and in some extreme cases his or her very survival.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare undertook this qualitative research project, with support from UNICEF, in order to better understand the underlying causes of child trafficking, to identify those most at risk and to uncover the dynamics of the trafficking process. This analysis, based primarily on the recorded experiences of 253 trafficked victims and their families, is the first national survey of its kind in Lao PDR.

The report's case studies provide a vivid portrayal of the extreme vulnerability to exploitation of children who are growing up in a country with low socio-economic indicators, situated at the crossroads of a fast-developing region. In shedding new light on the issue, we hope that this research project will lead to a more comprehensive, proactive and committed response to child trafficking, which is a terrible betrayal of children's basic right to protection in Lao PDR.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Laos is particularly susceptible to trafficking as it is situated in a fast developing region, with a young population, and relatively low economic indicators. Regional disparities in development, coupled with increasing modernization and exposure through media encourages young people to pursue a more materialistic lifestyle.

This research study took place over several months with research teams undertaking semi-structured interviews with victims of trafficking, their families, and key informants within the community. It is the first national study, covering 17 provinces and a total of 149 villages. Incidences of trafficking were found in every province surveyed, from Attapeu in the far south of the country to Phongsaly in the far north. Cases of internal and cross-border trafficking were also documented.

From the findings of the study it is possible to build a profile of those most at risk of trafficking and target interventions accordingly. The overwhelming majority of trafficking victims surveyed (60%) are girls aged between 12-18 years of age and most victims (35%) end up in forced prostitution. Other forms of employment were domestic labour (32%), factory work (17%), and fishing boats (4%). Those that worked in agricultural labour tended not to be trafficked and exploited whilst those working in domestic household situations experienced some of the most extreme cases of abuse and mistreatment.

The majority of cross-border trafficking was found to occur into Thailand although some cases were reported of trafficking into Myanmar and China for the purposes of buying and selling brides. Crossing the border is relatively easy; many victims actually crossed with legal papers, and informal crossings are not uncommon.

Most victims come from rural areas, although few of the victims came from extremely remote areas or from situations of severe poverty.

The connection between ethnic background and child trafficking issue needs further study, since the majority of non-Lao trafficking victims come from villages that have been resettled or relocated. These victims were found to be from Lao and Tai ethnic groups, with Tibeto-Burmese over-represented in trafficking data compared to the percentage of the population (10% and 2.5% respectively).

Along with a profile of those most at risk of trafficking it is also possible to profile the traffickers and the trafficking process. There was little difference in the methods used for recruitment for the purposes of either internal or cross-border trafficking. Internal trafficking was found to be common and based on the sample exclusively involving female victims trafficked into either factories or prostitution. The provinces of Houaphan and Xieng Khouang were found to be the most affected by internal trafficking.

Recruitment for either internal or cross-border trafficking is carried out largely by those familiar to the victims, with extreme cases involving relatives. Traffickers use their familiarity with the victims to build trust, making ultimately empty promises to lure victims into agreeing to leave their village for work opportunities.

Trafficking networks were found to be well structured, with connections to organized crime networks in neighbouring countries. Victims may be bought and sold several times over with the price the trafficker receives often portrayed as an employment agent's fee. The routes are well known and the areas where a lot of recruiting and trafficking take place have been noted in the report.

A significant finding is that approximately 17% of all the cases in the study are children who have disappeared. The families of these children have not heard from them since they left their villages, in most cases for two or more years.

Of the victims that return to Laos, most have escaped their employer on their own or with assistance from local citizens. There were almost no cases of victims being voluntarily released by the employer, except in situations where victims had contracted HIV and were too sick to continue working.

The majority of victims are lured or deceived into leaving their homes on the promise of a good employment opportunity. The reasons given by migrant labourers and trafficking victims for leaving their villages were often the same. Many victims cited economic reasons, particularly the desire to earn more money for the family, although this was not necessarily related to poverty as materialism and consumerism appear to be significant factors. Social and cultural factors were also cited including exposure to Thai media/

culture, inequality in development standards both within Laos and between Lao and its neighbours and the natural curiosity and restlessness of youth to explore their world.

There were few instances where traffickers were punished for their crimes. Conversely the victims are often punished through fines and imprisonment on both sides of the border. Since low levels of education are also inherently linked to low levels of awareness of children's rights, many Lao people are not aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and do not understand children's rights. The legal system is weak and the laws are not enforced properly due to lack of knowledge about the law and limited capacity of legal professionals. Traditional attitudes towards the treatment of children and women mean that abuse and exploitation often go unreported and when people report these crimes, in many cases the victims are the ones who suffer from shame and discrimination, not the perpetrators.

While the full dimensions of this serious and complex issue are only beginning to be understood, the subject of child trafficking in Laos PDR is now gaining increasing attention both nationally and regionally. Conclusions and recommendations for action are shared at the end of the study.

INTRODUCTION

Trafficking of persons is a world wide crime affecting countless numbers of people. No one really knows how many women and children are affected but estimates for the East Asia region alone are between 250,000 and 400,000 per year. Approximately one-third of global trafficking in women and children occurs in or from this region. A significant proportion of this trafficking affects the Mekong sub-region countries of Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos.

Trafficking is distinguished from illegal migration and people smuggling by the exploitation and abuse that is its end result. Coercion, deception, threats or use of force characterize the trafficking process resulting in its victims being subjected to exploitation and abuse. Children of all ages are affected. Older children may leave home willingly in search of better opportunities for livelihood. Younger children may be tricked or stolen. Poverty, lack of education and job opportunities, dysfunctional families and gender discrimination all play a role in creating situations that make children vulnerable to trafficking.

Trafficking has a particularly severe impact on children who are the most vulnerable members of society. Children trafficked into exploitive situations are robbed of educational opportunities and thus a chance to improve their economic situation in the future. They may suffer long-lasting health problems as a result of physical abuse, poor nutrition and untreated health problems and suffer irreparable psychological damage caused by abuse and fear. In the most severe cases children are placed in life-threatening situations ranging from extreme violence and exposure to communicable diseases.

Laos is particularly vulnerable to trafficking as it is situated within a fast developing economic region and its own socio-economic indicators remain low. Increased economic openness and its geographic location, sharing as it does borders with Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Myanmar, places Laos at the center of regional development. Opportunities for development are great but so too are the risks for its largely rural and poorly educated population.

Laos has a population of approximately 5.5 million inhabitants from 49 officially recognized ethnic groups. The population is young,



with 45% under 15 years of age and 55% younger than 19 years of age. Approximately 60,000 young people join the labour force each year; however, employment opportunities are limited and many young people leave their villages in search of jobs. Almost 80% of working people are dependent on subsistence agriculture. Many people work as civil servants but the salaries are extremely low and people must find ways to supplement their incomes. Although most of the population lives in rural areas there is an increasing trend towards urbanization.

Laos is a least developed country and in 2002, the Gross National Income was only US\$310 per capita. Considerable gains have been made in recent years to improve living standards; however, challenges remain particularly in provision of education, economic opportunities and delivery of social services.

Low literacy rates and lack of educational opportunities place Lao citizens at a serious disadvantage when it comes to educational and professional opportunities. Even for people who are not trafficked and migrate legally, they are limited to low skilled, low paid manual labour which may lead to exploitative working conditions.

The Government of Laos recognizes the problem of trafficking and is concerned about its impact on its children. To gain an understanding of the nature and scope of the problem the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, with support from UNICEF, commissioned this study into trafficking of Lao children.

The resulting study is intended to provide an overview of the situation and in particular to focus attention on trafficking of Lao children both internally and across international borders. It is meant to provide a qualitative picture of the situation and document the trafficking experience from the perspective of its victims, affected communities and concerned officials. It is not intended to provide data on the number of children trafficked or to provide a representation of all trafficking experiences. It is hoped that the study will help Government officials, policy makers, communities and international partners to better understand the impact and effects of trafficking on children and in doing so to assist in developing policy and programmes to prevent and protect Lao children from abuse and exploitation.

The study is based primarily on the analysis of case studies taken from the testimonies of trafficked children. Many of the cases involve severe forms of abuse and exploitation and while these situations are representative of the sample, this may not be the case for all trafficking situations.

DEFINITION OF TRAFFICKING

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Woman and Children (supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime), defines trafficking as follows:

- a** Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

- b** The consent of the victim of trafficking to the intended exploitation set forth in the subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in sub-paragraph (a) have been used;
- c** The recruitment, transportation, transfer and harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in sub-paragraph (a) of this article;
- d** "Child" shall mean any person under 18 years of age.

The Protocol states that even if fraud and deception are not used, it is a case of trafficking if the victim is under 18 years of age. While international standards recognize and attempt to distinguish between

consensual acts and those involving abduction, force, fraud, deception or coercion, under international law, children cannot consent.

Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 35 states that:

State Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

The situations and events described in the report adhere to this definition. For analytical purposes a distinction has been made whenever possible, between voluntary migrant labour ('migrants') and involuntary labour ('victims'). Likewise, the study is not confined solely to persons below 18 years of age as respondents in the migrant category were 18 years or over.

In September 2003, Laos became a party to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and its protocols on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. The convention and its trafficking and migrant smuggling protocols also recently came into force.

In addition, new legislation on the Development and Protection of Women, including articles on trafficking and domestic violence is scheduled to go to the October 2004 session of the National Assembly. This law will significantly strengthen the legal response to trafficking.

METHODOLOGY: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Participatory methodologies based on rapid appraisal methods were used for purposes of gathering the information contained in this report. In particular, semi-structured interviews were carried out with children who have been trafficked across borders with Thailand and other countries; children who were trafficked internally from one province to another within Laos (in particular those exposed to hazardous labour situations such as commercial sexual exploitation);

out-migrated girls working in urban factories or the entertainment industry; parents, family members or siblings of trafficked children; community members and village level officials; and district and provincial officials. Although participatory methodologies were used, the researchers were not mandated to offer solutions or assistance to the individuals or villages that so willingly participated in the study.

The study was comprehensive and included all provinces of the Lao PDR with the exception of Saysomboune Special Zone which the survey teams were unable to access due to security concerns. In most provinces at least two districts were selected purposely for interviewing (one each in Attapeu and Sekong) through consultations with provincial level Labour and Social Welfare (LSW) officials, and likewise at the district level, target villages were selected with the assistance of district LSW offices. Trafficked persons or their families were then identified by villagers. In the majority of cases, this identification process went smoothly and even though their experiences were painful and fraught with emotion, people were willing to recall their experiences.

These interviews were then compiled, summarized, translated into English, and entered into a computer in a programme specifically designed for qualitative research analysis.

COVERAGE

In all, a total of 149 villages were visited in 48 districts. These are indicated on the map at the front of this report. Interviews were conducted with 253 trafficked persons, 182 females and 71 males. Of the victims interviewed (excluding parents and officials) 63% were under 18 years of age, and 33% were between 19 and 29 years of age.

TYPES OF DATA

The resulting data fall into several broad categories depending on the aspect of trafficking experienced by the various individuals and villages in the study, as shown below:

1 BREAKDOWN OF INTERVIEW TYPES	
Village Officials	34 %
Parents and Family	18 %
Cross-Border Victims	25 %
Internal Victims	07 %
Cross-Border Migrants	11 %
Internal Migrants	05 %
Total	100 %

Victims (Internal and Cross-Border)

External or cross-border victims are individuals who were either taken against their will across the border or who were lured, tricked, or deceived to cross the border. A victim, as the term is used here, may also be an individual who was lured into leaving his or her home village for work in another location within the country. There was found to be little difference in the methods used for recruitment of either internal or cross-border trafficking victims.

Migrant (Internal and Cross-Border)

Migrants are referred to here as individuals who leave their home villages for purposes of seeking work either internally or across an international border. Typically migrants are not deceived and are compensated for their labour as planned. However, a number of cross-border migrants in the study were technically minors and are therefore considered as "trafficked" by international definition.

Family

Parents, siblings, or other relatives are considered as family of trafficked persons. They are often deceived by traffickers into allowing their children to travel outside the village for purposes of seeking employment.

Village Level Officials

The opinions of village officials, commonly the village chief or his assistant or the village representative of the Lao Front for National Construction, were sought regarding socio-economic conditions as well as the situation with respect to trafficking.

District Level Officials

In addition, District officials, usually from the local Department of Labour and Social Welfare office assisted the research teams in selecting villages where trafficking was taking place. These officials offered their own views on the trafficking situation and the causes of trafficking within their districts.

Researcher Observation

Finally, the researchers themselves, as Lao citizens, frequently offer their own observations on the circumstances and situations which they encountered, and were often called upon to judge the authenticity of information being provided by the many interviewees.

PROFILES OF TRAFFICKING VICTIMS



GENDER

The majority of trafficking victims (60%) are young females between the ages of 12-18. On average, males tend to be older; and more often in the migrant as opposed to the victim category.

ETHNICITY

With respect to ethnic composition of the trafficked victims, a disproportionate number are from ethnic minority backgrounds. This may be attributed to the 100% correspondence of minority trafficking cases surveyed to recently relocated or resettled villages or households.

In order of frequency, after Lao-Tai groups (62%), the Mon-Khmers show up most often in trafficking reports (27%), followed by Tibeto-Burman (10%) with only a small number of Hmong-Mien (1%) cases reported.

2 ETHNOLINGUISTIC PERCENTAGES OF TRAFFICKING VICTIMS*		
Ethnic Family	% in sample	% of population
Lao	18 %	30.0 %
Tai-Thay	44 %	36.5 %
Mon-Khmer	27 %	23.5 %
Hmong-Mien	1 %	7.50 %
Tibeto-Burman	10 %	2.50 %

*Victims here do not include migrants who are technically minors.

This table gives some indication of the issues involved. Fewer ethnic Lao victims of trafficking were identified than might have been expected on the basis of national population data (18% compared to 30% of total population) as are the Hmong-Mien (27% to 23.5%). However, the Tai-Thay, and the Mon-Khmer groups are slightly over-represented and the Tibeto-Burmans (10% to 2.5%) are considerably over-represented and clearly at risk.

AGE

Of the victims/migrants interviewed, approximately 63% were 18 or under, 33% were between 19 and 29, and 4% were 30 and above.

Males going to Thailand are on the average older than females and tend to be migrants as opposed to victims. Females tend to be younger, under 18 years of age, and more vulnerable to victimization and sexual exploitation.

3 AGE GROUPS OF EXTERNAL TRAFFICKING VICTIMS								
Age Groupings								
12-18 Years			19 - 29Years			30 + years		
M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
3%	60%	63%	12%	21%	33%	3%	1%	4%

EDUCATION

The correlation between education level and victimization is difficult to characterize. In general males are better educated than females, and they are also represented by fewer occurrences of trafficking overall. There is a general tendency towards lower education levels (higher percentages of no school versus upper secondary). Only 24% of respondents had completed secondary school, and 45% had no or only partially completed primary school. This figure is even more striking when disaggregated by gender, with 43% of female trafficking victims having either never been to school or only partially completed primary school. Completion rates for primary school were 31% overall and 23% of the female victims. These figures are lower than the national average rate and for females, which are 57.4%

4 EDUCATION LEVELS OF TRAFFICKING VICTIMS			
Education Levels of Victims			
	M %	F %	Total %
no school	0	13	13
some primary	2	30	32
finish primary	8	23	31
lower secondary	4	16	20
upper secondary	4	0	4
Total	18	82	100

respectively (2001-2002 school year, Ministry of Education data). With respect to ethnic minorities, both the frequency of occurrence of the Tai-Thai groups in the sample and their relatively higher levels of education compared to all other groups is noteworthy.

5 EDUCATION LEVELS OF VICTIMS BY ETHNIC GROUP					
Ethnicity & Education of Victims					
	Lao%	Tai-Thai%	Mon-Khmer%	Hm-M%	Tib-Bur%
no school	2	0	4	2	2
some primary	9	12	12	0	0
finish primary	13	14	6	0	0
lower secondary	4	12	4	0	0
upper secondary	2	2	0	0	0

The Hmong-Mien and Tibeto-Burman samples are probably too small to be meaningful. But the relatively higher education levels of Mon-Khmer groups may be significant when the sample size and smaller representation in the population as a whole are taken into consideration. Thus it may be suggested that overall education levels of the trafficking victims are either the same or lower than the average levels for rural areas in Laos, depending on location and ethnicity.

URBAN/RURAL

The cases to which the researchers were directed through the sampling process were from rural areas. There are probably several reasons for this, though none were mentioned specifically in interviews. The first is that rural people are more naïve, which means they tend to be more trusting of people and consequently, get deceived more easily. It can be suggested that urban people would be more suspicious, and more likely to seek legal means of dealing with traffickers. Also they would be, on average, better off financially and may have access to safer channels for migration, particularly as family connections across borders are strong in urban-border areas. It was noted that the most vulnerable lowland groups, though from rural farming backgrounds, tend to be clustered in areas that are easily accessible to urban areas. This proximity to the city, along

with the lure of material goods and the promise of a higher standard of living, may be a significant factor that influences people who decide to go to Thailand. Almost none of the people trafficked were from extremely remote areas.

TRAFFICKERS

WHO ARE THEY ?

Traffickers, on the Lao side, may be loosely classified into outsiders and insiders. Outsiders are usually from the general region but not residents of the same village as their victims. In some cases, however, outside traffickers may have been former residents of the village who have since moved out. Insiders live in the same village as the victims, and may even be closely related to them. A case in point is that of Mrs. Vieng of PakTha district in Bokeo province:

Mrs. Vieng is an ethnic Lue woman whose 16-year old daughter, Tui, was tricked and trafficked to Thailand by her cousin, Ms. Anhmany, from Oudomxay province. This case is a good example of an insider and a close relative gaining the trust of the victim and successfully trafficking her over the border to work in the sex industry.

Anhmany tempted Tui to come with her to Houayxay by promising her a job as a sales assistant in a shop with a monthly salary of 5,000 baht.¹ Anhmany claimed she had been working there for three months already and the owner asked her to recruit five more girls to come and work in his shop. The offer sounded reasonable, and since Anhmany was her cousin, Mrs. Vieng gave her daughter permission to go to Houayxay as long as she agreed to come back in three months. The family needed the extra income and since Houayxay is in the same province, she was not too worried about her going too far away. Vieng agreed with the understanding that her daughter would be accompanied by Anhmany to Houayxay.

Instead of taking Tui to Houayxay as agreed, Anhmany took her by boat to Thailand where she sold her for 25,000 baht. The next day Anhmany gave her cousin Mrs. Vieng (Tui's mother) 10,000 baht and told her it was from her daughter as an advance on her salary. Mrs. Vieng never heard from her daughter again.

The only news Mrs. Vieng ever found out is that her daughter was brought over the border by a human trafficking ring with connections in Thailand, and according to the village chief, this group had previously trafficked other girls on many other occasions. It turns out Tui has been sold to a brothel in Thailand and was forced into prostitution. Mrs. Vieng has no recourse but to rely on the Thai authorities to find Tui or hope that her daughter will be able to escape on her own.

¹ The currency exchange rates at the time of the report's publication are as follows: 1 US\$ = Thai Baht 40.85, 1 US\$ = Lao Kip 10,720, 1 Thai Baht = Lao Kip 262

Lao traffickers have regular contacts on the Thai side. Information pieced together from interviews with trafficking victims seems to indicate these contacts are highly organized and appear to be formed into a complex of *mafia*-type groups, the largest of which are in Bangkok, but with a considerable number of locations outside the capital as well. This is evidenced by the wide variety of destinations outside of Bangkok to which Lao victims are trafficked, in all regions of the country ranging from the far south to the far north, as well as to provinces such as Chonburi in the eastern region. The degree to which these groups may be interrelated is unknown.

In some places such as the land border crossing between Champassak and Ubon, the traffickers operate openly. The description below was offered by a local official in Champassak province:

"The brokers are the intermediaries who provide services to Lao people who want to work in Thailand but do not have enough money for travel costs or lack the necessary connections to find a job. The broker's role is to arrange transport to Thailand and line up recruits for jobs. There are 17-18 shops, usually offering long distance calling services, owned by Thai brokers at the border, which are used as places for trafficking people to Thailand.

When Lao people ask these brokers to send them to Thailand to work, they must agree to pay back the brokers after they get a job. Sometimes it takes people years to work off their debts, which is how they get caught in the illegal work racket and find it hard to leave. If they try to escape before they have paid off the broker, someone in the ring will likely see them if they try to get back to Laos, especially if they have to cross illegally."

ORGANIZATION

The traffickers are well organized and in the case of forced labour situations (discussed below) even seem to be filling orders for employers. The case of Ms. Sone age 15, from Khong district in Champassak is illustrative:

Sone was only twelve years old when she was trafficked by someone she knew. A girl in her village, named Phet, only fifteen herself, convinced Sone and three other girls, La, Nit and Nit's sister to go to Thailand with her.

Phet told Sone and her friends that her father said if they wanted to find jobs they should go to Khemmarath district in Thailand. Phet's father took five girls, including his own daughter, to see two brokers; one was a Lao woman and the other was a Thai man. The girls were taken from Savannakhet province and handed over to some Thai people on the other side of the Mekong in Khemmarath district.

From Khemmarath, they made their way to the capital. When the girls arrived in Bangkok, they met a man who escorted them to the house of a wealthy Chinese woman. Three of the five girls were selected to stay with the Chinese woman. Sone was one of the three who was chosen, as well as Phet and Nit. Sone heard the Chinese woman complain that the other two girls were too young and told the broker to find them other places.

Eventually, Sone was taken to another broker for further sale, while Phet stayed behind with the wealthy woman in Bangkok. A man took Sone to a garment factory, where she worked until she was rescued.

With so many tiers of agents and brokers involved, it may be assumed that considerable sums of money are changing hands since payoffs have to occur at each point for the system to work.

It is also interesting that locations to which victims are transported along the way are often well known. It can be speculated that the businesses at these locations are often masquerading as quasi-legitimate employment agencies, which protects them from prosecution. In any event, the people involved can simply deny any coercion, and place the blame on other employers further down the chain.

OFFICIAL COMPLICITY

Official complicity in trafficking was well attested in the data on both sides of the border. Policemen, military personnel, and other district level officials were frequently cited in the interviews as illustrated in the following case:

Mrs. Soulideth had a daughter who was trafficked to Thailand by a man named Mr. Thonekham, who used to live in her village. Mr Thonekham came to her house and offered to find a good job for her daughter in Thailand. At first Mrs. Soulideth and her husband were reluctant to let their daughter leave home; however, their family was very poor and badly in need of extra income to support the family. Moreover, their daughter wanted to continue her education but her parents did not have money to pay for her studies. Finally, when they found out that a member of the Lao Youth Union from their village would accompany her, they decided to grant their permission.

In another example, two Khmou girls were tricked into traveling to Thailand with the assistance of Lao military friends of the traffickers.

Mr. Sack is a 40-year old Khmou man from Hin Heup district in Vientiane province whose 16-year old daughter named Bou, disappeared on April 13, 2002 in the middle of the Lao New Year festivities. He later discovered that she left the village with another 16-year old girl named May. He started looking for the girls with May's father, Mr. Aloun, and they soon found out that the girls left with two women named Ms. Ta and Ms. Khek.

The concerned fathers went to Phonekang village, where Ms. Ta lived, but when they arrived, they realized that Khek and Ta had left already for a military camp in Vientiane. They continued on to the camp but still could not find the girls. Later on they heard that a group of four girls had recently crossed over to Thailand.

In fact, the group consisted of their two daughters, escorted by Ms. Ta and Ms. Khek. The two men crossed the river to Thailand to continue searching for them. They contacted their relatives living there and spent several months looking for them in entertainment places, bars and night clubs until at last they found out their children had been sold to a restaurant/bar in Nongkhai. Unfortunately, the two fathers were not able to see their children so they returned to Laos and reported the disappearance to the police.

TRAFFICKED SITUATIONS



As a very broad generalization, based on the data collected in this study, girls from the northwestern provinces of Oudomxay, Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang and Bokeo tend to be mostly trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation.

Approximately 35% of the total number of victims trafficked to Thailand were sold for purposes of sexual exploitation. Other main groupings were 32% for household servants, 17% for factory work, 12% for agricultural labour, and 4% for work on fishing boats.

Many of the same ethnic groups in Laos are also found in adjacent countries. In northern Laos, in addition to Thailand, some girls have gone to Myanmar, but a larger number have been taken to China.

Keo is an 18-year old Akha girl whose family was relocated to Long district in 2002. Her family is very poor and Keo lives with her older brother because both of her parents passed away a long time ago.

Keo met a woman named Ms. Lang who said she could find her a husband in China. She enticed Keo with stories about life in China and told her that the houses were bigger and that the standard of living was much higher there. She convinced Keo and another girl named Dou to go to China with her, without telling anyone they were leaving.

Ms. Lang brought the two girls to China and Ms. Lang took care of all the papers and travel costs. When they arrived in China, they stayed at her house and some Chinese men came to the house to see them. Ms. Lang lied to the girls, promising that the men came to meet because they were looking for wives. Keo was naïve and believed it when the Chinese man told her he loved her and would marry her so she would not have to go back home.

Keo did not marry the man from China because her older brother rescued her and Dou. It was not until the girls got home that they realized that Ms. Lang was not a matchmaker lining up prospective husbands for them. In fact, she was trying to sell them to Chinese men. Fortunately her brother found her and brought both girls back to Laos.

In another instance, two Hmong girls, Hiane and Ia were taken to China. At least one of the traffickers was from China. In this case, Hiane was able to return to Laos after 25 days, but Ia, who went with a small child, is still there

Mr. Fong is a farmer from the White Hmong ethnic group in Oudomxay whose cousin, Hiane, was trafficked to China. She was trafficked by a man he knew very well named Mr. Ki, a Chinese Hmong who married a Lao Hmong girl and has lived in Laos for many years. Fong found out that Mr. Ki, in conjunction with a man named Det, whom he did not know, had trafficked his cousin and another girl named Ia.

After Hiane came back from China, she reported Ki and Det as traffickers to the police in the hope of having them arrested. The police asked Hiane to provide photographs of the two men but she did not have any.

In the case of Myanmar, the majority of cases are trafficked to Thachilek, opposite Mae Sai on the Thai side of the border. The case of Ms. Tik is a good example:

Ms. Tik is 18 years old, an ethnic Lue girl who was trafficked to Thailand and Myanmar by Ms. Muay and Ms. Nong who live in Xieng Kok village. They came to her house and persuaded her to go with them over the border where they said she would be working as a housemaid and would receive a salary of about 10,000 baht per month. To someone more savvy and more experienced, the offer would sound too good to be true, but Tik was naïve and easily convinced so she left in 2001 with Muay and Nong without telling her father.

When they arrived in Long district, they stayed overnight before crossing over to Chiang Rai. Once they got there, a Burmese woman came to pick up Tik and they took her on to Myanmar. It was discovered later that Tik had been trafficked first to Myanmar and sold to another broker from Thailand who subsequently sold her to a brothel.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Sexual exploitation is a major aspect of trafficking. The physical appearance of the girls is a major factor in assessing their value as a commodity, the more beautiful the girl, the higher the price. Girls who are not considered to meet the aesthetic standards are rejected and frequently sent back to the

trafficker who may either accept the situation as a lost investment, or, if contacts are in place, try and market the girl to another form of labour such as a domestic or factory work. In the following example these elements are clear.

Ms. Nang is from the north of Laos in Luang Namtha province and was trafficked by someone she knew from her village, Ms. Thien, and forced into prostitution. In 2001, Nang left home for the first time when she was 16 years old with two other girls, Ping and Oi.

Nang willingly went to Thailand with her mother's permission. Before leaving, however, Nang claims she told Thien explicitly that she had no intention of going to Thailand to work in the sex industry. Thien swore that she would not do make her do such a thing, saying that as a mother herself, there was no way she would do that to her.

The girls were taken to Thachilek port, a local checkpoint between Bokeo province and Thailand, a common transfer point used by traffickers. The girls were then separated and Nang was sent to a house where there were about 30 other Lao girls working. Two days later, a man came to the house and took her to a hotel where he raped her every day for about a week until she was forced to start working as a prostitute.

Once she began working, she was locked up in a hotel and forced to provide sexual services to clients eight to ten times a day. She never received any money. Nang was able to escape her situation with the help of her friends Ping and Oi. She later found out that Thien had sold her for 30,000 baht. Thien did not succeed in selling Ping and Oi because the former was not deemed attractive enough and the latter was disabled, although they discovered Thien still had intentions of selling them as domestic servants.

As soon as they got back to Long district, Luang Namtha, the girls went to the police to report Thien as a trafficker. The provincial police eventually arrested Thien and fined her six million kip and put her in jail for six months.

FORCED LABOUR

Trafficking for purposes of other types of forced labour is also common and often involves extreme physical abuse. Forced labour situations include illegal sweat shop labour, factories, and domestic servants.

Illegal Sweat Shop or Factory

The following example demonstrates, not only the difficulty of the situation, and the extremes that some girls must use to get out, but also the distances that the trafficking net covers including the inland province of Phongsaly.

Ms. Noi left Laos in 1995 and ended up working in Thailand for nearly six years. Originally from Phongsaly in the north of Laos near the Chinese border, she was only 16 years old when she was trafficked to Thailand by her own cousins, Mr. Xay and his wife Ms. Chanh.

Xay and Chanh persuaded Noi to work as a sales assistant in their shop. She asked her mother's permission before leaving and was allowed to go as long as she came back in June of the same year. Noi left February 9, 1995, full of hopes and dreams of a better life, on the same bus as another girl called Vilayphone.

They arrived in Oudomxay province and then took a boat to Houayxay and from there they crossed the border illegally by boat, which is quite common practice. Vilayphone was taken away to a hotel in Bangkok and when Noi asked about going home, she was told by the traffickers that she had just paid 30,000 baht for the two of them.

Noi was also taken to Bangkok where she joined Vilayphone, who warned her that she would be forced to have sex with customers at the hotel. If she refused, she would be beaten very badly. However the hotel owner decided that Noi was not attractive enough and sold her again to another woman, Ms. Sifong, in Bangkok and she ended up doing piece work in a sweatshop.

Her initial job was sewing buttons, everyday, no holidays, from 7am to noon and then 1pm to 9pm. Sometimes the evening shift was extended to 1am or 2am. The workers were paid very little, only 500 baht per month plus they were given some pocket money for meals, 30 baht per meal. The factory owners convinced the workers to let them keep their money, telling them they would receive their pay all in one lump sum.

In another instance, a village man from Champassak traveled to Thailand to find his niece and his friend's daughter who had been trafficked. This is his account:

Mr. Kham is from Phonethong district, Champassak province and his village is situated on the Mekong River, approximately 38 km from the Thailand's Chongmek border checkpoint, an extremely busy area for trafficking.

Mr Kham's niece was trafficked to Thailand along with his friend's daughter. Mr. Kham decided to go to Bangkok to look for the girls and since he has a passport, it made it easier for him to travel to the capital. He paid a broker 3,000 baht at the border, the regular transportation fee to go Bangkok, and managed to find the factory where the children were working by paying the Thai police. Once he found the factory, Mr. Kham estimated that 200 Lao people were working in this factory.

The working conditions, as in many factories, were appalling. The girls were locked up and beaten and many of them were underage. Kham said that he saw Lao girls being beaten with his own eyes. They were lashed with whips if they did not obey or work hard enough and meals were not provided.

It was not easy for the girls to find a way to leave. Even when the girls fell ill, someone from the factory took them to a hospital and paid for the treatment. The girls were accompanied to the hospital for fear that they would try to get away.

In terms of salary, it was based on the amount of work. In this factory, many employees were trafficked by brokers. The amount of money owed to the broker was also deducted from the employees her salary.

In-Country Factory

The flow of labour to the cities is one of the causes leading to trafficking. A lot of women and girls from Northern provinces are persuaded by their friends and well known people to come to work in factories in Vientiane and Savannakhet. Some of them are trafficked and abused. An example follows:

Jung, 19-years old, is from Xieng Khouang province. She left her home town in 2000 with her cousin, Ms. Bong, who asked her to go to work in Vientiane. Jung was allowed to go because her parents trusted their cousin. Jung was very excited at the prospect of going to the capital to see what life in the city was like because she had never been there before.

As in many cases, the working conditions were not good. Jung had to work seven days a week, from 8am to 11pm with a one-hour lunch break. Her main job was to cut cloth and fix up the finished pieces. She received 20 kip per piece plus over time. She should have received about three hundred thousand kip per month; however, the factory owner deducted expenses such as electricity, water, and accommodation. In the end, she got only about 150,000 kip (approx. US\$14) per month, which she needed for food and other basic necessities. The girls like Jung who stayed in the factory dormitory, were only allowed out for two hours after 5pm every Friday.

At the factory she was treated very badly. The owner shouted and swore at the workers and looked down on them. One of the worst aspects of life in factory besides the verbal abuse, low pay and lack of freedom, was the fact that the workers were given water laced with amphetamines. Jung said when they drank the water, they felt energetic. However, when they stayed up late working, they were not able to sleep for the whole night and then they woke up exhausted the next morning. To solve the problem, they drank the water again to recharge their energy so it became an endless cycle of overwork, lack of sleep and unwitting amphetamine use.

Domestic Worker

Many trafficking victims are sold to brokers who place them in private homes as domestic servants, often in urban areas, where they are usually locked up in the house they are working in. This type of scenario is particularly dangerous as the victim is isolated and disoriented. Escape is difficult and dangerous, and victims forced to work as domestic servants experience some of the most extreme cases of violence and abuse.

The following case which the research team discovered was eventually brought to the attention of the public in the Bangkok Post Newspaper and the co-workers were rescued.

Manivone was 16 when she was trafficked to Thailand. She was working in a garment factory in Champhone district, Savannakhet province, an area that is notorious for trafficking. The factory was run by a Thai businessman called Mr. Xang, who has business interests in textiles, road construction and importing heavy machinery. He successfully convinced her, along with another girl from her village, Net, to go to Thailand with him.

The girls left Savannakhet in 1996, crossing the Mekong River in a small boat accompanied by Mr. Xang. They stayed overnight in Mukdahan, a well known border town where trafficking victims are often transferred. The following day Mr. Xang handed the girls over to another man who put them to work in his house where there were many other girls working. They worked for 18 days but were not paid. Then the girls were delivered to Paichit, a wealthy businessman in Bangkok.

Upon arriving at Paichit's house, the girls were told to hand over their clothes from home and given something else to wear. In addition to their clothes, all their money and telephone numbers from home were taken away. The girls' suspicions turned to fear that they had been sold.

The house they were forced to work in had very high walls and 24-hour security guards. Manivone ended up being confined in this house for seven years and throughout her incarceration, she was treated brutally by her employers and never received any money. She worked with four other Lao girls; one from Khammouane province; one from Savannakhet; and another from Champassak; doing housework and other chores from 5am to 1am, without a break. They were fed only once a day but if their employer was not happy with their work, they were not fed at all and punished severely to the point of torture. The girls were never given any medical treatment for their injuries nor were any basic necessities provided. For the short time they were allowed to rest, the girls slept on the bare floor with just a pillow and blanket.

The punishment and beatings continued throughout the seven years that Manivone was detained and various methods of torture were employed. Manivone was tortured regularly in many different ways with pliers, ranging from pinching her skin in tender spots to cutting her ears and tearing the soft flesh. Pliers were used to cut her teeth and break them, leaving exposed broken stumps.

The girls were punished for the smallest infractions. For example, if the flowers looked faded in the garden, rope was tied around the girls' necks and then they were dragged around the yard. If leaves or branches that fell to the ground were not swept up immediately, the girls would be forced to lie face down on the ground while they were whipped with a strip of rattan or their fingers hit with a rock.

The four girls often used to discuss plans to escape but they felt their chances were hopeless because the wall around the house was so high and the security so tight. Even if they did manage to escape, no one had any money to get back to Laos.

Fortunately for Manivone, her uncle Nam, started looking for her after her family realized that the Thai businessman must have sold his niece. One day by a stroke of luck, Manivone was outside sweeping in the garden when her uncle Nam passed by. When she saw him outside the gate, she asked him to rescue her. Manivone managed to escape with the assistance of her uncle and made her way back to Laos after seven years of forced labour.

Endnote: This case was publicized in the Thai media and the police came to Paichit's house and freed the other girls. Due to the publicity generated by the case, Mr. Paichit was charged under Thai law. Mr. Paichit traveled to Laos and offered Manivone's family money, approximately US\$2,000, to stop the legal proceedings against him and his wife. Manivone was reluctant, but her uncle convinced her to take the cash settlement and sign the papers. The case has subsequently been dropped.

Fishing Boat

Yet another precarious work situation for Lao trafficking victims, in particular for boys and young men, is deep sea fishing. In these cases, most of the time is spent on commercial fishing boats in the open sea which are difficult to scrutinize and where there is little opportunity for escape. It may be suggested that a high percentage of disappearances might be attributed to this sector. The following is an account of a fishing boat experience and a rare example of escape.

Mr. Keomany had friends who came back to Laos and persuaded him and his two friends, Pick and Thene, to go to Thailand. Keomany and his friends were taken to meet a boat owner who told them they would be

going out to sea for a few days. He saw the boat owner pay the two Thai men some money, but he could not see exactly how much and he did not realize he had been trafficked. He was seasick for the first couple of days but when he managed to get up and around, he met some other Lao men working on the boat. The other Lao men revealed that they had been sold to the boat owner and had to work off the money he paid for them. They admitted that they had been working very hard and still had not received any money. Finally it dawned on Keomany that he and his friends had been trafficked as well.

The boat went out to sea four to six times per month for five to six day periods, during which time they had to work hard, day and night. There was no rest once they docked either because they had to unload the catch, clean the boat, and prepare food for the crew. They worked year-round in all seasons, even through heavy storms and were paid only about 200 baht per trip, approximately 1,000 baht per month, except the boat owner deducted expenses and only paid up at the end of the year. It worked out to only about 5-6,000 baht on average per year, depending on the nature of their work, which did not even cover basic daily expenses.

They endured these working conditions for nearly seven months until they successfully escaped on their second attempt. Since they barely made any money, they could not save up enough to cover the travel costs to go home. They were also warned by the other Lao boat workers that if they tried to escape, they would be beaten, possibly even killed if they got caught.

Agriculture

Although a large portion of the migrants from Laos seeking jobs in Thailand are in the agricultural sector, the majority do not fall in the trafficking victim category because many do receive fair wages for their labour. In some cases, however, employers take advantage of the illegal status of the workers and simply do not pay them the agreed amount, and even go so far as to report them to the police when the time comes to pay their salary. The following is an example.

Mr. Thongbay left home with some friends from the same village, five other young men and one woman, along with a broker named

Somchit. Somchit is a merchant from Loei province, Thailand, who in addition to being a broker, usually delivered eggs to people in Kenethao district, Sayaboury province in Laos. He sent Thongbay and his friends to an egg warehouse.

Thongbay and his friends worked on the duck farm for almost a year. Everyday, they had to wake up at about 5am or 6am and work until 3pm. They also had to sleep at the farm in order to keep an eye on the ducks. The owner would send food to them, but they never received a regular monthly salary. Every now and then the owner would pay them about 500–1,000 baht each. After nearly a year, Thongbay had received only 5,000 baht.

Thongbay and friends often asked the owner for some money, but he always put them off saying that he would pay them in one lump sum whenever they decided to go home. When Thongbay's friends decided to leave, they asked the owner for their pay, but he refused so they left the farm without receiving any money at all. Nevertheless, trusting Thongbay stayed on with the hope that eventually the owner would pay him.

One day, the owner said he was going to the market but instead reported Thongbay to the police for working illegally. The police officers who investigated Thongbay the next day initially thought he was Burmese. When he told them he was Lao, he was imprisoned in Saphanhin district for 15 days and then sent to a camp in Bangkok. In the camp, Thongbay met about 50 other Lao men who went to work as boatmen in Thailand.

INTERNAL TRAFFICKING

Often the issue of trafficking within the country is viewed as less important in contrast to the more dramatic aspects of international or external trafficking. This study, however, found that not only is internal trafficking a problem, it is common. It was found in the factory workforce of Vientiane and is being used for purposes of sexual exploitation.

Although recruitment practices in cases of internal trafficking follow the same pattern as those found in international trafficking, other aspects of internal trafficking are different. Victims of internal trafficking are almost always female, usually girls under 18 years of age. Labour provided by internal victims is mostly restricted to two

areas, garment factories and prostitution. In the latter case, however, girls' labour usually entails selling and serving drinks and entertaining customers, cooking, and cleaning and washing, as well as prostitution.

Cases of internal trafficking were found almost exclusively in Houaphan and Xieng Khouang provinces especially among Tai Deng (Red Tai) and Khmou populations.

A good illustration of the situation is seen in the case presented here. Of interest also is the fact that village officials were knowledgeable about the situation yet neither the village officials, nor the police attempted to assist the girls.

The case took place in June 2003 and involved Mr. Deth, who came to recruit young girls in Sam Neua district in Xieng Khouang province to work for him in Ly village, Pek district, in the same province. He gave some money to their parents and signed the contracts for the girls. Mr. Deth told their parents that he loved the girls like his own daughters. He promised they would have easy jobs washing clothes, doing dishes, cooking and cleaning up the house and that he would pay them 200,000 kip per month. The parents believed him so let their daughters go with him.

When they arrived however, the girls reported that it was not at all like he promised. Deth forced the young girls to serve beer and food to the customers, in addition to working as hostesses and prostitutes. The girls were sexually abused by some of the customers. Any girl who did not obey would be beaten and shouted at and sometimes would not be allowed to eat.

Four of the young girls wanted to leave Mr. Deth's beer shop because conditions were so bad. Mr. Deth made an agreement with the owner of another beer shop, Mrs. Soulany. She agreed to pay 500,000 kip per girl and signed a contract with Mr. Deth which was certified by the village chief on June 19, 2003. The agreement stated that Mrs. Soulany would pay Mr. Deth part of the money on the day of the sale and then the balance a few weeks later.

At first the girls were very happy because they thought that they could escape however, the longer they stayed in the new beer shop, the worse it got. On June 23, 2003, two girls escaped from the shop and

went to stay with a friend. The friends brought the two girls to the police station in Pek district, Xieng Khouang province but they were told there was no need to file a complaint with the police and that this matter could be settled at the village level.

The internal labour situation, especially where factories are concerned, remains a risk for people seeking jobs. In the case of the Khmou woman cited here, the conditions are as bad as many reported by victims in Thailand.

Mone, a young Khmou girl from Houaphane province was trafficked within Laos to the capital city, Vientiane, to work in a garment factory when she was 18 years old. Traffickers came to her province posing as job recruiters looking for workers to fill positions in Vientiane.

Mone was sent to work in a factory where conditions were poor. There was strict 24-hour security at the factory. No one was allowed to leave the premises without written permission from the director. Mone was assigned to a unit where everyone was doing piece work sewing buttons, for which they would receive about 20 kip per piece. Mone averaged about 130 pieces per day but her salary was not enough to cover her daily living expenses. She was often required to work overtime, sometimes till midnight, but she never received overtime pay.

After a month in the factory, Mone was miserable. She did not have enough money to buy food. In addition the workers were not treated very well. The supervisor shouted at the workers and would beat them. They were locked up in the factory or the dormitory except for meals.

MIGRANT LABOUR



The largest portion of the cross-border movements between Laos and Thailand are related to labour migration. Indeed all trafficking begins with or is justified by the promise of finding work that pays well. Often labour migration involves whole families hiring themselves out for temporary farm labour and is therefore not restricted only to individuals. The distinction between labour migration, whether legal or illegal, and trafficking is that labour migrants are normally compensated and do not experience exploitation and abuse. Generally the migrant has some idea as to where they are going and in many cases may pay transportation and administrative costs associated with travel to the employment.

The brokers charge different rates for their services depending on where people want to go. For example, if someone wants to go to the south of Thailand, they charge about 6,000 baht; it costs 3,000 baht to go to Bangkok or Chiang Mai, and it is 2,000 baht to go to Isaan in the northeast.

Informal networks have evolved in some areas, and as in the following case, a number of individuals may be recruited to work in the same location.

Mr. Done is a 24-year old from Sayaboury province who wanted to go to Thailand to earn some money to help his family. He knew of a restaurant in Bangkok owned by a Chinese man, and before leaving Lao called him up and asked if he had any vacancies. He said yes, so Done decided to go to Thailand. His mother gave him permission and he crossed the border illegally to Kenethao district.

While Done was working in Bangkok, he sent home money once, and was able to visit one time as well and give his parents some money. After visiting his parents, he returned to his job in Bangkok. Done reported that his work experience in Thailand was not too bad because in addition to earning some money, he also built his confidence and he gained new knowledge and skills. He felt he could make use of this experience, especially if he could save up enough money to open a business. However, some aspects about working in Thailand were not so easy since there were many rules and regulations to follow. He did not feel very free because he was always worried about getting caught for working illegally and he agreed it would be much better to ask for a work permit first.

As in the previous case, internal labour migration, especially where factories are concerned, is still not a guarantee of good pay and good working conditions. This is perhaps another reason why potential migrants are willing to take the risk of traveling to Thailand since labour conditions in Laos are still poor by comparison. Internal labour migration to Vientiane is high from the provinces of Houaphan and Xieng Khouang. In many aspects, the situation is not unlike Lao people going to work in Thailand. Based on data from this study, migrants from Phongsaly appear to fare better, and often travel only as far as neighbouring provinces such as Oudomxay or Luang Namtha compared with other migrant workers from northern Laos.

THE TRAFFICKING EXPERIENCE



The trafficking experience is a complex arrangement of interrelated elements. It is useful however, for analytical purposes, to distinguish the various components of the process.

For these purposes, the following elements are identified:

- recruitment
- departure from Laos
- buying and selling
- violence and abuse
- drugs
- HIV/AIDS
- escape

Of course, not all of these elements are present in any given instance. Violence, drugs or HIV may or may not be present and escape is not always an option.

RECRUITMENT

As we have seen in the section on traffickers above, recruitment is usually carried out by people who are familiar to the victims and who may even be residents in the village. In extreme cases, close relatives are involved and even parents who may be misled by the trafficker. Cases of parents “selling” their children were not found during the study although allusions to this were made by various interviewees in Champassak province. Recruitment is generally a slow process, requiring the establishment of trust with the victim and the family as a first step. In addition, most recruitment is done in groups of friends or peers from the same or from adjacent villages.

DEPARTURE FROM LAOS (LEGAL, ILLEGAL)

The Mekong is more of a highway than a boundary with both Lao and Thai populations having strong connections through intermarriage and flourishing informal trade relationships. The border between Laos and Thailand is approximately 1,100 km long, with vast stretches of river and forests that are simply not possible to police. Furthermore, a large number of border crossing situations that eventually end up as trafficking are done legally with legitimate border passes or even passports. However, in many places informal crossings are so common as to not attract the attention of authorities.

BUYING AND SELLING

The underlying principle of trafficking is that the victims are bought and sold on the basis of their physical assets for the intended labour situation. Prices vary considerably ranging from 500,000 Kip or the equivalent of just under US\$50 for a girl trafficked within Laos to 30,000 Baht or US\$760 for a girl sold into prostitution in Thailand. Often the amount the employer has paid for the child will subsequently be deducted from any salary to which they are promised, thus burdening the victim with an unintended and often unknown debt.

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

The worst cases are those where victims are physically abused. In many of the cases reported the victim experienced some level of violence and abuse, the most extreme being reported in cases of sexual exploitation and domestic servants. This violence or threat of violence coupled with the threat of being handed over to the police as an illegal migrant was usually enough to keep the victim trapped in his or her situation. Cases of rape, beatings, verbal abuse, and torture were all reported. Victims often go without medical treatment and suffer from long-term physical and psychological damage.

The experiences like those of Mee are not unusual:

Mee worked as a shop assistant, doing all kinds of tasks, even carrying 50-kilogram sacks of rice and sugar. If she was not able to complete the task immediately, her employer would beat her with anything she could find. Once her boss even smashed a ceramic dish over head. On countless occasions, Mee bore the scars and marks of physical abuse and was often covered in bruises and scratches. She was only fed leftovers and had to sleep on the floor under the stairs, her only comforts a pillow and a blanket.

DRUGS

Drug abuse by a family member was cited by some victims as a key factor affecting their vulnerability to trafficking. The following examples are from Long district which has been heavily affected by relocation.

A village official from Xieng Kok reported there were about 20 young people in the village addicted to drugs. They tried to arrest the dealers many times, but they always pay off the police and get released. Many of the villagers have complained about this matter, but nothing seems to stop the supply of drugs from coming in.

Drugs, in particular methamphetamines, are also used to control victims and used as additives in drinking water at factories or other places to which children have been trafficked for purposes of forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Four men exerted strict control over the girls working in the beer shop. They were not allowed to go out beyond a certain limit. The four men were seriously addicted to drugs. If they did not have any drugs, they would get violent and beat people up, threaten people and even physically abuse the Lao girls to get money to buy drugs.

HIV/AIDS

A number of cases were recorded during the study that resulted in victims contracting HIV/AIDS and ultimately their death. In all these cases victims were trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation. The cases of the following two victims are especially compelling.

Bay, 21 is an ethnic Khmou girl who was deceived and trafficked to a massage parlour in Sansouk village in Souphanbouly province, Thailand.

The hours at the massage parlour were grueling; Bay had to work from 7pm to 3am. The living conditions were not much better. The rooms were cramped and the girls slept four people to a room on the floor with no mattress. For the first two months Bay never received any money and was given only 50 baht per day for food. The massage parlour owner, Mrs. Mee, claimed she had already handed over the equivalent of two months' salary, 57,000 baht, payment for Bay and another girl. She made it clear that she expected the girls to work for free for the next couple of months to pay off her investment. Once they had worked for two months they were supposed to start receiving a salary for the services provided. The money paid by the clients was divided three ways; one part for Mrs. Mee; one for the "officers" (the local police) and the remainder was intended for the girls.

After six months of working at the massage parlour Bay became seriously ill. She went to the district hospital but was very weak and could not walk. She had rashes and spots all over her skin and she was bloated. She could not sleep or eat, was nauseous and often vomited if she did manage to get some food down. They tried to treat her symptoms, but there were so many. Eventually she found out she had tested positive for HIV.

Bay went back to work but two months later, she became extremely sick once more. Mrs. Mee told Bay to go home and paid Bay 28,000 baht.

On returning home Bay became gravely ill. Since completion of the research Bay has died.

Ly, a Lue ethnic girl from PakTha district, Bokeo province was deceived by traffickers and in 1992 was sold into prostitution in Hat Yai, Thailand where she worked for six years until she was finally freed. One year after she returned home, she died. Before dying, she confessed to her family and friends that she was sick because when she was in Thailand, she was forced to sleep with clients five to ten times a day, and then her employers suspected she was HIV+ and decided to let her go.

ESCAPE

Escaping from the various trafficking situations is always difficult and often cannot be accomplished without considerable planning, ingenuity and bravery. Even then, after escaping from the establishment itself, victims often must face a variety of obstacles such as how to get from the interior of Bangkok to the Thai-Lao border, and whether to trust or avoid the Thai and Lao authorities. Sometimes escape is not possible, but in the following experience, the victim managed to escape and return to her home in Saravane.

Chantaly went to Thailand in March, 1994, when she was 16 years old. She ended up working as a domestic servant in the house of a rich Thai man named Goh who owned a factory. In order to find a way to escape, she decided to make Goh trust her. Her plan worked; he trusted her so much he would leave her alone in the house and he even gave her a set of car keys.

One day, Chantaly had the opportunity to escape when Goh went out to a meeting and his children were not at home. She hardly had any money, just a gold necklace Goh bought her and 40 baht. She caught a tuk tuk to Mochit and on the way the driver asked her how she ended up working in Thailand. She told him the truth that she had been working for three years but had never received any money. All she had was the gold necklace so the driver took her to a shop so she could sell it to get some cash. She sold the necklace and got 2,000 baht for it and used the money to pay her way home. The tuk tuk driver took her to a bus station to go to Nongkhai, the town closest to the Lao border near Vientiane.

When she arrived in Nongkhai, she had to ask people how to get to Vientiane because she did not know how to get there. She found a bus going to Vientiane but when she arrived at the Thai border check point, the immigration officers asked her to show her passport. She did not have one, but fortunately an older Lao woman from Vientiane helped her get past the Thai checkpoint by pretending Chantaly was her daughter.

However, when they reached the Lao check point they were stopped just as they were about to go through. The immigration officers thought that the older Lao woman was trying to bring a Thai woman into Laos illegally because they did not realize that Chantaly was a Lao citizen. The woman told the immigration officers the truth that Chantaly did not know the way and that she felt sorry for her and was trying to help her. They questioned Chantaly and she told them how she had been tricked and sold in Thailand and that she had just escaped. She also told them her parents' names and address. The police detained her for two hours and they checked her bag and her money. Finally they believed she was actually a Lao citizen and they took her to the bus station and sent her back to Saravane.

GONE FOREVER

A significant number of children, 17% from the survey, have simply disappeared and never returned to their homes and families. Quite naturally this is a source of grief and psychological hardship for parents and families of victims, especially when they know the traffickers, who all too often are living free from prosecution. In many cases parents are still waiting for their children to return. The following examples are typical of this sad situation.

Mrs. Som's daughter Sitthaly was trafficked to Thailand and since the day she left, she has been hoping and waiting for some news. She did not give her daughter permission to go work in Thailand and even tried to dissuade her from leaving, but to no avail.

Sitthaly left with two other girls and two young men from the village and made their way to Pakse. They were promised that once they had worked for six months, they would be paid in a lump sum. They crossed the border into Thailand from Songkhone district in Savannakhet by way of Thapathoum checkpoint, a major border crossing in the south.

The only information Som knows is that once the victims and traffickers arrived in Thailand, they were handed over to Mr. Nun, another broker. He took the girls to a wealthy, Thai business woman, known as "Che-Noi" which literally translates as "rich business lady", who subsequently sold the girls to a factory. She is the last person to have seen her daughter or who would know her whereabouts.

Vong, a young Khmou girl from Luang Prabang, left for Thailand on September 22, 2002 without her mother's permission. Her mother, Mrs. Naly, had no idea her daughter had left home. She thought Vong was at school as usual, but when she was supposed to come home at the usual time, she did not show up. While her mother was out, Vong left with another girl.

Her mother asked around the village but nobody heard or saw anything. Ten days later, Mr. Kong, a *khatooy* (a Lao and Thai term for a transvestite) from Khammouane province came to see Naly and told her that Vong had left for Thailand because he found a job for her daughter. Once he told her this, she realized then that he was a trafficker and she got very upset. At first he denied it because he saw himself as a recruiter, not a trafficker. Mr. Kong promised that he would bring Vong home within three months. After three months, Mrs. Naly went to see Mr. Kong again but he told her that her daughter would



come back home only after completing a one-year contract. He said she would have to work for at least one year to pay back the broker on the Thai side. Three months later, Mrs. Naly went to see Mr. Kong again, but could not find him. She then asked her son, who was working in the provincial administration office, to trace his sister, but with no success.

Mrs. Naly went to Thailand and found information that her daughter had been sent to Phuket to work as a maid by a rich business woman from Bangkok. She was not able to get further information or continue her search as she ran out of money.

CAUSES AND PERCEPTIONS

There are a range of causes of trafficking, which are affected by the different set of circumstances of each of the victims. If we listen to the stories of the victims, as well as the viewpoints of other people affected by trafficking such as the families of victims, we can begin to understand some of the underlying issues that lead to migration and trafficking. Moreover, the observations of local officials are included to provide an overview of the situation from the village level by people who are not necessarily directly affected by trafficking, but whose opinions give additional contextual information which may help us understand why people leave the village in the first place as migrants and often end up being exploited.

PERCEPTIONS OF VICTIMS AND MIGRANTS

There are several themes in the stories of the victims which should not be seen as mutually exclusive, namely the theme of earning money as a way of helping one's parents and family, often to increase the family's status but equally as a result of poverty, rice shortages and lack of money to cover education costs; a theme of earning money to acquire material goods such as a motorcycle; and the theme of wanting to experience a more modern life as portrayed mostly through the medium of Thai television.



She dreamed of making enough money to renovate her house and to be able to buy her family some basic household appliances.

Pathoumpphone, Champassak

There were a number of reasons why she wanted to go to Thailand, but her main ambition was to build a house for her parents.

Pakse, Champassak

La could not answer why he wanted to work outside the country. He said that he saw his friends going there so he was interested in following them. Besides, he could earn more money than working in the village. Before deciding to work in Thailand, he admitted he really wanted to have a motorcycle. As for choosing Thailand over Vientiane, he said that nobody approached him to work in Vientiane.

Soukhouma, Champassak

Her idea at that time was to go to Thailand just for fun. She just wanted to take a short trip and then come back.

Pakse, Champassak

She saw many of her friends go over in a big group and she was curious to see what life in the big city was like.

Samneua, Houaphane

His motivation for going to work in Thailand was the influence of his friends, who persuaded him to go. When he saw how his friends had improved their standard of living after working in Thailand, he wanted follow them and go to Bangkok to try his luck.

Songkhone, Savannakhet

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS

Parents interviewed during the survey were generally concerned over their children's welfare. Some of the parents were deeply distressed by the disappearance of their children while others seemed to understand and accept that their children wanted more opportunities and to experience life outside Laos. Some parents also expressed pride that their children could earn money to help the family.

She thought that she would go and see her daughter after the rice planting was finished and take her back home with her this time. She deeply regretted that she let her daughter go to Thailand and if she ever comes back, she will never let her leave home again.

Na Le, Luang Namtha

Mr. Houn said his daughter decided to go work in Thailand because she wanted to experience the money, clothing and the modern lifestyle of a more developed country. (Tha Pabath, Bolikhamxay)

Mrs. Lang said she could not sleep properly and cried every night because she missed her daughter and worried about her a lot. She said that she does not want money or any other things; she just wants her daughter to come back home safely.

Long, Luang Namtha

Before leaving home, she taught her daughter to be a good person and told her she could do any type of job except she should never work as

a prostitute, use drugs or have an affair with a married man. She said she would be proud of her daughter as long as the money she earns is clean, and that if she made money from prostitution, she would not accept it.

Xieng Kho, Houaphane

Khoung's parents said they feel it is alright for their daughter to serve beer because many other girls in the village do the same job. Her father said the family is very poor and he has to work hard and can barely feed everyone. He also said that since his people are farmers, they have to work for themselves and not sit around and wait for other people to help them. He did not care that the villagers gossiped about his daughters because he was proud of them.

Xam Neua, Houaphane

PERCEPTIONS OF VILLAGE LEVEL OFFICIALS

Government officials generally interpret the motivations and causes of trafficking in purely economic terms and sometimes in a negative fashion. In most cases they are realistic, openly acknowledging the deficiencies in economic opportunity and the lack of access to material goods compared to Thailand.

The village chief said that prostitution could improve the economic situation of the girls' families, but he felt it was improper behaviour. Most of the girls were forced to do it, although there were some who entered the business voluntarily. Most of the girls would return home when they earned enough money. After being at home for a while, some girls could not stay in their village, primarily due to the fact that the other villagers always gossiped about them and insulted them. Girls who have difficulty reintegrating often go back to the sex industry since they are not accepted anymore in society once they have been involved, even against their will, in prostitution. They may want to leave and go back home, but if they are not accepted by their fellow villagers any longer, their lives are pretty miserable. In some cases even their families reject them.

Pek, Xieng Khouang

This police officer offered a good summary of the main reasons and motivations of the people who go to work in Thailand.

First of all, there are very few jobs available in Laos. When people are unemployed and they are told there are plenty of jobs in Thailand, they are tempted to go and try their luck. Some people have managed to come back with some money and to improve their families' standard of living and some have made enough to build a new house or buy a vehicle. When people see obvious signs of material success, they are inspired to go to Thailand. In some cases, parents and family members actually encourage friends and relatives to leave. Young people, often from middle class families, tend to leave in groups, full of dreams of modern life in the city and earning money. In general though, of all the people who have gone to Thailand, very few of them have been lucky.
Lakhonpheng, Saravane

FAMILIES

SOCIAL STATUS

To identify the forces at work in the trafficking process it is necessary to consider not only the pull effect of modernization from the development worldview and the Thai media, but also the gravitation towards social equilibrium that is centered in social structures of villages and families.

It was found in the study that trafficking seems to occur irrespective of economic wealth, especially in lowland situations. Poverty was cited as a cause but equally the desire for material goods whether it be land, modern conveniences, and permanent housing, were of equal motivation.

The forces at work in trafficking between Laos and Thailand, are the same as those that underlie trafficking internally, for example, from Houaphane to Xieng Khouang or to Vientiane.

Bee The economic status of Ms. Bee's family could be considered middle class because their house is made of wood and surrounded by a garden and many kinds of fruit trees. They own many kinds of household consumer items such as a television, a motorcycle, a bicycle and a tractor. They also have rice paddy and a peanut garden.



THE FAMILY INSTITUTION

Although it was not found to be the major cause of trafficking, a number of cases reported, often incidentally, family situations that can be broadly classified as dysfunctional, for any number of reasons whether organic, social, or psychological. Thus among the interviewees, there were children of deceased parents, children of divorced or separated parents, children of single parents, and children of parents who are addicted to drugs. And while these cases were by no means the majority, they were found in sufficient numbers to be considered as an element in the overall trafficking setting and suggest that there is room here for additional research.

The following example is illustrative:

Peut is a Hmong Khao from Xieng Khouang. There are seven children in the family and she is the oldest child. Her parents are farmers. Her father is addicted to amphetamines so her mother has to work very hard to support the family. Their cottage is very small and there is only a stove, some broken beds, and two old ragged blankets. There are no household appliances or any other equipment.

Family life may be directly affected by social upheaval such as that brought about by relocation of villages. It can also be brought about by divorce and separation, death of a parent, drug addiction or violence. Sadly, it is often the children who are most adversely affected and who may take the burden of resolving family problems upon themselves and in the process get drawn into the trafficking circle.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

PROSECUTION OF VICTIMS AND MIGRANTS

Inter-marriage and trade means that many people have strong connections on both the Lao and Thai sides of the border. As a result, whether it is for purposes of migration or not, many Lao people frequently go to Thailand. Frequent travel to Thailand is often viewed by local authorities as normal since many people go over the border to work illegally or just to visit relatives.

To combat the perceived problem of cross-border movement fines are often imposed. Unfortunately officials often lack the knowledge and training to distinguish between a case of illegal migration and one of trafficking. Consequently many trafficking victims are fined in varying amounts. There is however, no clear policy being implemented evenly throughout the country. In a few districts, neither fines nor imprisonment were imposed.

The detention of those returning from Thailand was recorded in two districts, Na Le and Kenethao.

About 1,300 people have gone to work in Thailand so far and most of them are still there. In order to stop the flow of people, the district authorities impose penalties on the offenders. A first-time offender is fined from 80,000 up to 1 million kip and may be detained for rehabilitation for more than five months. However, these measures have not proved to be that successful since many people continue to migrate to Thailand.

Kenethao district officer

In order to prevent people from working illegally, the district authorities are placing an emphasis on checking if people have proper work permits. If someone wants to work outside their village, they need to obtain the proper documents from the local authorities and they cannot stay beyond the expiry date. If anyone does not obey this law, he/she will be fined and punished accordingly. For example, the fines start at 150,000 kip per person for the first time, 280,000 kip for the second time and 500,000-700,000 kip for the third time. Some people have been fined up to 1 million kip and imprisoned for 45 days. However, these penalties still do not prevent people from looking for work outside their village.

Na Le district officer



PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKERS

On the other hand, in only a very few instances are traffickers prosecuted. So the paradox that emerges from the study is that in most cases the victims rather than the criminals are being punished, on both sides of the border. For example,

Mr. La's daughters were trafficked to Thailand by a man named Mr. Khamdy. When some officials from Vientiane went to Thailand to coordinate with the Thai police to take some Lao workers back home, they informed Mr. La that his daughters were detained by the Thai officials. They told him not to worry because in the next four months the authorities would send them home. La wrote an application form and filled in a certificate for the district authorities and then sent it to Vientiane. In November 2000, his daughters returned home and they told him that Khamdy had trafficked them. He was very angry about it so he sued him at the district level; nevertheless, Khamdy is still free and continues to traffic people.

Chayphet's daughters were trafficked to Thailand by a woman named Vilay and they were forced to work as prostitutes. The working conditions were awful and they had to work everyday without any holidays or days off. The girls tried to think of a way to escape and return home. The first attempt they made was to call their families using a customer's mobile phone. They rang their parents, but since no one answered, they tried calling their friends in Nongkhai to send news to their parents in Laos. Once Chayphet found out about her daughters, she went to see Ms. Vilay and asked her to return her daughters. She refused to help so Chayphet went to the police to report Vilay as a trafficker.

Eventually both of the girls managed to escape the brothel and return to Laos. As soon as they got home they filed a report with the district police in Xaythany district.

Ms. Chayphet felt terrible about what happened to her daughters, so she decided to sue Vilay for trafficking her daughters. On January 3rd, 2003, the court released the verdict. It was decided that the three girls voluntarily went to Thailand; therefore, the people who sent them to Thailand were not guilty. Later, Ms. Chayphet made an appeal to the court; however, she did not have enough money to pay for the additional costs (about 700,000 kip) and had to give up the lawsuit.

Prosecutions are difficult to obtain under the current legal system as there is no specific provision under the law for trafficking. Crimes related to kidnapping and prostitution of a minor are covered but the crime of trafficking itself is not and therefore legal redress is difficult. In addition, access to the legal system is limited and people lack an understanding of the legal system and their rights. Traffickers often are known but victims lack confidence in or knowledge of the legal system preventing them and their families from reporting the crime. In addition fear on the part of the victim of being fined or detained inhibits reporting.

With the Law on the Development and Protection of Women, which is scheduled to go before the National Assembly in late 2004, this will partly be addressed through a strengthened legal code. However, wide scale education about the law will be necessary to ensure enforcement.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

Two main themes weave their way through this report: the theme of naïveté and that of modernization.

The naïveté of village adolescents allows them to fall victim to the skilled sales pitch of the recruitment traffickers, since these young people do not have the life skills to assess the situation and take protective action.

Disparities brought about by unequal levels of modernization and development both within the region and within Laos, create a climate which encourages those with less opportunities to take risks. Impressionable youth, are drawn to Thailand, yet there is not much encouragement for young people to stay in their home villages, especially when job and educational opportunities are so limited. Traditionally, the institution of the family would be the primary and essential force preventing children from leaving the village. However, social and cultural changes are eroding the traditional family structure without replacing it with a new model.

The term “poverty” is heard over and over again in the interviews, but unless an analysis of it is properly nuanced, it remains a catch-all term in relation to trafficking. To make sense of the causes it is necessary to see what is meant by “poverty” through the eyes of rural villagers as opposed to outside measurements of poverty.

Thus with respect to “poverty” and its relationship to trafficking, the term should be used carefully. Poverty should be seen in relation to economic growth or improvement. The desire to improve the family’s overall standard of living and social status often leads to out-migrations and the subsequent breakdown of the family unit. In relocated villages, this appears to be even more severe and some of the negative by products of out-migration include: drug addiction, prostitution, depression, ill health, and increasing economic disparity among different families. Virtually all trafficking of ethnic minorities recorded during the study has been carried out from relocated villages or old villages into which other villages have been consolidated.

In general then, it is clear that trafficking is not necessarily the result of economic poverty in the sense that it may be measured by



outside indicators. The causes that emerge from the present study are first and foremost social and cultural. As a general target for anti-trafficking programmes, two situations of vulnerability emerge: villages that are peripheral to urban population centres and upland minorities who have been subjected to village relocation. It is therefore significant that trafficking victims from extremely remote areas or from traditional minority villages (villages that have not been relocated) do not appear in the sample.

MIGRATION VS. TRAFFICKING

Differentiating labour migration from trafficking is an issue that needs to be approached from two perspectives: legal and actual. From the legal point of view, the points mentioned in the introduction regarding the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and the accompanying protocols pertain, especially since the Lao PDR is now a signatory to both the convention and the protocols. Thus legally, for persons 18 years of age and under, migration for purposes of labour, whether or not it is consensual, is considered as trafficking.

In actuality, trafficking can be said to occur when exploitation of services or slavery is present. But many aspects of the processes of migration and trafficking appear the same. First of all, the reasons for going are usually the same and secondly, the recruitment process may be identical.

Also, among the individuals in the study classed as migrants are those that have relatives on the Thai side of the border, and in these cases there is considerably less risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the study that human trafficking is a complex issue and there is no single solution which will solve all problems and which will be able to prevent trafficking in its many and varied forms. In general, approaches for prevention should address the main causes of trafficking. Some suggestions are offered here, but these are by no means exhaustive, and additional recommendations will need to be considered as well.

- Lack of survival skills in Thailand is a serious problem for trafficking victims. While this could be approached with school-based curricula, it is doubtful that simply preaching against the perils of going to Thailand would have much impact. Indeed many victims and migrants admitted that they had been warned of the dangers in various ways but had decided to go anyway. Thus there should be a different approach focused on experience-based learning for high risk populations that includes how to survive in Thailand. This might be carried out more effectively through the non-formal education system rather than the formal system and should include how best to contact Thai authorities, and providing telephone numbers for Thai NGOs specializing in the rescue of trafficking victims.
- Intensified efforts to investigate and locate children who have disappeared in Thailand should be made. This process should begin with parents and focus on the links in trafficking networks that can be reconstructed starting with Lao traffickers who for the most part remain in place and so far have not been subject to prosecution.
- A standard policy should be implemented across the country where returnees are concerned, and this process should be facilitated as necessary. At the same time efforts to facilitate legal employment for Lao migrant workers in Thailand should be continued.
- Radio broadcasts in ethnic minority languages are planned on a limited scale to address the trafficking issue. This should be expanded in terms of the number of minority languages included in the broadcasts, especially for those groups who are at a greater risk of being trafficked.

- Given the popularity of Thai television in Laos, financing a prime-time Thai soap opera relating to a Lao trafficking experience would be guaranteed to have a large viewership in Laos and would perhaps raise awareness among Thai people about the illegal labour situation and the plight of Lao workers in their country.
- Research could focus on villages which are distinct for their lack of involvement in trafficking, and to identify the traits that characterize such villages. In addition one area that remains unclear is the relationship of education to trafficking. A study of this area in particular could suggest interventions through the education system that would be more successful than those already in place.
- A review of anti-trafficking prevention in Laos should be conducted. Successful approaches implemented in Thailand could be used as models, since the Thai context bears many similarities to the situation faced in Laos.

