People are most often trafficked within regions, each with its distinct forms and dynamics. Some of the most extensive and diverse human trafficking patterns take place in and between the six countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS):

- Cambodia
- China
- Lao PDR
- Myanmar
- Thailand
- Viet Nam

HUMAN TRAFFICKING is one of the worst forms of human rights abuses, whereby people are severely exploited through deception, coercion or force.

Human trafficking is a complex and dynamic phenomenon affected by:

- Socio-economic disparities;
- Limited labor rights and migration opportunities;
- Gender inequalities; or
- Weak governance systems.

Patterns regularly change and new practices of exploitation emerge.

It is one of the world’s largest CRIMINAL INDUSTRIES.

Affecting TENS OF MILLIONS of people in every corner of the globe.

Generating estimated annual profits in excess of $150 BILLION.
UN-ACT’S FOUNDATIONS

The United Nations Action for Cooperation Against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT) represents the evolution of counter-trafficking efforts in the GMS that began 15 years ago as the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP).

As UNIAP neared the end of its programming in 2012, governments, civil society, United Nations agencies and international organizations from across the subregion reviewed the achievements and experiences in the anti-trafficking sector to determine ongoing needs.

Despite considerable progress, it was agreed that the anti-trafficking response remains fragmented and uncoordinated, which undermines impact. There also continue to be significant gaps in the sector’s grasp of the human trafficking phenomenon and thus its capacity to develop adequate responses.

The review led to UN-ACT as a way to build capacities where needed, to coordinate interventions in the subregion and beyond, and to lead with analysis and research.

UN-ACT TODAY

UN-ACT is a project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with a regional management office in Thailand and six country offices across the GMS. It is the only United Nations project in the GMS dealing comprehensively with human trafficking. Through its targeted results, UN-ACT both coordinates and drives the strategic intersection of governance, policy, research and direct interventions—as a facilitator and manager as well as expert and innovator in the subregion’s counter-trafficking efforts.

UN-ACT staff also serve as the Asia-Pacific focal point for UNDP’s global work on migration and displacement, adding a human development and resilience approach to the humanitarian framework of other agencies. This involves addressing some of the negative root causes of migration and displacement, including limited livelihood and employment opportunities, protracted conflicts, governance challenges, environmental degradation or disasters.
RESULTS AREA 1:

The COMMIT Process is strengthened to become sustainable and self-reliant.

COORDINATING STRENGTHS

UN-ACT has assumed the secretariat function for the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT) from its predecessor, UNIAP. Established in 2004 in recognition of the complex, diverse and often cross-border patterns of human trafficking, COMMIT is an intergovernmental process involving the six GMS countries.

Multi-year subregional plans of action to counter human trafficking drive COMMIT, ensuring coherence in direction and collaboration across borders. The subregional plans break down into annual country-specific work plans that bridge the national and regional dimensions. COMMIT Task Forces oversee activities, monitor progress and make joint decisions, bringing together all anti-trafficking actors.

UN-ACT helps to coordinate COMMIT’s work. This includes ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach, empowering often-underrepresented institutions (such as labor or social welfare ministries) and providing non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as youth groups with opportunities to engage with policy makers.

DRIVING INNOVATION

UN-ACT works to ensure a sustainable, self-reliant COMMIT by focusing on building the capacities of government agencies. It has prepared a strategy for that based on an assessment of existing anti-trafficking capabilities in the subregion.

The objective is for COMMIT governments to take increased responsibility for the secretariat functions, with UN-ACT focusing more on its coordination and technical advisory role to COMMIT and the anti-trafficking sector more broadly.

The SPA IV reflects a systems-building approach to develop COMMIT into a sustainable transnational referral mechanism. Standard operating procedures are being established to counter human trafficking along with more progressive trafficking-prevention interventions.

MORE PARTICIPATION

The development of the latest subregional plan of action (SPA IV, 2015–2018) has set new standards for inclusion and participation in COMMIT involving all anti-trafficking stakeholders, including non-government actors.

The outcome is a framework agreement that is significantly more focused on results than any of the previous SPAs with indicators and targets to measure progress over time.

BETTER COOPERATION

Bilateral cooperation has been enhanced across the subregion including between Thailand and its neighbouring countries, where flows of human trafficking are some of the most prevalent. This includes the introduction of standard operating procedures for the repatriation of survivors and greater coordination in case investigations through the placement of a police attaché in the Embassy of Thailand in Myanmar.
**RESULTS AREA 2:**

COMMIT countries increase their cooperation with other countries and regional actors to counter human trafficking.

---

**COORDINATING STRENGTHS**

Human trafficking flows also reach beyond the subregion, often to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. UN-ACT assists the GMS governments in establishing cooperation with key destination countries, including through COMMIT and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The deployment of UN-ACT liaison officers to some of these countries is being considered, and relations with the ASEAN secretariat and sectoral bodies, such as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, have been strengthened.

As secretariat to COMMIT, UN-ACT also facilitates the process’ engagement and cooperation with other stakeholders, such as United Nations entities, international organizations, civil society groups including youth, academics and the private sector.

UN-ACT organizes regular regional network meetings and similar fora at the national level, providing a platform for exchange and coordination among those working to counter human trafficking across the region.

---

**DRIVING INNOVATION**

UN-ACT provides technical advice to government and non-government actors as well as regional bodies, including ASEAN. With the ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons and the accompanying Regional Plan of Action adopted, the experiences of COMMIT—its comprehensive and inclusive approach, the merging of regional and national responses and the inclusion of China—are of increasing interest to ASEAN.

As ASEAN strengthens its counter-trafficking efforts, COMMIT is ideally positioned to lead the way with policy and programming initiatives, which can be scaled up in a broader regional context. Because of its experience and expertise in both ASEAN and COMMIT, UN-ACT provides crucial technical advice on knowledge transfer between the two bodies.

---

**BEETTER VICTIM IDENTIFICATION**

Officials from various government agencies involved in COMMIT and ASEAN, including labor, police and social welfare, have developed common, regional indicators of exploitation for first responders, with support from UN-ACT and partners.

This is in recognition that victim identification is often a time-consuming process and a victim status cannot be determined at first encounter.

Such indicators of exploitation will help responders from different agencies identify cases in which investigations are required and allow for cross-border cooperation as needed.

---

**MORE GLOBAL ATTENTION**

Human trafficking in the fishing industry in South-East Asia has received global attention in recent years.

UN-ACT has been monitoring such patterns and supporting interventions, including through grant and technical assistance to the NGO Labor Rights Promotion Network Foundation, which led the fieldwork in identifying and assisting large numbers of trafficked persons from Myanmar and Thailand stranded on Indonesian islands.

These interventions were instrumental in attracting global attention to the topic and contributed towards identifying and supporting more victims, including by government agencies.
The limited research on vulnerabilities to human trafficking as well as trends and patterns continues to be a significant weakness in the sector. In response, UN-ACT has a dedicated component on research, data analysis and access to knowledge, thereby helping to expand and make accessible the evidence base for more informed counter-trafficking interventions.

UN-ACT uses its agenda-setting function as the COMMIT secretariat to introduce relevant research into policy and programming considerations. It also initiates discussions on research priorities, findings and follow-up interventions through the regional network meetings as well as national interagency working groups.

The UN-ACT website hosts a comprehensive resource center, with linked Facebook and Twitter accounts to reach audiences interested in anti-trafficking.

UN-ACT’s extensive networks, including in academia, allow it to facilitate partnerships between universities in the region and beyond for research collaboration and capacity development, especially between countries with similar human trafficking patterns.

UN-ACT conducts research in-house and in partnership with other organizations, and publishes it through three research series, respectively focusing on vulnerabilities, trends and impact. The project has published a research strategy that outlines the conceptual framework, priority areas and its work on methodological and ethical standards in research on human trafficking.

UN-ACT is part of a technical working group developing indicators, instruments and measurement frameworks for prevalence research on human trafficking at the global level and contributes to other research mechanisms, including the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development, or KNOMAD.

A university programme that involves institutions in Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand, including an annual academic conference, is being developed in partnership with Mahidol University in Thailand.

UN-ACT has developed quantitative and qualitative research projects with different focuses including particular types of human trafficking (such as forced marriage), affected economic sectors (including fishing), vulnerable populations (such as deportees) and the political economy underpinning exploitation.

UN-ACT hosts and assists PhD students with dissertations (such as on digital partnerships against child exploitation) and has worked with the Japanese Institute of Developing Economies in taking a multidisciplinary perspective on UN-ACT dataset analysis.
RESULTS AREA 4:

Civil society and other non-government actors are able to contribute more effectively to anti-trafficking efforts.

COORDINATING STRENGTHS

UN-ACT provides vital opportunities for non-government stakeholders, including youth, vulnerable populations and those affected by human trafficking, to directly engage with policymakers. With UN-ACT as its secretariat, COMMIT has become more transparent, accountable and inclusive, with civil society and others involved nationally and regionally.

UN-ACT has helped NGOs engage with COMMIT through a civil society platform, which facilitates their involvement in implementing and monitoring the COMMIT SPA IV. UN-ACT also supports the COMMIT Youth Forum, a formal body for youth engagement in COMMIT’s human trafficking prevention efforts.

DRIVING INNOVATION

UN-ACT provides financial and technical assistance to a select number of NGOs working on human trafficking. Through a small-grants scheme, it enables non-government actors to provide services to trafficked persons, with emphasis on populations who often remain unassisted. UN-ACT technical support centers on training in reporting and monitoring, project proposal formulation and fundraising, thereby helping NGOs to become more sustainable.

The private sector is an important partner to counter human trafficking since exploitation sometimes occurs in supply chains of corporations and because companies have relevant technological or other expertise to contribute. Private sector know-how has been utilized by UN-ACT in a number of ways, including for the development of victim identification applications in China and Thailand that help overcome language difficulties during first contact with potential trafficking victims.

MORE BUSINESS PARTNERS

UN-ACT, together with Microsoft and other partners, organized a regional conference involving governments, civil society and private sector actors for the sharing of knowledge and ideas about the role of ICT in combatting human trafficking. The event contributed to public-private partnership initiatives to develop national case databases on human trafficking.

BETTER DIRECT SERVICES

UN-ACT enables NGOs to support some of the most underserved populations and to fill critical gaps in services.

For instance, the Cambodian Center for the Protection of Children’s Rights offers psychosocial counselling services with UN-ACT assistance.

Village Focus International in Lao PDR helps so-called ‘push back’ cases—trafficked persons who are deported as irregular migrants.

In Thailand, the Labor Rights Promotion Network Foundation assists male survivors of human trafficking in the fishing and related industries.

Finally, the Vietnam Justice Support Association for the Poor fills a critical gap with much needed legal advisory services to trafficked persons seeking justice.
Gaps in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and the ability to measure the impact of interventions are critical weaknesses in the anti-trafficking sector. UN-ACT has built up dedicated M&E in-house capacities to ensure that the project is able to demonstrate progress towards its four results areas, learn from challenges and make adjustments where needed.

It also extends its M&E expertise to COMMIT and civil society organizations. With UN-ACT support, COMMIT has become more results-focused, as demonstrated in its latest subregional plan of action.

The project is working with COMMIT governments to develop monitoring and reporting procedures that include civil society organizations, thereby strengthening focus, transparency and accountability.

The small-grants scheme for civil society organizations also includes a strong M&E component, with technical support extended to ensure that progress is monitored while sustainably boosting their capacities in this crucial area.