



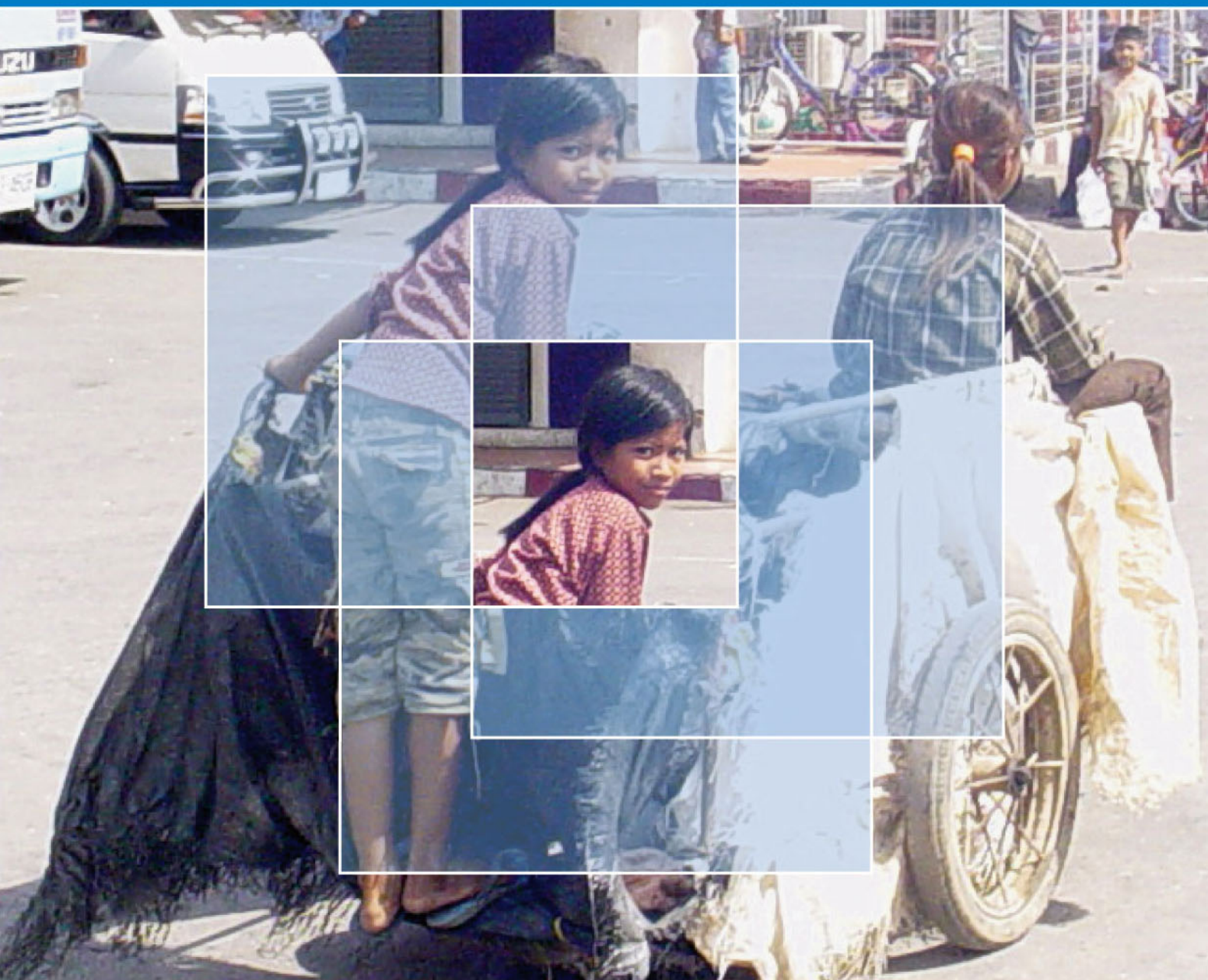
International  
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# The Mekong Challenge

## Destination Thailand

A cross-border labour migration survey  
in Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia

Part of a series of studies on human trafficking and labour migration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region



The Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women

# The Mekong Challenge

## Destination Thailand: A cross-border labour migration survey in Banteay Meanchey Province, Cambodia

Provincial Department of Social Affairs, Labour,  
Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation and SILAKA,  
in collaboration with ILO–IPEC Mekong Sub-Regional Project  
to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women

International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour  
International Labour Office Bangkok

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## FOREWORD

In Cambodia, a country with many developmental needs, the field of human anti-trafficking work is now well attended, with many UN agencies, International Organizations and NGOs all working hard to prevent human trafficking, protect victims of trafficking and help them rebuild their lives following such traumatic ordeals.

Despite this increased effort there is still a lack of hard data relating to the demographics of potential victims and the chain of events that can increase vulnerability. Cambodia has a young population with half of its inhabitants below the age of 20 and many of them will migrate across the border to Thailand in search of work (both ‘legally’ and ‘illegally’). While previous research has shown that children and young women are particularly vulnerable to the trickery, deceit and coercion used by traffickers and exploitative employers, there is a dearth of information about the attitudes of young Cambodian migrants themselves, their experiences during migration, their working conditions at destination, and other circumstances and factors that can increase their vulnerability to sexual and labour exploitation along the way.

This publication, *“Destination Thailand: A cross-border labour migration survey in Banteay Meanchey Province Cambodia”*, part of the sub-regional Mekong Challenge Series, examines quantitatively, the experiences of young Cambodian migrants from one of the country’s primary sending provinces.

While much of the existing anti-trafficking research tends to focus on sexual exploitation and ways to protect victims, this publication – among other things – approaches young people to learn about their ambitions and aspirations. It includes the views of nearly 250 children and youth (10-17, and 18-25) from 31 villages in four target districts. Their views shed light in new areas that could help to prevent human trafficking in the future, while putting to rest myths that, without scientific data to back them up, can become accepted as fact.

The majority of young respondents said they had an optimistic view of their own future – a future in Cambodia. Only a very small minority indicated that they wanted to live abroad.

We sincerely believe the findings of this research will help to better understand the thought processes of some of those most vulnerable to human trafficking and, in so doing, improve future measures to prevent the trafficking, labour and sexual exploitation of Cambodia’s growing population of youth.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report highlights analysis of a survey on labour migration conducted in four districts (six communes) of Cambodia's Banteay Meanchey province. The report is designed for relevant institutions to use in programmes that reach out to labour migrants. The survey's baseline data serves as an important tool in monitoring the movement of labourers across the Cambodia–Thailand border and in developing a national policy on labour migration, job creation and skills-development programmes at the macro and micro levels.

The labour migration survey was initiated by the Cambodian Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSALVY) and the International Labour Organization–International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, through the Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking of Children and Women (ILO–IPEC TICW Project). The survey findings are intended to help in the implementation of the “Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Employment of Workers” that was signed by the governments of Cambodia and Thailand in May 2003.

The task of conducting the survey went to SILAKA, an NGO specializing in human resource development, with technical support from the MOL and technical and financial support from the ILO–IPEC TICW Project. SILAKA worked in close cooperation and collaboration with other stakeholders at the local level, including the Provincial Department of Social Affairs; Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (PDSALVY) in Banteay Meanchey, four district offices of social affairs, local authorities (district, commune, village) and two local NGOs.<sup>1</sup> The survey covered 31 villages in six communes of Banteay Meanchey province and respondents entailed 239 households, 80 returning migrants (some only visiting), 163 children aged 10–17 and 83 young adults aged 18–25. The survey also included interviews with local authorities.

The survey findings were first presented to stakeholder institutions in Banteay Meanchey for validation; a number of recommendations were raised, including elements to be considered for a better national policy on labour migration.

On behalf of the labour migration survey team, we would like to express our gratitude to all staff and authorities at all levels, the local NGOs in Banteay Meanchey and all villagers who contributed through individual or collective efforts in the collection of information, ideas and recommendations involving labour migration.

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<sup>1</sup> The Cambodian Association for Assistance to Families and Widows (CAAFW) and the Cambodian Children and Handicap Development Organization (CCHDO)

Technical editing was carried out by Karen Emmons and Eriko Kiuchi-Ito with the assistance of Khleang Rim.

Because this report covers only a portion of the labour force, we do not present the findings as representative of the situation nationwide. However, it does offer insight concerning the populations that are at risk of irregular migration and of being trafficked.

We welcome all suggestions and comments from readers for improving the quality of the report and future research on labour migration.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural disasters and two decades of civil war have resulted in unbalanced population growth and thus strains on education, skills training and employment opportunities in Cambodia. The dire economic situation has created hardship among rural people who are poor in many of Cambodia's provinces. This situation has led to an increase of migration – both internal and cross-border, as vulnerable populations seek economic opportunities elsewhere. For example, of the 1.2 million migrants seeking employment in Thailand who registered with the Ministry of Labour as of 1 July 2004, 14 per cent, or 168,000, were from Cambodia.<sup>2</sup>

The Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking of Children and Women of the International Labour Organization–International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO–IPEC TICW Project), in collaboration with the Royal Government of Cambodia, launched a pilot intervention in 2000 in Banteay Meanchey, Prey Veng, Battambang and Sihanoukville. To sustain the continuing efforts through the second phase (2003–2008), it is vital to have reliable data on the volume of migration and more information on people who are vulnerable to trafficking, either in-country or moving to neighbouring countries. Irregular migration and undocumented labour considerably increases people's vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking. Certainly there is a need for more understanding on who has migrated and how to better address anti-trafficking and anti-exploitation efforts.

In collaboration with the (then) Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation<sup>3</sup> (national and provincial departments) and local NGO partners, the ILO–IPEC TICW Project initiated a survey of labour migration in Banteay Menchey province. The partners met together with local stakeholders to identify areas along the Cambodian–Thailand border for surveying and decided to target the districts of Svay Chek, Thma Puok, Ou Chrov and Malay. These districts are considered primary places for receiving, transiting and sending labour migrants to Thailand. All are located in Banteay Meanchey province. Thus, that north-western province was targeted for the survey and the actual random sampling focused on 239 households, 80 returning labourers, 163 children aged 10–17 and 83 youth aged 18–25 living in 31 villages (representing six communes) within the four targeted districts.

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<sup>2</sup> Arnold, D., "The Situation of Burmese Migrant Workers in Mae Sot, Thailand", Working Papers Series, Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong, No. 71, September 2004, p.17

<sup>3</sup> In 2004 under the new Government but after the survey was conducted, the MSALVY was split into two ministries: the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. For this report, MSALVY and PDSALVY are used to refer to the institution in place at the time of the survey.

SILAKA, an NGO specializing in human resource development, was contracted to conduct the survey in collaboration with the Provincial Department of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation (PDSALVY), the district offices of social affairs in the four targeted districts and the Cambodian Association for Assistance to Families and Widows (CAAFW) and the Cambodian Children and Handicap Development Organization (CCHDO). The partners created two survey teams for four districts (one team for two districts).

## Objectives

The survey was designed with the following objectives:

1. To capture as best as possible the situation of irregular migration and trafficking from Banteay Meanchey to Thailand;
2. To identify potential partners for implementing the interventions to prevent trafficking in children and women within the framework of labour migration to Thailand; and
3. To present the outcome for feedback, comments and recommendations at a provincial stakeholders ownership exercise (PSOE) meeting in Banteay Meanchey.

## Expected output

1. Information on labour migration and possible trafficking situations in the six selected communes, with recommendations for project interventions and collaboration partners for preventing trafficking in children and women (in the framework of labour migration).
2. A validated report with recommendations for actions from relevant stakeholders.

## Methodology

With technical support from ILO–IPEC TICW Project, SILAKA staff localized four separate questionnaires from a Lao labour migration survey, which was earlier conducted through the ILO–IPEC TICW Project in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The SILAKA staff then relied on a migration movement survey by the Ministry of Planning/National Institute of Statistics (MOP/NIS) for use in interviewing other stakeholders: village chiefs, commune chiefs, commune police officials, NGOs, intermediaries and provincial and district government officials. The questions sought data and information on households and population characteristics, perceptions and aspirations of children and youth, as well as the experiences of returning migrant workers. The two survey teams, each consisting of 10 members, then were set up and a short workshop was organized to orient them to the questionnaires and methodology on data collection and summarizing by village, commune and district.

The surveys in the sample communes of Kok Romiet, Thma Puok, Svay Chek, O’Bei Cheun, Malay and Boeung Beng were conducted, along with interviews for secondary data from provincial and district officials. Interviews were made with a random selection of households, returning labourers and young people (broken into three age groups: 10–14 years, 15–17 years and 18–25 years). The survey covered 31 villages and interviews with a total of 565 primary people (out of a population of 35,808) and 37 other resource persons.

The targeted communes are transit and sending areas of migrant workers to Thailand. Some people migrate seasonally to Thailand for work in different sectors, especially for agriculture. Some migrate with assistance of facilitators/relatives who have a relationship/network with Thai employers. Others migrate on their own and cross the border without any assistance.

Participants in the consultation meeting (PSOE) in October 2004 indicated both positive and negative impacts on migrant workers as well as their families. Positive impacts include the improved living conditions of the migrant workers' families. Negative impacts include the experience of workers returning with no money and who then had to sell their property to repay loans that they accumulated in paying someone to find them work in Thailand.

## Survey findings

Analysis from the survey includes the following key conclusions:

- There has been a nine-fold increase in the number of school drop-outs in the past five years, which increases young people's vulnerability. There is a high incidence of child labour; as much as 24 per cent of people going to Thailand are children aged 10–14 years.
- Some families have no information and contact with migrant workers once they leave home. Many heads of households reported not receiving any remittances from those migrant working family members.
- There is no office or place for information in Banteay Meanchey for people who want to look for work in Thailand, which leads to people's dependence upon agents or facilitators and thus increases their vulnerability to being trafficked or exploited in other ways.

According to the survey findings, cross-border migrant workers and their families may encounter some of the following risks:

- Being abused and exploited. Some 53 per cent of the 80 returning labourers who were interviewed reported experiencing various types of abuse and exploitation, including being shouted and cursed at, forced to work long hours, underpaid, not paid, not allowed to leave the workplace, forced to work in dangerous conditions, physical violence, sexual abuse and being arrested. When interviewed, some of the returning workers said their living and working conditions were bad with no protection from physical abuse and illness, including HIV/AIDS; work conditions were described as unhygienic, not enough light and without fresh air. There is an insufficient networking of concerned local organizations in Thailand to follow up employers' adherence to labour and migration laws and human rights; as well, there is a shortage of focal points to receive and settle labour migrants' problems.
- Legal problems. Migrant labourers who do not register to work in Thailand risk arrest by the Thai police; they can more easily be cheated, robbed, killed or have a landmine accident as they sneak across the border. Most migrant labourers who are victims of physical abuse don't report it to the local police or relevant organizations, even when they need help.

## Recommendations

- Establish an office that provides easy access to information near the Cambodian–Thailand border, particularly in the areas with a large amount of migrant and suspected trafficking movement. Catering to migrant workers and others who would like to work in Thailand, the information should include insight on working conditions, safe means of transferring money, human rights, immigration and labour laws, including warnings about trafficking practises. This service would provide the contact details of intervention agencies for people looking for work in Thailand and for their families who might need help in later locating a migrant family worker.
- Networking with Thai organizations and other institutions involved in human rights protection should be strengthened. This network can help to share information and resources, seek common solutions to migration and labour issues and follow up the implementation of immigration and labour laws and human rights protection and to deal with complaints, in cooperation with local authorities where necessary.
- Establish a national operational policy on labour migration management. The Cambodian Government should effectively implement, immediately, a policy that ensures security and safety for registered cross-border labour migrants who will be living and working in hiring countries. As well, the legal channel should be increased, especially for migrant workers with a long-term employment contract (about two years). However, there needs to be a system for assisting seasonal/daily migrant workers to Thailand to provide some protection against unsafe migration. This could be done by improving the existing policies. A policy would facilitate joint actions between relevant agencies in Cambodia and Thailand that could help reduce labour exploitation, including trafficking and violations of human rights. The recently signed memorandum of understanding on employment creation with the Government of Thailand can be used, but there is a need for allocated resources and a mechanism for follow-through.
- Increase legal protections against exploitation and abuses for all types of migrant labourers that take place on both sides of the border.
- Establish programmes to disseminate information among villagers in both Cambodia and Thailand on labour and anti-trafficking laws and other crucial assistance. There is a need for more vocational training programmes as well as information about existing training programmes and other support to villagers who would like to migrate for employment.
- New infrastructure is needed or existing facilities need improving, such as building schools closer to communes and the construction of new and repair of old roadways and waterways.
- Set up a database of labour information. An employment database could provide villagers access to job opportunities. Staff members of the Ministry of Labour should be trained to use the database and to keep it up to date and distribute information to employers and people seeking work. Other relevant public servants need to be trained to help assist migrant labourers.

- Negotiate with the Thai Government for workers' passage throughout Thailand. The border passes issued to registered migrant workers, which allow them to cross over into Thailand, should be expanded to include medium- and long-term migrant workers.
- Attract investors to start or expand business projects that would help create more local jobs, particularly agro-industry-related, in areas such as Banteay Meanchey province.

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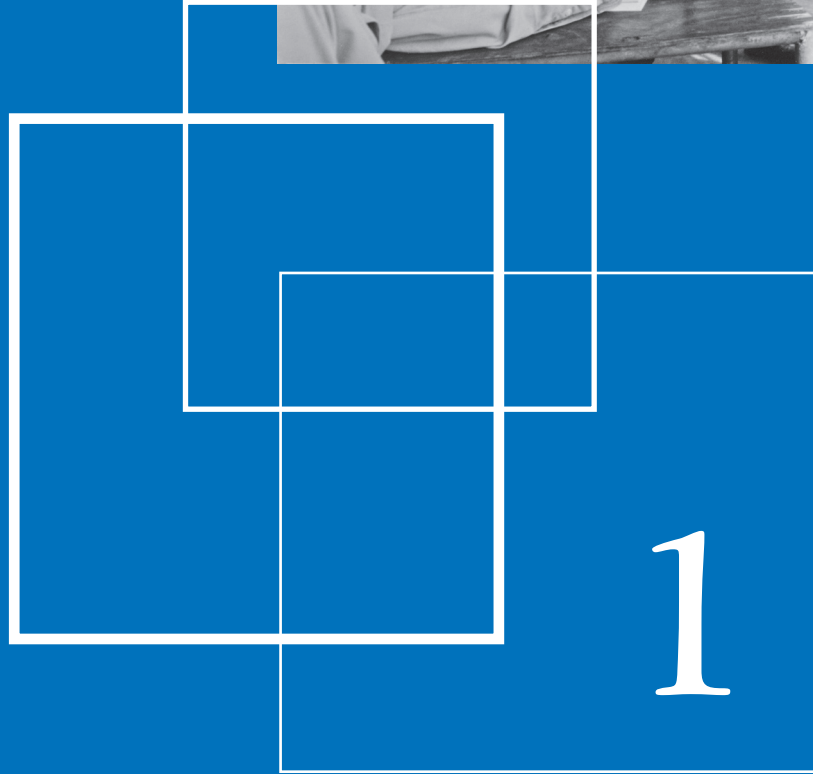
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# 1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

## Research rationale

Cambodia has a young population – more than half of its people are younger than 20 – and thus a fast-growing labour force. Some 150,000 to 175,000 people join the labour force annually, and this rate will grow to 200,000 by 2010.<sup>4</sup> Given the existing population dynamics, the limited absorption capacity of the local economy and factors such as landlessness, poverty and an array of socio-economic problems, an increasing number of job seekers are attracted to the perceived economic opportunities abroad.

In Thailand, of the 1.2 million migrants seeking employment who registered with the Ministry of Labour as of 1 July 2004, 14 per cent, or 168,000, were from Cambodia.<sup>5</sup> This accounts for the majority of all Cambodian migrant workers abroad.

However, most Cambodian migrant workers are low skilled. Due to the lack of legal migration options, large numbers of workers leave the country without proper documentation, which instantly renders them extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by unscrupulous employers, recruiters and traffickers. They have communication problems due to language barriers and have no protection, or even recourse, against labour inequities, such as wages and conditions that differ from those promised.

Trafficking in persons increasingly is closely linked to labour migration, particularly irregular migration. Though many workers are aware of the potential risk, many other migrants are ill-prepared

and uninformed. Promoting safer, or at least informed, migration would strongly contribute to the diminishing incidence of trafficking.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has been taking steps to better manage the migration of its nationals and confront the trafficking problem, as well as the worst forms of abuse associated with the exploitation of migrant labour, by creating more and broader, legal channels for labour migration. The Government in collaboration with the International Labour Organization–International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour Mekong Sub-Regional Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women (ILO–IPEC TICW Project) launched in 2000 a pilot intervention to address the problem of trafficking in Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Prey Veng and Sihanoukville. A second phase began in 2003 with more focus on trafficking prevention under the framework of labour migration and will continue through 2008. The target provinces for the second phase are: Banteay Meanchey, Sihanoukville, Seam Reap, Phnom Penh, Prey Veng, Kampong Cham and Svay Rieng.

In May 2003, the Royal Government of Cambodia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Royal Government of Thailand on “Eliminating Trafficking in Children and Women and Assisting Victims of Trafficking”. Also in May 2003, the Government signed another MOU with Thailand on “Cooperation in the Employment of Workers”.

To successfully implement the MOU on Cooperation

<sup>4</sup> Asian Migrant Center, “Migration Needs, Issues and Responses in the Greater Mekong Subregion”, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Arnold, D., “The Situation of Burmese Migrant Workers in Mae Sot, Thailand”, Working Papers Series, Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong, No. 71, September 2004, p.17

in the Employment of Workers, both countries have agreed to set a framework to resolve the problem of irregular migrant workers and to enhance bilateral cooperation in the management of cross-border migration for employment in several ways:

1. Protection of Cambodian labour migrants;
2. Return and repatriation of workers;
3. Establishment of migrants' emergency fund;
4. Prevention of irregular labour migration; and
5. Identification of Cambodian workers currently in Thailand.

The MOU calls for the establishment of legal/organized labour migration schemes that allow Cambodian citizens to work in Thailand. With financial and technical support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the ILO–IPEC TICW Project, the Government conducted a national workshop<sup>6</sup> to stimulate internal discussion and increase understanding of the purposes and consequences of the MOU, as well as to identify practical implementation approaches.

A key recommendation adopted at the workshop highlighted labour migration surveys as a key starting point. Currently, reliable data on the volume of population migration and the types of people migrating, particularly irregular migration and undocumented labour, is scarce. Having knowledge on the situation of labour migration and trafficking is recognized as necessary to enhancing national development benefits and action programmes to protect the fundamental rights of migrants and reduce irregular migration and human trafficking.

### The ILO–IPEC TICW Project and the labour migration survey

The ILO–IPEC TICW Project covers five countries (Cambodia, China (Yunnan province), Lao People's

Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam). The first phase started in 2000 and focused on capacity building and raising public awareness of trafficking prevention. In targeted pilot areas that were identified as the main source areas of vulnerable migrants and trafficked victims, the project helped to decrease ill-informed and/or unprepared migration and generate local livelihoods for at-risk families.

Based on ILO experience, the second phase of the TICW Project is designed to explore more possibilities of workers' and employers' organizations participating in anti-trafficking efforts, including mobilizing their input and pilot projects with their cooperation. The second phase is looking at the situation of labour migration as one way of identifying the direct and potential factors leading to the trafficking of children and women. It will look to identify useful counter-measures for both the “push” and “pull” sides of the problem.

The ILO–IPEC TICW Project in Cambodia launched its second phase through a national stakeholder ownership exercise (NSOE) meeting on 4–5 March 2003 with participation from relevant government institutions, employers' associations, trade unions, national and international NGOs and UN agencies. The TICW Project Phase II aims to contribute to eliminating the worst forms of child labour, including the trafficking in children and women for labour and sexual exploitation, in both sending and receiving areas/sectors in Cambodia through the development, implementation and monitoring of effective and integrated national and local strategies and actions.

Based on an earlier ILO–IPEC study, “Moving Forward: Secondary Data Review of Sending and Receiving Areas and Employment Sectors in the Prevention of Trafficking in Children and Women in Cambodia”, and the outcomes of the NSOE, the following areas were agreed on as the target provinces

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<sup>6</sup> 23–24 June 2004

for Phase II:

- The four sending provinces: Prey Veng, Kampong Cham, Svay Reing and Banteay Meanchey and
- The three sending areas: Sihanoukville, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

Among the four sending provinces, Banteay Meanchey province also is considered a transit and border-crossing zone for labour migrants and traffickers moving into Thailand.

Contributing to effective implementation of the MOU on the employment of workers, the TICW Project is looking to develop interventions in the target communities of Banteay Meanchey to prevent trafficking of children and women under a labour migration framework and to reduce unsafe migration to Thailand.

To identify effective interventions in Banteay Meanchey, TICW Project staff consulted key stakeholders in the province in May 2004. Through a consultation meeting with the vice-provincial governor, the director of the PDSALVY and the director of Cambodian Children and Handicap Development Organization, the following criteria was agreed upon to select areas to conduct the research:

- Districts located close to the Thailand border;
- High incidence of cross-border migration;
- High incidence of seasonal migration;
- Transit area for trafficking and migration;
- High risk of trafficking across the border;
- Resources available in communes;
- Employment situation in communes;
- Low education levels;
- Existing or potential implementing agencies; and
- Exiting mechanism or network.

Through this consultation, four of eight districts bordering with Thailand in Banteay Meanchey

province were selected: Thma Puok, Svay Chek, Ou Chrov and Malay districts.

After selecting the four districts and conducting a similar consultation process in each district with district stakeholders and using the same criteria, six communes were selected:

- Kok Romiet commune, Thma Puok district;
- Svay Chek commune, Svay Chek district;
- Poi Pet commune (but only four of its villages were targeted: Toul Prat, O Reusey, Prey Kob and O Neang), Ou Chrov district;
- Bei Cheun commune, Ou Chrov district ;
- Malay commune, Malay district; and
- Boeung Beng commune, Malay district.

### Brief background on the research areas in Banteay Meanchey province

Located 370 km northwest of Phnom Penh and bordering Thailand, Banteay Meanchey has a total population of around 577,770, of which 51 per cent are female. The province consists of eight districts, 63 communes and 604 villages.<sup>7</sup> Among the districts, four border Thailand: Thma Puok, Svay Chek, Ou Chrov and Malay.

In the six selected communes at the time of the labour migration survey, there were: 63 villages and 12,641 families, with a total population of 59,378 (see Annex 2). These communes are transit and sending areas of migrant workers to Thailand. Some workers seasonally migrate to Thailand to work in different sectors, though particularly in agricultural. Some workers migrate with assistance from intermediaries or relatives who have a link with Thai employers. Other workers have crossed the border to find work on their own.

Other TICW Project consultation meetings have indicated there are both positive and negative impacts on migrant workers and their families. On

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<sup>7</sup> General population census, 1998; pg 40.

the positive side, living conditions have improved; but in terms of negative impact, some workers return without any earnings and have to sell property to pay back loans they took from money lenders to cover their costs of travelling and/or other arrangements across the border to work in Thailand. In addition, there is a lack of appropriate information and monitoring mechanisms to protect migrant workers from labour and sexual exploitation.

The main purpose of this labour migration survey was to provide insights and background information about the current situation and, as much as possible, provide some indication on the trafficking of children and women within the labour migration framework internally and across the border with Thailand. The data is meant to inform policy and programme development on labour migration management and trafficking prevention efforts at the local as well as at the subregional levels.