

## Human Trafficking in Asia

### What are the challenges?

Human trafficking is a significant social problem of global proportions. The abuse and exploitation associated with human trafficking occurs world-wide: no country is exempt from the issue and no single country has complete control over addressing the problem.

Trafficking is overwhelmingly driven by poverty and a lack of respect for the rights of individuals. It is compounded by victims' low understanding of the consequences of trafficking, their high expectations of life elsewhere and shifting economic disparities within the region. Lack of opportunity and gross inequalities in economic and gender-based power contribute to exploitation.

Direct and indirect factors such as growing demands for exploitative services (including cheap goods and sexual service) in destination countries, like Australia, also contribute to encouraging human trafficking. The reluctance of these destination countries to acknowledge their exploitative demands further exacerbates the problem.

Human traffickers prey on the vulnerable, the economically disadvantaged, children without parental protection, or girls who believe themselves to be a burden on their families. Once trafficked, the victim loses control over himself/herself. They often have their personal identification (passports) confiscated and are financially bonded into exploitative activities. Seeking assistance from government authorities or civil society is difficult as most individuals are trafficked from one jurisdiction to another outside the legitimate migration policies of that state, making them 'illegal' in their destination country.

An effective response to human trafficking requires leadership from all governments in our region to implement victim-focussed strategies to address the problem that go beyond traditional law enforcement to confronting the supply and demand factors that perpetuate this damaging and degrading crime.

#### 1. What is the extent of the problem?

The issue of human trafficking has become a global concern. The number of victims trafficked has risen sharply in recent years, with an estimated 5 million people trafficked annually. In addition, the industry generates annual illicit profits of around A\$14 billion from crime syndicates.

Human trafficking is most prevalent in Asia. Of the 600,000 to 800,000 people trafficked annually in the region, about 250,000 are estimated to be from South-East Asia and 150,000 from South Asia.

The majority of Asian victims are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. However, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has indicated a recent dramatic rise in persons being trafficked for the purpose of labour exploitation. According to the ILO some 12 million people are enslaved worldwide for the purpose of forced labour. Of this 12 million, 55% are in South East Asia, and 40% - 50% are children.

#### 2. Why does it happen?

Human trafficking is the result of factors that supply (or "push") the potential victims from their home countries or regions and factors that demand (or "pull") the services of trafficked people into other countries or regions.

Factors that affect the supply of trafficked persons include: poverty; lack of access to employment opportunities; lack of access to education; armed conflict; domestic violence, child abandonment, and various discriminatory practices (including gender inequalities).



Factors influencing the demand for trafficked services in destination countries include: economic opportunity, the demand for cheap labour, the demand for sexual services, influence of family or friends, and the promise of a better life elsewhere (particularly directed to children who are easily manipulated).

### 3. Effective strategies for responding to trafficking

There are several challenges impacting on the Asia region's capacity to effectively respond to human trafficking. Many Asian countries are not a party to the United Nation's Protocol on Trafficking. Several countries lack national legislation which specifically targets human trafficking. In countries where this legislation does exist, there is often insufficient law enforcement capacity.

To be effective, anti-trafficking strategies must target the three dimensions of human trafficking operations: the supply, the traffickers and the demand. A common strategy to address human trafficking is known as the "4P approach", involving interventions that target Policy, Prevention, Protection (which includes return and reintegration), and Prosecution. The 4P strategy requires interventions in countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Effective human trafficking **prevention** strategies attempt to decrease the supply of potential victims through:

- alerting communities of origin to the dangers of trafficking
- alerting communities of destination countries to the exploitative practices of employers
- improving and expanding education and economic opportunities
- promoting equal access to education
- educating people about their legal rights
- ensuring workers rights and minimum standards

**Protection** strategies decrease the demand in destination countries through:

- identifying and prosecuting people who exploit trafficked victims
- naming and shaming the employers of forced labor and exploiters of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation, and raising public awareness through campaigns which make it harder to conceal or ignore these crimes
- coordination and cooperation between local, state and national level programs to fight trafficking and build stronger relations between countries and across regions
- advocacy campaigns to expose the exploitative nature of the industry

Strategies that effect the **return** and **reintegration** of trafficked victims include:

- helping victims locate and return to their families
- family support and basic counselling
- support for income-generating activities, education and vocational training
- routine follow up visits to all returnees.

**Prosecution** strategies aim to target those who traffic and receive profits from human trafficking via:

- law enforcement to vigorously prosecute traffickers and those who aid and abet them
- fighting corruption which facilitates the profits from human trafficking
- identifying and monitoring trafficking routes through better intelligence gathering and coordination
- clarifying the legal definitions of trafficking and coordinating law enforcement responsibilities
- training law enforcement personnel to identify and direct trafficking victims to appropriate care

### World Vision sponsors Youth Forum to speak out on trafficking

In September 2007, the Mekong Youth Forum on Human Trafficking, sponsored by World Vision Australia, Save the Children Fund, the International Labor Organisation, and the United Nations Inter-agency Project on Human Trafficking, provided a unique opportunity for young people (aged 12 to 19) from the Mekong region to discuss and voice their concerns, thoughts and opinions about human trafficking in their region. The forum was attended by thirty elected youth representatives from six countries: Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The forum saw five days full of activities, involving analysis and reflection on strategies to combat human trafficking. The centre piece of the forum was Dialogue Day, when the youth delegates sat face to face with the government representatives responsible for anti-trafficking initiatives in their respective countries, and asked questions, presented their views and exchanged their concerns. The participants took full advantage of this opportunity and openly engaged with their government officials about this crime that is so prevalent in their region.

The delegates ultimately submitted 30 recommendations to the regional government officials, which were considered and incorporated into discussion at the fifth Senior Officials Meeting of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) process in Beijing in December 2007.

#### 4. Australia's commitment to anti-trafficking initiatives

Australia has made significant efforts and investments to combat human trafficking in the past several years, both domestically and overseas and the Australian Aid White Paper released in 2006 expresses an intent to continue to tackle trans-boundary threats such as trafficking. World Vision welcomes the Australian Government's focus on the issue and its longer-term commitment to addressing the problem.

Australia's moves to scale up domestic efforts against trafficking have been significant, particularly in relation to aligning legal frameworks and stepping up law enforcement. However, this law enforcement approach needs to be supported by stronger efforts to build support services for trafficking victims, particularly women and children, and to address the harms caused by human trafficking.

One area requiring reform is the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons visa regime. The current visa framework introduced in 2004 as an amendment to the *Migration Act 1958* (CTH), allows for the provision of visas for victims of trafficking who have the potential to provide law enforcement agencies with information and/or assist in criminal prosecutions. We believe visas should be granted on the basis of a person's status as a victim of trafficking and their need for safety and support, regardless of their ability to assist in prosecution.

At present not all trafficking victims in Australia have access to victim support packages. There is a large unmet need for health services, accommodation, employment support, legal advice, and migration advice. An effective response will require a coordinated approach across Federal and State agencies to investigate, review, and coordinate responses to human trafficking in Australia. Participating agencies should include the Attorney General's Department, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Public Prosecution and relevant State and Territory community services departments.

## World Vision Recommends

World Vision is encouraged by the Australian government's current commitments to combating human trafficking in the region. However, there is still much that needs to be done. Outlined below are a series of recommendations to assist the Australian Government in improving its response. Broadly, Australia needs to adopt strategies to address the demand factors in our own country while supporting and providing leadership to other countries in the region to implement their own effective anti-trafficking programs.

### 1. Continued funding and diplomatic support of the COMMIT program to tackle trafficking in the Mekong region

In October 2004, governments from the Greater Mekong Subregion signed a memorandum of understanding to combat human trafficking in the subregion. The Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT) seeks to address all forms of human trafficking and provides a blueprint for regional cooperation in tackling the problem. Despite significant advances the process needs further support to reach its potential. World Vision calls on the Australian Government to increase its support for COMMIT.

### 2. Persuade Asian neighbors to sign and ratify UN protocols that protect people from human trafficking

A clearly defined mutual understanding of key trafficking concepts and a treaty-bound legal obligation to police such violations is a fundamental step in advancing the issue of regional cooperation in eliminating human trafficking. Important UN documents relating to trafficking and human rights include the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children. World Vision urges the Australian Government to assist our regional Asian neighbours to fulfil their obligations to ratify and implement these protocols.

### World Vision fights human trafficking in the field

World Vision (WV) is currently working to fight human trafficking in all Greater Mekong subregion countries except China. WV also works on trafficking related issues in parts of South Asia and is currently exploring opportunities in Indonesia.

The focus of WV's work has largely been in victim protection, repatriation and reintegration. Over the past three years, WV has helped repatriate over 800 trafficking victims, predominantly back to Myanmar, with smaller numbers repatriated back to Cambodia and Laos.

Anti-trafficking strategies are being integrated into WV's field programs to support stronger community structures which empower communities to protect themselves against the factors that push trafficking.

Recently, WV has collaborated with law enforcement agencies in the Greater Mekong subregion. These initiatives include training (for example, gender-sensitive and child-friendly interview techniques), the establishment of a hotline for people to report suspected cases of trafficking, and assisting victims to be effective witnesses.

### 3. Enhance response/commitment to victim support services

World Vision calls on the Australian Government to:

- enhance its response to the needs of victims of trafficking in Australia, particularly women and children
- increase accessibility to the Trafficking in Persons visa regime and other related support services to focus on a person's status as a victim of trafficking and their need for safety and support
- provide all victims of trafficking with access to health services, accommodation, employment support, legal advice, and migration advice
- establish a national interagency taskforce to investigate, review, and coordinate responses to human trafficking in Australia
- implement the recommendations tabled in the supplementary report of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the Australian Crime Commission to review the *Criminal Code Amendment (Trafficking in Persons Offences) Act [2005]*. The Act should be amended to allow the provision of victim impact statements in court proceedings
- pursue bilateral agreements to assist the repatriation of victims where appropriate, and make representations to source country governments to develop reintegration programs for victims of trafficking
- increase financial support for NGOs working with victims of trafficking and those involved in income generating schemes in source countries where people are potentially vulnerable.

### 4. Conduct a comprehensive study of the determinants that create demand for cheap migrant labor in the construction, hospitality, agriculture, manufacturing, and sex industries in Australia

World Vision urges the government to conduct a comprehensive research study investigating the demands for cheap and easily exploitable migrant labour in trades with a historical link to such exploitation, including the hospitality, agriculture, manufacturing and sex industries.

### 5. Increase support for tackling poverty in countries and regions where people are vulnerable to trafficking

Poverty is a major driver of people trafficking and mitigating the results of trafficking in Australia addresses only half the problem. Trafficking will not be eliminated until the root cause of the problem is addressed. Australia must strive to increase its support for comprehensive poverty alleviation programs and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

## Further Information

### Recent WV Publications and Papers on human trafficking

World Vision Myanmar – Street Children Centres Program Summary, February 2002,

([http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/HDNet/HD.nsf/0079b63a7bd2158685256b9c00572f30/d2f41059b32501d585256bdf006335ac/\\$FILE/IDSS%20Pri%20Fernando.pdf](http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/HDNet/HD.nsf/0079b63a7bd2158685256b9c00572f30/d2f41059b32501d585256bdf006335ac/$FILE/IDSS%20Pri%20Fernando.pdf))

World Vision Cambodia – How and Why We Work: Child workers in the Informal Economy in Phnom Penh, September 2005, ([http://www.worldvision.org.kh/pdf/Child\\_Workers\\_in\\_the\\_Informal\\_Economy.pdf](http://www.worldvision.org.kh/pdf/Child_Workers_in_the_Informal_Economy.pdf))

World Vision Cambodia – Wise before their time: Young people, gender based violence and pornography in Kandal Stung District, September 2005, ([http://www.worldvision.org.kh/pdf/RGBV\\_Report.pdf](http://www.worldvision.org.kh/pdf/RGBV_Report.pdf)).

Information regarding World Vision anti trafficking initiatives can be accessed through the websites of relevant World Vision offices in Asia including:

The Asia Pacific Regional Office (<http://www.wvasiapacific.org/human-trafficking/>)

The Asia Pacific Human Trafficking Strategy (<http://www.wvasiapacific.org/around-the-region/asia-mekong-human-trafficking-strategy.html>)

World Vision Australia (<http://www.worldvision.com.au/childrescue/trafficking.asp>)

### Other key resources on human trafficking

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Trafficking in Persons: Global Patterns, 2004

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) ([www.uri.edu/artic/wms/hughs/catw](http://www.uri.edu/artic/wms/hughs/catw)), University of Rhode Island  
Trafficking in Persons Report, United States State Department, 2005, (<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005/>)

### About World Vision

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organisation working to create lasting change in the lives of children, families and communities living in poverty. In Australia, World Vision is the country's largest charitable group. With the support of more than 400,000 Australians, World Vision helps over 20 million people every year. The organisation implements humanitarian relief, long-term community development projects and advocacy that addresses the causes of poverty and helps people move towards self-sufficiency.

To discuss World Vision Australia's position on human trafficking, please contact [policy@worldvison.com.au](mailto:policy@worldvison.com.au)