The Making of COMMIT SPAIV

COMMIT is an intergovernmental process based on a 2004 MoU to combat human trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS). It works on the basis of multi-year action frameworks, so-called Sub-regional Plans of Action (SPAs). The third SPA (2011-2014) is in its final year, with a process underway to develop SPAIV that is set to guide COMMIT’s work between 2015 - 2018.

The COMMIT members (Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) requested UN-ACT as the COMMIT Secretariat to develop a zero draft for SPAIV jointly with key regional partners. A workshop for this purpose was organized in June 2014.

There have since been consultations in all 6 countries on the zero draft. The discussions and feedback have informed the further development of SPAIV, to be agreed upon in principle at the next regional COMMIT Taskforce meeting in late October. This will allow for the planning of COMMIT’s work in 2015 to take place in the final quarter of 2014, with SPAIV to be officially endorsed at the COMMIT Inter-Ministerial Meeting in April 2015.

The SPAIV development process has been the most inclusive and participatory in the COMMIT framework to date, with engagement of a wide range of key anti-trafficking stakeholders, including civil society.

Consultations on the latest Sub-regional Plan of Action (SPA) are being held across the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) with governments and partners.
 Trafficking Trends and Developments

CAMBODIA

- UN-ACT Cambodia, Thailand and other regional offices have been working with the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Government of Thailand in assisting potential migrant victims in Saudi Arabia. Seven (7) victims (of 9 in total) were repatriated to Cambodia on 24 September 2014.

- Cambodian asylum seekers in Australia have been protesting on the island of Nauru, where more than one thousand migrants, including citizens from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Sri Lanka are hoping to find safe haven. Protests began as a result of a controversial settlement agreement between the governments of Australia and Cambodia which plans to return the asylum seekers to their countries of origin. The Cambodians claim that there are limited livelihood opportunities in their home country, and limited assistance provided by their government. The UNHCR has recently criticized the Cambodian-Australian agreement, stating that it sets a dangerous precedent for future cases.

CHINA

- A major case of trafficking for forced marriage was identified by Chinese law enforcement. Police discovered a large group of Cambodian women who were trafficked for forced marriage to Northeast China, of which 150 have been preliminarily identified as Victims of Trafficking (VoT’s). The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) sought interpretation assistance for the advancement of the investigation, and two interpreters were sent to assist police in interviewing the trafficked women.

LAO PDR

- The governments of Lao PDR and China signed an agreement to enhance cooperation on law enforcement and security as well as improve coordination in traditional areas such as anti-terror, illegal immigration and cyber-crime.

- The Vientiane Transit Center (VTC), supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), received further officially identified and repatriated Lao victims of trafficking from Thailand. Together with the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW), the VTC conducted case monitoring and follow up work on the returnees in the provinces of Luang Prabang and Xayabouly.

MYANMAR

- National Anti-Trafficking Day was held on 13 September in Naypyitaw. Events were held across the country with the active participation of various partners, children and youth. Myanmar's 2014 motto for Anti-Trafficking Day was “Working together with respect and empathy to end Human Trafficking.”
THAILAND

- A number of human trafficking cases received significant attention in Thailand in recent weeks. Amongst these is a case of Thai and Myanmar workers who were found stranded by a Thai NGO on Ambon, Indonesia upon escaping from forced labour on fishing boats. The subsequent assistance efforts were supported by Thai government agencies, international organizations and civil society stakeholders.

- The Thai government has submitted new information to the United States to be used for devising and implementing more preventive measures to combat TIP. Furthermore, a special fast-track channel has been established for human trafficking-related cases in order to hasten the prosecution of perpetrators. The government claimed that its anti-trafficking accomplishments had so far prompted the US to hold off on sanctions against the country, allowing exports of Thai goods to continue.

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) are in negotiations with Thailand to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on strengthening cooperation, training and exchange of information in relation to human trafficking. A formal agreement would make Thailand the third country to sign such an MOU with the UAE, along with Armenia and Australia.

VIET NAM

- The Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and the Singaporean Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) discussed cooperative measures to deal with security threat during a meeting in Singapore. The two ministries reviewed the status of signed agreements and agreed to intensify reciprocal exchange visits to share anti-crime experience, reinforce security and improve personnel training.

- International labour-rights group Verite reported that 32 per cent of the approximately 200,000 foreign workers in the electronics industry in Malaysia were being used as forced labour. Working under forced-labour conditions, the report detailed that roughly 40 per cent of the abused workers were Vietnamese nationals. Verite also reported that Vietnamese workers had their passports confiscated and were forced to work overtime to pay off debts from excessive recruitment fees.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING PARTNERS

The *Anti-Trafficking Review* is an open access, academic publication with a readership in 78 countries, published by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). The *Anti-Trafficking Review* calls for papers for a Special Issue entitled 'Forced Labour and Human Trafficking.'

For more detailed information, please click here: [Call for Papers](#)

Deadline for submission: 30 November 2014

Word count for Full Article submissions: 4,000 - 6,000 words, including footnotes, author bio and abstract

We advise those interested in submitting to follow the *Review's* style guide and submission procedures, available at [www.antitraffickingreview.org](http://www.antitraffickingreview.org). Please email the editorial team at atr@gaatw.org with any queries.
NEWS UPDATES

China targets online brokers

“Such online bride advertisements are the targets of a new anti-human-trafficking initiative in China, where police on Monday announced they would stamp out the marriage-brokering services to prevent the exploitation of women from poorer countries.” (Phnom Penh Post)

Few trafficking arrests for Kachin task force

“On Burma’s northern border with China, an inability for authorities to identify potential victims contributes to hundreds of women being trafficked over the borders every year as forced brides and prostitutes.” (Democratic Voice of Burma)

20 fishermen seek rescue by activists

“Almost 30 Thai and Myanmar fishermen facing exploitation on deep-sea fishing trawlers in Indonesian waters recently sought help from a labour rights network, said an activist.” (Bangkok Post)

China to crack down on ‘foreign bride’ websites on human trafficking, prostitution fears

“The Chinese police will clamp down on websites that sell men group tours to meet “foreign brides” in South-east Asian countries, as the practice leads to human trafficking and prostitution, the state-run China Daily reported.” (The Straits Times)

Laos Joins Southeast Asian Neighbors in Imposing Stricter Internet Controls

“The government believes that this kind of Internet regulation is necessary to prevent abuse and misuse of the Internet as a space for communication and connection...they cited the spread of inaccurate information about the Lao Airlines crash and a recently online rumor of human organ trafficking in Attapeu province.” (Global Voices)

US waives sanctions against Thailand over human trafficking report

“President Barack Obama has decided not to impose sanctions against Thailand and Malaysia for failing to meet minimum standards in combating human trafficking.” (Bangkok Post)

Myanmar to implement subregional plan to curb human trafficking

“Myanmar will draw and implement a subregional action plan for the year 2014-18 in collaboration with ASEAN members and China in its increased effort to crack down on human trafficking, according to the Central Body for Suppression of Trafficking in Persons (CBSTP).” (China Daily)

Four arrested for trafficking Vietnamese women to China

“Police of Tay Ninh have arrested four people, including two foreigners, accused of smuggling at least nine Vietnamese women from the southeastern province to China.” (Thanh Nien News)

80 per cent of human trafficking cases linked to China

“Taking a look at the past cases, there has been forced marriages. But now male Myanmar nationals are forced to work in factories in the south of China. We need to not only place a special emphasis on migrant workers heading to China but also step up our efforts to fight against human trafficking.” (Eleven Myanmar)
Meet held on Lao migrant workers

“Thailand’s Department of Employment has registered more than 150,000 Laotian workers who did not have the required legal documents. However, many more workers have yet to be registered, the National News Bureau of Thailand (NNT) reported.” (The Nation)

Children of migrant detainees not mistreated: Thailand

“In an interview with Channel NewsAsia on Friday (Sep 12), Thai authorities rejected claims made by an international human rights group that it is mistreating thousands of children being held in immigration detention centres across the country.” (Channel News Asia)

Modern slavery in Malaysia electronics factories: survey

“Nearly one-third of the 350,000 workers in Malaysia’s electronics manufacturing sector - a major supplier for leading global brands - suffer labour conditions akin to "modern slavery", a report released Wednesday (Sep 17) said.” (Thanh Nien News)

Thailand to Allow Foreign Day Laborers Without Passports

“Thai authorities plan to put a new rule in place allowing foreign migrant laborers without passports to work in border towns of the Kingdom on a day-to-day basis, in an attempt to reduce the number of migrants who travel on to bigger cities for better paying jobs.” (The Irrawaddy)

Thailand and UAE to sign MoU against human trafficking

“The UAE has started negotiations with Thailand to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to combat human trafficking crimes as part of the UAE’s wider strategy to strengthen international cooperation against this menace.” (Gulf News)

Volunteer at Anti-Sex Trafficking NGO on Trial for Rape

“The Phnom Penh Municipal Court on Tuesday heard the case of a Cambodian volunteer for a Christian anti-sex trafficking NGO who is charged with raping four boys who were under his care.” (Cambodia Daily)

Migrant Children Tell of Detention in Thailand

“The report, which was released Tuesday, includes first-person accounts from Cambodian children, many of whom have been repeatedly locked up at Bangkok’s Immigration Detention Center (IDC) despite being underage.” (Cambodia Daily)

Vietnam to verify report of ‘modern slavery’ among workers in Malaysia

“Vietnam will investigate whether 40 percent of its migrant workers suffer passport retention and debt bondage in Malaysia’s electronics sector as suggested in a US-funded report, which described the situation as tantamount to “modern slavery.”” (Thanh Nien News)

Myanmar Suspends Work Permits for Maids Going to Singapore

“Myanmar has temporarily banned its women from working as maids in Singapore due to concerns over abuse and exploitation, an employment body in Yangon said on Saturday.” (The Jakarta Globe)

Police find 37 migrants in gang’s vans

“Two members of an alleged human smuggling gang have been arrested in Phangnga province with two SUV vans carrying 37 Rohingya migrants.” (Bangkok Post)
Thais to inspect boat labour

“Seeking to repair the bruised reputation of its notoriously abusive and migrant worker-dependant seafood industry, Thailand announced on Monday a plan to inspect conditions of the fishing sector beginning next month.” (Phnom Penh Post)

US appreciates Thailand’s efforts to tackle human trafficking

“The United States recognises Thailand’s more serious attempts to solve human trafficking, said Sihasak Phuangketkeow, Thai Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs.” (Pattaya Mail)

Opinion: Migrants are an economic asset

“We have seen, tragically often, the results of poorly managed, “desperation” migration. Only last week another 500 migrants died trying to make the journey across the Mediterranean. This underscores the need for progressive thinking.” (Bangkok Post)

Migrants can help to fill the gaps in Asia’s greying societies

“But the most viable solution lies in policies that bring in workers and attract migrants. Such approaches have to be carried out sensitively; there will always be concerns about a society’s identity, threats to wages, increased crime and pressure on social welfare.” (South China Morning Post)

Jail order: ‘Traffickers’ get 7 months in bride plot

“Two Chinese men and two Cambodian women were convicted and sentenced yesterday by Phnom Penh Municipal Court to seven months each in prison for attempting to sell two Cambodian women to Chinese husbands in February.” (Phnom Penh Post)

Migrant Workers Get Refund After Lock-In Ordeal

“Eight migrant workers who say they were duped out of $300 each by a Phnom Penh recruitment agency were refunded Wednesday after protesting outside the company’s office and later being locked inside.” (Cambodia Daily)

After Long Silence, Somaly Mam Hits Back

“Four months after a Newsweek article reported that Somaly Mam falsified her backstory as a sex slave, prompting her exit from the NGO named after her, the anti-trafficking activist publicly defended herself for the first time Wednesday in an article published on the same day that a public relations offensive was launched on her behalf.” (Cambodia Daily)

Voices of despair from S Arabia

“Abuse, deceit and slave labour were just some of the allegations that emerged from Cambodian workers in Saudi Arabia yesterday as talks between the two nations over a formal deal, which would see thousands more sent there, appeared to continue.” (Phnom Penh Post)

Chonburi raises awareness on human trafficking

“Chonburi officials showed videos, staged plays and held activities to raise awareness about human trafficking for students, NGOs, community leaders and law enforcement.” (Pattaya Mail)

Australia Alarms Rights Groups With Deal to Resettle Refugees in Cambodia

“Australia signed an agreement with Cambodia on Friday to resettle refugees there, despite strong protests from human rights groups that believe Australia is breaking international laws.” (New York Times)

Disclaimer:
Please note that the views and opinions expressed in the above news articles do not express the views and opinions of UN-ACT or any of its affiliated agencies or partners.
There’s no quick fix to Thailand’s TIP problem

Annette Lyth
Regional Project Manager (UN-ACT)

Human trafficking in Thailand has been in the media spotlight in recent months, not least due to the US State Department’s 2014 global report on trafficking in persons published last June. In the report, Thailand was downgraded from Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 3. The low ranking means that Thailand is rated among the countries judged to have performed least well in fighting human trafficking and could consequently risk some sanctions from the US Government.

The US State Department’s decision last month not to impose sanctions on a number of countries in the Tier 3 ranking, including Thailand, reveals some flexibility in terms of policy. However, while waiving the sanctions may strike some as a soft move, “no one should make the mistake of thinking that this diminishes the seriousness of the TIP problem in Thailand”, as stated by Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch.

Although it is positive that more attention is being paid to this horrendous abuse of human rights, there is also a concern that the discussion in light of the US State Department report is too simplified in the quest for quick fixes before the publication of the next report. Human trafficking in Thailand and the broader region is a highly complex problem. It cannot be fixed with a sweep of a magic wand.

Thailand is affected as a source, transit and destination country for trafficking victims. It sees different types and patterns of trafficking of men, women, boys and girls for sexual exploitation and forced labour. It is important to recognize the differences between the many cases and types of trafficking that exist in this complex setting. Thai citizens are being trafficked in different patterns of exploitation to countries in Europe, the Middle East and the US, as well as other East Asian destinations, while citizens from neighbouring countries are trafficked into Thailand for many different purposes.

Trafficking in the fishing industry, in particular onto fishing boats, is attracting increasing attention in Thailand and is a phenomenon with highly complex dynamics. The reliance on migrant workers with little information about or access to safe migration channels is compounded by environmental issues, such as the depletion of fish stocks in the Gulf of Thailand, which compel fishing boats to go further out to sea for longer periods. Trafficking of women for sexual exploitation is linked to gender discrimination and traditions that assign women a lower social status in society and give men a sense of entitlement. Children are trafficked for begging and selling flowers due to poverty, which forces families to give up their children, or when parents are led to believe that they will secure a better future for their children by letting them go with a broker. All of these patterns are complicated by inadequate and unequal enforcement of the law and governance, requiring policy and operational responses at different levels.

There aren’t any quick solutions to the problem of human trafficking. As Thailand recognizes and is taking measures to erase the problem of human trafficking, both of its own citizens and of foreign citizens on its soil, its efforts must be based on a longer-term vision that addresses the root causes of the different types of trafficking that occur here. It is also important that development and industry partners refrain from knee-jerk reactions demanding quick fixes in the short term that do not take account of the complex structural problems that contribute to human trafficking.

Strategic coordination and cooperation, both among relevant government agencies and other key stakeholders, is key. More genuine efforts that are effective in the longer term are also more important than the Tier ranking in the next TIP report from the US State Department.

Annette Lyth
“Malaysia’s electronics sector workforce includes hundreds of thousands of foreign migrant workers who come to Malaysia on the promise of a good salary and steady work – an opportunity to make a better life for themselves and their families. But many are subject to high recruitment fees, personal debt, complicated recruitment processes, lack of transparency about their eventual working conditions, and inadequate legal protections. Unscrupulous behavior on the part of employers or third-party employment agents can exacerbate vulnerability to exploitation, but the system in which foreign workers are recruited, placed and managed is complex enough to create vulnerability even in the absence of willful intent to exploit. The conditions faced by foreign electronics workers in Malaysia have the potential to result in forced labor.

(...) Verité conducted a combination of desk and field research, employing a mixed methods approach to field data collection. A total of 501 electronics workers were interviewed using a quantitative survey form by a team of twelve researchers. The sample included foreign workers from seven countries, as well as Malaysian nationals. A set of longer, semi-structured interviews were also conducted, to supplement the quantitative data. These interviews were used to explore particular aspects of vulnerability to forced labor, and to profile how various risk factors can combine to trap workers in their jobs. Regional and global stakeholders from civil society, government and business were also consulted.

The key findings of the research are summarized below:

1) Forced labor is present in the Malaysian electronics industry;
2) Forced labor is linked to recruitment fee charging and the indebtedness that follows. Recruitment fee charging of foreign workers was found to be pervasive in the study sample, and fees were often excessive;
3) Worker indebtedness was strongly linked to excessive recruitment fees charged to workers in their home countries and in Malaysia;
4) Recruitment-related debt compelled workers to work;
5) Forced labor is also linked to deceptive recruitment: One in five workers in the study was misled in the recruitment phase about the terms of their employment agreement;
6) Passport retention, which is prohibited by law in Malaysia, was widely experienced by workers in the study;
7) Foreign workers interviewed by Verité were highly constrained in their freedom of movement. Passport retention was a strong contributing factor;
8) Many foreign workers in the study experienced poor living conditions, in housing provided by employers or third-party employment agents;
9) It was difficult for foreign workers surveyed by Verité to leave before the end of their work contracts;
10) A 2013 change in government policy compromised workers’ ability to pay off recruitment debts and to leave before the end of their contracts;
11) Workers in the study that were employed by third-party employment agents were found to be more vulnerable to forced labor conditions than directly hired workers.

A full copy of the publication can be found online at:

www.verite.org