

Lao PDR

The Situation

Lao PDR is primarily a source but also a transit and destination country for human trafficking. Many Lao victims are recruited by local persons who have cross-border experience but not connected to any organized crime syndicates.¹

Source

Lao men, women, and children are trafficked for sexual and labor exploitation in Thailand. Many of the trafficking victims were from the lowlands. Men are trafficked for forced labor in factories and the fishing industries.² A small number of Lao women are trafficked for forced marriages with Chinese men. While there are no reliable estimates on the number of Lao who are trafficked, the Thai authorities estimate that at least 180,000 undocumented Lao worked in Thailand.³ World Vision Laos reported that 44 percent of parents do not know where their children are. Of children who returned home, half reported their experience was terrible, and 40 percent reported being locked up, and 13% report they were raped.¹⁴

Transit

Laos is a transit country for victims trafficked from Burma and Vietnam to Thailand.⁵

Destination

Laos is a destination country for women who are trafficked from Vietnam and the People's Republic of China for sexual exploitation.⁶ In Lao PDR commercial sexual exploitation usually takes place in nightclubs or small beer-shops.⁷

Internal Trafficking

Laos has internal trafficking of women and girls from rural to urban areas for sexual exploitation.⁸ Internal trafficking of minority women and girls has increased in the northern part of Laos.⁹

Causes

There are many causes of human trafficking in Laos. Many argue that the economic differences in the Sub-Mekong region encourage people to migrate to relatively wealthier neighboring countries like Thailand.¹⁰ An ILO supported study by the Lao Government found that nearly 7 percent of households in three border provinces had family members working in Thailand. With more than half of the population under the age of 20, young Lao migrate to fill unskilled jobs and become vulnerable to trafficking.¹¹ World Vision argues that the rural to urban migration increases the urban poor and population at risk of trafficking.¹²

The Lao Government

The Lao Government was placed in Tier 2 in the 2007 U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in

Persons Report for not fully complying with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but making significant efforts to do so. There are reports of local government officials who are complicit in trafficking.¹³

The 2004 Law on Women, the Law on the Protection of Children, and other provisions of the Lao criminal code criminalizes most forms of trafficking for labor and sexual exploitation. Penalties are commensurate with those for rape. In late 2006, the Lao government drafted the National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking.¹⁴

Prosecution

In 2006, the Lao Government reported 27 trafficking investigations, 15 arrests, and 12 prosecutions, and three convictions with sentences averaging six years in prison. There have been no reported prosecutions of government officials complicit in trafficking.¹⁵

Protection

The Lao Government has two small transit centers for returning victims and collaborates with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for the victims' return and reintegration. The Lao Women's Union and also runs a shelter which provides legal, medical, and counseling services; they assisted 17 trafficking victims in 2006. The Lao government does not adequately identify all its trafficking victims. Some trafficking victims have been incarcerated in immigration detention facilities. In 2006, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW) assisted 259 trafficking victims.¹⁶

Prevention

The Lao government has an array of prevention efforts through print, radio, and media television. The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW), with funding from NGOs, produced a drama program and billboards on trafficking in Lao, Hmong, and Khu languages. The Law Women's Union also raised awareness of trafficking among government officials and women and girls in several provinces.¹⁷

International Cooperation

The Lao Government has many regional agreements for anti-trafficking, including the Regional Commitment and Action Plan of the East Asia and Pacific Region against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Asia Pacific Consultation, Manila Process, Bali Ministerial Meetings on Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling, and the Bangkok Declaration on Irregular Migration, Memorandum of Understanding on Labor Migration with Thailand.¹⁸ In August 2006, the Government hosted a meeting of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking and also held its first national workshop on anti-trafficking.¹⁹

Recommendations

The U.S. Department of State recommends that the Lao government should pass and enact

comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation, eliminate the practice of fining returning trafficking victims, increase efforts to combat internal trafficking, and make greater efforts to prosecute and convict public officials who profit from or are involved in trafficking.²⁰

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- 1 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report
 - 2 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report
 - 3 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report
 - 4 World Vision Laos PDR: Human Trafficking
 - 5 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report
 - 6 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report
 - 7 UNIAP: Lao PDR Overview
 - 8 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report
 - 9 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report
 - 10 UNIAP: Lao PDR Overview
 - 11 ILO-IPEC: Lao PDR, The Situation
 - 12 World Vision Laos PDR: Human Trafficking
 - 13 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report
 - 14 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report
 - 15 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report
 - 16 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report
 - 17 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report
 - 18 UNIAP: Lao PDR Overview
 - 19 2006 US Department of State Human Rights Report
 - 20 2007 US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report

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