



GMS human trafficking: a changing landscape



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The Greater Mekong Subregion

contains
Cambodia,
China, Laos,
Myanmar,
Vietnam,
Thailand,
where:

10% of illegal Cambodian migrants in the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet are children, most of them beggars.¹

Yunnan baby traffickers in 2007 admitted to paying 1,500 Yuan (around US\$220) for a baby girl and 8,000 Yuan (around US\$1200) for a baby boy. Their selling price was three to four times this amount.²

For around six months in 2008 the Cambodian government banned marriage with foreigners altogether after a report showed that the number of marriage visas issued in Korea had increased to 1759, up from only 72 in 2004.³

A report on young migrant workers in Thailand showed that 60% of domestic workers were not allowed by their employers to leave the house or to receive visitors⁴.

In 2004, Cambodian police estimated more than 50,000 women and girls were in Cambodian brothels. In 2008 UNIAF estimated up to 30% of them were Vietnamese.⁵

10,000 Burmese were estimated to be trafficked to Thailand annually for the purpose of sexual exploitation.⁶

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.⁷

1. Mirror Art Foundation 2005
www.humantrafficking.org/updates/538

2. 'China police break baby trafficking ring', Associated Press, Sept 2007
http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-09/07/content_6090460.htm

3. IOM "The marriage brokerage system from Cambodia to Korea" 2008
www.wunrn.com/news/2008/04_08/04_21_08/042108_cambodia.htm

4, 7. ILO "The Mekong Challenge: Underpaid, Overworked and Overlooked", 2006
www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/child/trafficking/downloads/underpaid-eng-volume1.pdf

5. SIREN Report Vietnam 2008 www.no-trafficking.org/content/SIREN/SIREN_pdf/vietnam%20datasheet%20final%20november%202008.pdf

6, 7. Matilac, R and Florendo, R (2002) Research on Child Trafficking in Southeast Asia, ECPAT Online Database, 2004 www.ecpat.net

8. Laos Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

9, 10. Article 3 of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000)

World Vision

The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) is home to more than 260 million people. Once wracked by conflict, the region has become increasingly prosperous, with travel, tourism and trade all growing.

But the injustice of human trafficking remains. In fact, this climate of change, freedom and relative political stability may have made migrants more vulnerable than ever before to "modern day slavery."

Rapid economic growth has brought greater prosperity to the region. It has also created new opportunities for exploitation. The disparity in wealth between neighbouring countries acts as a magnet to those wanting to escape poverty. It provides traffickers opportunities to exploit the vulnerable who seek to cross porous and increasingly open borders.

Gathering accurate statistics is a challenge because of the criminal and underground nature of trafficking and due to different data collection methodologies used by researchers.

However, globally it is estimated that 800,000 to 2.5 million people are trafficked each year, including some 1.2 million children. At least 12.3 million people are engaged in exploitative labour practices, including children. In the GMS alone, it is thought that a quarter of a million people are victimised by trafficking each year.

What is Human Trafficking?

"Trafficking in Persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring and 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."

A person is considered to have been trafficked even if they have given their consent to the above. And a child – anyone under 18 – can be considered trafficked if they have been recruited and transported into exploitive or slavery-like conditions even when they have not been deceived, forced, threatened, abducted or coerced.

"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".¹⁰

As the dynamics of the region change, traffickers are finding new ways of exploiting and trafficking people, across borders as well as within the borders of GMS countries.

Women and children are trafficked into many other industries including domestic work, factories or fish processing. And men and boys – not traditionally considered trafficking victims or included in statistics – are also being trafficked. Industries recruiting men include fishing and construction.

Forced marriage

Vietnamese women have long married foreign men – predominantly Chinese, Korean and Taiwanese – but it is increasing. Between 2002 and 2007 there were some 25,000 marriages by Vietnamese women to Korean men, and from 2003 to 2005, 24,600 to Taiwanese men. In response, the government has recently tightened the requirements for foreign marriages. Marriage brokerage is now illegal.¹

Begging

Begging takes place in most cities and border towns in the GMS. In Bangkok, children, the elderly, those with disabilities and entire families are found on the streets. Often when children grow too old to beg effectively, they are then trafficked into vending or small-scale criminal activities.

Fishing boats

Men and boys from Cambodia and Myanmar (to a lesser extent also from Laos) are trafficked and exploited on fishing boats operating from Thailand. There are an estimated 200,000 migrant labourers on the vessels. More than half are undocumented. An ILO survey also found that a majority of fishermen were children between 15 and 17 years old.^x

Debt bondage

Victims including children work in slavery to pay off a debt. Traffickers lure Thai women into debt bondage in Japan, the victims forced into the sex trade to pay back off their travel costs.³ The traffickers usually lie about the amount of money the victims owe and the work they are expected to do.

Domestic Servitude

One common route for domestic labour is from Laos to Thailand; similarity in culture and language means Laotians are a popular choice. According to UNICEF, 32% of those trafficked to Thailand from Laos had been forced into domestic labour⁴. Domestic workers from Myanmar and Cambodian are also employed. Often confined to the house of their employer, these workers are very vulnerable to abuse.

1. World Vision Presentation to SOM 6, Beijing

2. IOM "The Mekong Challenge: Underpaid, Overworked and Overlooked", 2006 www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/child/trafficking/downloads/underpaid-eng-volume1.pdf

3. American Anti-slavery Group, 2008 www.iabolish.org/slavery_today/in_depth/trafficking.html

4. UNICEF "Broken Promises, Shattered Dreams", 2004 www.unicef.org/media/files/BrokenPromisesFULLREPORT.pdf

5. UN High Commission on Human Rights

www.no-trafficking.org/content/web/05reading_rooms/Cambodia/cambodia_hr_report_on_trafficking.pdf

6. "China Police Break Trafficking Ring", AP/China Daily September 7 2007 www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-09/07/content_6090460.htm

Thailand is the wealthiest country in the Greater Mekong Sub-region, attracting a steady migration flow from its poorer neighbours, especially across land borders. With Thais now enjoying the fruits of development, many no longer want to do dirty, dangerous or degrading jobs – so-called "3-D" work. Migrants fill the labour gap and in the process boost the Thai economy. Some 80% of migrants come from Myanmar, with the rest coming mainly from Laos and Cambodia.

While the Thai government allows a certain quota of migrants to work legally in Thailand, hundreds of thousands are illegal. Fear of being caught and deported, paying fines or having their money removed, makes them extremely vulnerable to exploitative conditions and trafficking.

Hotspots of cross-border trafficking

Although most trafficking occurs within and across the region victims are also trafficked further a field to places like the Middle East, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, Europe and the US. Trafficking into the region is also a growing phenomenon, with women from Moldavia and Romania reportedly trafficked into the sex industry in Cambodia.⁵

To and through Yunnan Province, China

As one of the poorest provinces in China, Yunnan is a source for women and children trafficked into the commercial sex-trade in China and across the region for other purposes. Babies have also been trafficked for adoption. In 2007, a gang of 57 were arrested for trafficking babies from Yunnan. Reportedly the gang trafficked more than 60 babies over two years.⁶

The Poipet border between Thailand and Cambodia

Begging, small-scale criminal activity, vending and carrying umbrellas are all activities that children undertake for money. Vietnamese women are also trafficked into the sex trade. According to an IOM report from 2007, as many as 4,000 Vietnamese women may be victims of trafficking in the commercial sex-industry in Cambodia.⁷ The Asian Migrant Centre estimates that half of foreigners in the commercial sex industry in Cambodia are Vietnamese and that nearly one third are aged under 18.⁸

Samut Sakhon, Thailand

Up to 200,000 Myanmar migrants work in factories in Samut Sakhon, many of them undocumented. In September 2006, after a raid in one of the seafood-processing factories, 66 people were rescued from labour exploitation and taken to a government shelter for trafficking victims. About 30% of the victims were children.⁹ Samut Sakhon continues to attract migrants from Myanmar even though many fall prey to exploitative labour and trafficking.

7. IOM "The Long Way Home" 2007 http://www.iom-seasia.org/resource/pdf/thelongroadhome/The_long_road_home.pdf?POSTNUKESID=ddecfb505333

8. Cited from World Vision MDRTS Final Report, 2007

9. SIREN "From Facilitation to Trafficking: Brokers and agents in Samut Sakhon, Thailand" 2007 www.no-trafficking.org/content/SIREN/SIREN_pdf/SIREN%20TH-01%20Samut%20Sakhon%20brokers%20and%20traffickers.pdf

GMS trafficking TRENDS

Bunna was in his early teens when he was tricked by a "facilitator" in Poipet, Cambodia. She promised him a well-paid work as a cowherd near Bangkok. Since he did not want his mother to stop him, he did not tell his family that he was leaving. The job turned out to be a horrible ordeal where he was suppressed and forced to work without pay until he ran away. Now back home, though he still crosses the border to work both day and night, he says he will never trust a trafficker's promise again.



Sopheha was trafficked from rural Cambodia to a brothel in the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet when she was only fourteen. She was taken there by a woman she believed would soon become her mother-in-law. "Life was unbearable," she says, "The men liked young girls and I was the youngest. I had all sorts of customers, Thai and Cambodian – I hated them all. Worst were the beatings if I said no."



Tin has been begging for several years on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, where his uncle trafficked him at the age of 13. His uncle told him that he would be working in a small enterprise and that he would receive a good salary. Instead, he must raise a certain sum of money each day, which he hands over in its entirety. If he fails he is beaten and left without food. Tin wishes he could save enough to return home but his "owners" make sure this is never possible.



Trang was trafficked at 13, from her village in Vietnam to brothels in Battambang and Phnom Penh, Cambodia. She is now waiting at World Vision's Trauma Recovery Centre for her final journey – back home. Even though her family helped to arrange her trafficking, she is not frightened to return. At the centre she has learned hairdressing and improved her reading and writing. She says, "I will miss my friends here, but at least I will be with my family in my own country. I hope I can stay this time."



Non was 17 when he was trafficked from Southern Laos to Thailand. He was promised a good job, but instead he ended up trapped on a fishing boat in Thailand. He endured abuse, was guarded at night and was not paid for his hard labour. After two horrifying years he managed to escape. He is now back in Laos where he informs youth about their vulnerabilities and how to avoid being trafficked and exploited.



Names changed: photographs representative

Children as part of the solution

Through the **2007 Mekong Youth Forum in Bangkok**, children presented their views on trafficking to governments. World Vision worked with Save the Children, the UNIAP and the ILO to network children across the Mekong region together for this event. Their recommendations for action and policy changes to stop trafficking were presented by youth delegates to the Senior Officials' Meeting of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative in Beijing, December 2007.

www.mekongyouthforum.com

In preparation for **World Congress III** on commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), child delegates were nominated by their peers to speak up in Brazil on issues of exploitation and child trafficking. The GMS youth session was the only event at the November 2008 congress to be hosted and led by children. The child delegates called for greater involvement and leadership from authority figures including parents and teachers, to help children better understand their own vulnerabilities.

www.ecpat.net/WorldCongressIII

World Vision's trafficking **RESPONSE**

World Vision has anti-trafficking initiatives across the region. Prominent among them are two multi-country projects whose programmes work across borders - an acknowledgement that trafficking issues are transnational in nature and must be addressed as such.

The goal of World Vision's Mekong Delta Regional Trafficking Strategy project is to reduce vulnerabilities and assist trafficking survivors who have been exploited in the GMS. Among other things the project aims to build community capacity to prevent trafficking and increase protection services for trafficking victims

This project works at the grass-roots with civil society in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

To complement this programme another project was initiated in 2006. World Vision's Regional Advocacy Anti-Child Trafficking Project was set up to influence policy and advocate for trafficking victims, especially children. It works in the same countries, plus China.

This project seeks to have the broader issues of human trafficking recognised, and to raise awareness and empower communities themselves to combat trafficking.

Various activities within these projects include:

Voices of Victims (VOV) in Savannaket, Laos which aims to reduce the number of youth trafficked from Laos to Thailand; a migrant advice centre to empower youth and provide information on safe migration practises; and child and youth protection committees to provide support and trafficking prevention education in schools and communities.

In China, World Vision is building partnerships and networks to support the development of better policies on human trafficking. By caring for and keeping track of migrant families, World Vision is helping to reduce the risk of people being trafficked.

In Phnom Penh, Cambodia, World Vision raises awareness about child-sex tourism with billboards, signs and magazines targeted at potential sex tourists. Addressing the demand side of the problem is an important step to tackling the problem.

In Vietnam, anti-trafficking messages reached over 200,000 people in 20 provinces.

Prosecution an effective deterrent

One important solution to deter trafficking is that the perpetrators are prosecuted – and not their victims. In some cases, however, victims are still seen as criminals. Many victims have been forcefully deported on the basis of their illegal migrant status. World Vision is working to educate and inform authorities, including police and border officials about trafficking and how to identify and process victims fairly and with dignity.

GMS governments are taking the issue increasingly seriously and the number of trafficking-related prosecutions is on the rise:

Cambodia: In 2005, 73 suspected traffickers were arrested. In 2006, they added 13 foreign child-sex tourists to the tally.

China: The government reported more than 7,500 cases of trafficking between 2005 and 2007. Between 2001 and 2005 alone more than 25,000 people were reported rescued.

Laos: between 2006 and 2007 trafficking investigations rose from 27 to 38

Myanmar: Between 2006 and 2007 more than 90 traffickers were convicted

Thailand: 144 cases were prosecuted between 2005 and 2007

Vietnam: During 2007, 339 individuals were sentenced, 19 jailed for 15-20 years and 320 imprisoned for less than 15 years for trafficking offences. In the same year six Vietnamese were sentenced to jail for 5-12 years for forced marriage.



Vocational training is an important part of rehabilitation for trafficking survivors at World Vision's Neavear Thmey Trauma Recovery Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia



For further information on World Vision's anti-trafficking initiatives in the GMS:

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