



# Traffick Report: Thailand

Because of its rapid economic growth over the past decades, Thailand attracts many migrants from neighbouring countries, in search of opportunities, fleeing harsh living conditions or looking for a higher income. Here, lack of information and legal protection leaves them extremely vulnerable to human trafficking.

## Thailand's migration situation

It is estimated that between 1.2 and 2.3 million registered and unregistered migrants reside and work in Thailand, most of them employed in construction and domestic work, fishing and agricultural industries, and the sex trade.

In 2004, the Ministry of Interior registered approximately 1.28 million people from Cambodia, Lao PDR and especially Myanmar, and allowed them to receive work permits. In general, registered migrants are protected by the same legislation as Thai nationals. They are entitled to have access to public services such as health care and education for their children.

Irregular migrants, who enter Thailand illegally, are not entitled to any labour or social protection. Many children are among this group; some enter Thailand for the purpose of illegal work, while others come with their families and work because they are not allowed to attend school.

Thailand also experiences internal migration from the poorest provinces to the wealthiest ones. The country is also home to 1 million persons belonging to ethnic minorities, half of whom have not been granted Thai nationality. Because they are part of needy communities, ethnic minorities are more likely to migrate within the country; but because they do not benefit from any protection, they are also at risk of being victims of trafficking.



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## Trafficking snapshot:

In 2004, the Ministry of Interior registered 1.28 million migrant workers from Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. Over 93,000 were under the age of 15.<sup>1</sup>

Up to 12% of migrants in major border areas on the Thai side are considered to be probable trafficking victims.<sup>2</sup>

Out of 253 surveyed Lao victims who were trafficked into Thailand in 2004, 35% were destined for prostitution, 32% for domestic labor, 17% for factory work, 12% for agricultural work, and 4% for fishing boats.<sup>3</sup>

Around half of Thailand's hill tribes and ethnic minorities, or 500,000 people, do not hold Thai nationality.

80% of migrant children working in Thai factories were pressed into 12-hour workdays at wages far below the minimum wage.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly 25% of sex workers in Thailand are boys and girls under the age of 18 including children as young as 12.<sup>5</sup>

82% of migrant domestic workers and 45% of migrants working on fishing boats were forced to work more than 12 hours per day with no days off.<sup>6</sup>

Three separate factory raids in Thailand in 2007 uncovered trafficking victims, who had been imprisoned, forced to work for no pay and suffered physical intimidation and abuse.

1. Jerrold W. Huguet and Sureeporn Punpuing. "International Migration in Thailand". International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2005

2. "Research Report on Migration and Deception of Migrant Workers in Thailand". World Vision Foundation of Thailand (WVFT) and Asian Research Center for Migration, Chulalongkorn University, 2004.

3. "Broken Promises, Shattered Dreams." UNICEF/Laos MoLSW

4. Philip S. Robertson. "The Mekong Challenge- Working Day and Night: The Plight of migrant child workers in Mae Sot, Thailand". ILO / FTUB 2006

5. "Factsheet #2: Proportion of Underage Sex Workers in Thailand" UNESCO Trafficking Project, September 2003 <http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/trafficking>

6. "The Mekong Challenge - Underpaid, Overworked and Overlooked: The realities of young migrant workers in Thailand" ILO and Mahidol University's Institute for Population and Social Research 2006

The long journey home - former victims of trafficking return across the Thai border to Myanmar. Their repatriation has been supported by World Vision's anti-trafficking initiatives in Thailand.

## Migration and trafficking - the links

Within the Mekong Delta Sub-Region, Thailand is the principal destination country for sexual exploitation and forced labor. In large part this is due to its comparative wealth in relation to its neighbors; its estimated GDP in 2006 exceeded that of Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam combined. The high incidence of undocumented migration increases the risk and vulnerability of these individuals to be exploited for the labor and sex industries.

The illicit nature of the Thai sex industry makes it extremely challenging to determine its scope, but it is recognized as both large and profitable. Women and children are trafficked into Thailand for sexual exploitation primarily from Myanmar. Other victims include women and children from Cambodia, the Yunnan province of China and Lao PDR. Thai ethnic minorities are also at risk.

Children (under 18) comprise a significant sector of Thailand's sex industry. Not all of these children have been trafficked, but the ones that have are the most difficult to find or help.

Men, women and children from Lao PDR, Myanmar, Cambodia and the Yunnan Province are also trafficked into Thailand for forced labor often in what is known as the '3D' jobs - dirty, dangerous, and disdained - typically in factories, construction, agriculture, fisheries, and domestic work. Undocumented migration and the absence of protection for these migrant workers increases their risk of being trafficked and exploited.

Due to its economic and geographic situation, Thailand is also a major transit point for trafficking. Victims from Thailand as well as from surrounding countries are trafficked through to other Asian countries and as far as Australia, South Africa, Europe and North America for sexual exploitation. Thai laborers working abroad can also become victims of debt bondage, paying exorbitant recruitment fees.



## Partnering for solutions

Working effectively against trafficking in Thailand requires commitment at all levels of society - government, non-government organisations and communities both local and international.

**Communities and individuals** in at-risk areas need a greater awareness of the risks and realities of migration and conditions in various labor sectors that employ migrant workers, including informal sectors such as domestic labor or prostitution. Education materials to prevent human trafficking, including real-life experiences of victims, need to be made available in the public domain - schools, supermarkets, bus and train stations and hospitals - so that all people are made aware of the issue.

**All children and youth** should be given the opportunity to participate in activities that affect them, including efforts to prevent trafficking in persons. Governments, parents, and international organisations should provide financial and technical support for children's participation in trafficking prevention.

**Border crossings** must be made safer with improved identification and protection of migrants who have fallen victim to trafficking.

**Putting laws in practice**, in particular the Royal Thai Government's newly approved Anti-Trafficking Law, will improve the rights of trafficked victims and extend protection to men who have been trafficked. Tougher, more visible penalties for traffickers will deter operators at all stages of the trafficking journey.

**Immigration policies** need to allow for the protection of the rights of all migrant workers (documented or undocumented), and accommodate for the realities of current migration levels and demand for migrant labor in Thailand. To this end, Thailand's Alien Working Act should be reviewed, and better protection measures put in place for migrant workers in Thailand.

**An immediate response** in situations of abuse and exploitation will minimise additional trauma for trafficked victims once they are discovered. The Thai Government needs to set up an office empowered to take responsibility and action on migrant protection.

**Speedy and safe repatriation** is another area where the Thai government can show commitment and cooperation with neighbouring countries. The victim should have the right to choose whether he/she will serve as a witness in the prosecution case against the trafficker and where he/she will be repatriated (to the home village or an alternate location).

In this Thai border town, young illegal immigrants earn money by carrying umbrellas for tourists in exchange for small tips. The vulnerability of these "Umbrella Girls" to the promises of criminals is high.

Here, World Vision has partnered with community and border authorities to keep a watchful and protective eye on children who regularly take on this work.

Trafficking is defined by the United Nations – and most international organisations - as:

*“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 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.”*

This definition also states that the consent of the persons trafficked by any of the means indicated is considered irrelevant. Regarding children:

*“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if it does not involve any of the means set forth”.*

Da (name changed) travelled from rural Cambodia to Bangkok in search of her father who had been trafficked into a begging gang. With no money to buy his freedom or return home, she was coerced into the same industry.

Now she is learning to weave and sew at a residential centre for children who have been trafficked and may be still at risk. She Her mother is preparing for her return, and says that when she finally comes home the first priority will be sending her to school.



## Prevention. Protection. Policy. Prosecution.

Known as “the 4 Ps”, these are the key words for counter-trafficking activities in the Greater Mekong subregion:

- **Prevention** means reducing the vulnerability of a person or a community from being trafficked.
- **Protection** means creating the social, political and legal environment that protects the rights of the victims of trafficking.
- **Prosecution** means ensuring effective prosecution of the perpetrator and full justice to the victim.
- **Policy** means influencing the countries’ international obligations, national laws, bilateral agreements and also public opinion.

## Three levels of action.

- **Community level:** raising awareness and informing people of the risks of unsafe migration and trafficking.
- **National level:** acting in concert with the government, UN agencies and international organisations and advocating for policy improvement.
- **Regional level:** addressing trafficking as a cross-border phenomenon, in collaboration with neighbouring countries.

# World Vision's trafficking **RESPONSE**

World Vision is a leading advocate against human trafficking in Southeast Asia, partnering with governments, authorities and other NGOs. In Thailand, World Vision is using the following strategies to battle trafficking in persons:

## Assistance Support and Protection

**Project (ASAP)** The ASAP is an Australia funded project working to reduce incidence and risk of human trafficking among migrant and other vulnerable communities in key source and transit locations including Chiang Rai, Tak, Ranong, and Mukdahn. In the fight against trafficking, this project has increased protection services and the exercise of human rights and personal security as well as improving the social, economic and political environments for migrant and trafficked women and children.

## Children in Need of Special Protection

**Project (CNSP)** After working to reduce the number of children trafficked or exploited along the Thai-Cambodian border, the CNSP project finished in 2007. Through the project, World Vision staff and local volunteers were trained, the needs of children were gauged and recorded, and the public was informed and made aware of child rights through World Vision campaigns. Along with partner organizations, the CNSP also worked to advocate policy change to address human trafficking.

## Pattaya Street Children Project, Children's Happy Home Project

These projects, operating in the busy tourist areas of Pattaya and Phuket, aim to address migrant children's and street children's issues in sensitive areas. These children are often exploited into low-paid harsh labour or sex trade, or wander in the streets begging for survival. World Vision provides food, shelter, clothing and basic education, but also counseling, in order to prevent street children from being exploited and/or trafficked, and legal and psychological support to victims who are being rescued.

## In addition...

World Vision works with vulnerable and marginalised communities throughout Thailand, including Burmese migrant settlements in border areas, newly arrived migrant populations in Bangkok and rural communities where lack of opportunity drives young people towards the cities. Many of these interventions take place within World Vision development programmes with an emphasis on safety and security for children and adolescents.

## World Vision Asia-Pacific regional projects

### Mekong Delta Regional Trafficking Strategy 2 (MDRTS-2) Project

World Vision's Mekong Delta Regional Trafficking Strategy project is addressing the issues of trafficking in five countries simultaneously - Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar. The goal of MDRTS-2 is to reduce vulnerability to trafficking in both source and destination areas and to provide trafficking survivors with the support they need to start a new life after the trafficking experience. It also seeks to synergise country-level operations to create a united response to the issues of human trafficking.

### Regional Advocacy anti-Child Trafficking Project (RACTP)

RACTP flows across Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Its main goal is to improve the policy environment towards eliminating trafficking in persons, especially children, in the Greater Mekong Sub-regions. Strategies include the strengthening of local advocates on trafficking issues and partnering with governments to encourage real action to effectively combat human trafficking at community, national and regional level.

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"I won!" In a slum community just outside the outskirts of Pattaya, World Vision works with children growing up in the shadow of the city's infamous sex tourism industry. Children's club activities use fun games to share valuable messages on life skills, confidence and child rights.

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