



Migrant Lao Children – Whereabouts Unknown

Contact lost with half of Lao migrant children – migration accelerating: Survey

For Immediate Release:

Vientiane/Bangkok – ILO News – Preliminary results of an ILO-supported survey released by the Government of the Lao PDR have found that a large proportion of young Lao migrants have lost contact with their families during the last three years and it's feared many have become the victims of human traffickers.

More than 50 per cent of Lao children (aged 15 – 17) bound for Thailand, from the Lao PDR provinces of Khammuane, Savannakhet and Champasack, have not been heard from since leaving home. A similar proportion of younger children (10 – 14) have not contacted their families in Lao PDR after migrating, although the actual number involving this age group is smaller. In both groups, their present whereabouts are unknown.

More than one in five of all Lao migrants from these provinces are under the age of 18, with girls accounting for more than two-thirds (67 per cent), making this group the most vulnerable to human traffickers.

The survey has also confirmed that the pace of migration is rapidly accelerating. In all age groups (adults included), 73.7 per cent of total migrations have occurred within the last three years, compared with less than 5 per cent prior to 1989.

The survey, based on sampling of some 36,398 people in 5,966 Lao households in the three provinces, reports nearly 7 per cent (6.9 per cent) have family members on the move. Thailand is the destination of choice for more than 80 per cent of Lao migrants, regardless of socio-economic status.

This survey is the first of its kind, and its findings underscore growing international concern that, as more people migrate, traffickers – who redirect migrants into exploitative labour - become increasingly organized and children more frequently targeted. Girls are particularly vulnerable to human traffickers, and often end up in exploitative and slave-like conditions, including prostitution, forced labour and domestic servitude.

“This ILO-supported survey sheds new light on the dangers of ill-informed and ill-prepared migration. It also indicates an urgent need for Governments across the region to work together to find ways to prevent trafficking and protect migrants from abuse,” said Christine Evans-Klock, Director of the ILO’s Sub-Regional Office in Bangkok. “Our objective is to keep children in school and their parents in decent work,” Ms. Evans-Klock said.

The Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (TICW) is funded by the UK Government, through the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). It operates in Cambodia, China’s Yunnan province, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The ILO-IPEC project provided technical support for this survey, conducted by the Lao PDR’s Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Department of Labour, and the Committee for Planning and Co-operation through the National Statistical Center. The survey was carried out during February and March 2003. It covers the provinces of Khammuane, Savannakhet and Champasack, accounting for approximately one third of the total population. A comprehensive report will be available in the first quarter of 2004.

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