

New UNODC Report Sheds Light on the Phenomenon of Human Trafficking into Thailand

Bangkok (Thailand), 10 August 2017 – To tackle human trafficking from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar into Thailand, governments must first better understand it as part of the broader phenomenon of irregular migration from those three countries, according to a new report launched today by UNODC and the Thailand Institute of Justice (TIJ). The report, *“Trafficking in persons from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar to Thailand”*, is the first joint report of its kind to explore human trafficking in the sub-region, and emphasises the need to combine robust criminal justice responses that cripple trafficking networks with approaches that protect migrants and maximise the benefits of international migration.

It is estimated that four million migrants live in Thailand, 90% of whom come from the neighbouring countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion – Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. Many of these migrants enter the country irregularly and remain in an irregular situation. They are therefore not only vulnerable to deception, coercion, violence, and exploitation whilst travelling, but also once they have arrived at their destination. The vulnerabilities and risks are amplified for children.

While trafficking to Thailand occurs for a range of purposes, the most common form is labour trafficking. People seeking higher wages are recruited by traffickers that exploit their vulnerabilities using physical violence or threats to work in industries such as fishing or construction. Many victims of trafficking, women and children in particular, are also brought to Thailand for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

While the lack of data and information remains one of the biggest challenges when it comes to countering trafficking in persons within Asia, this report aims to address some of the gaps in the understanding of human trafficking - and related migrant smuggling - in Thailand. Some new areas of focus include profiles of victims and traffickers, the contemporary push and pull factors, the routes taken by regular and irregular migrants, the fees paid to smugglers and traffickers, and the behaviours and methods of traffickers and their networks. It also explores the circumstances that make Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar source countries for the majority of persons trafficked into and through Thailand.

Stressing the need for a more complete picture of the current trafficking situation in the target countries. UNODC’s Regional Representative, Jeremy Douglas stated, “We now understand the situation better, and have identified some challenges and opportunities for enforcement and justice authorities in the countries. Importantly, the study provides a platform for us to expand our cooperation and assistance.” He added, “We are also considering if the findings might be helpful across the Mekong beyond the four countries that participated.”

“Promoting the development of data and research on crime and justice issues is a central part of the TIJ mission. Building on Thailand’s engagement in UN crime and justice forums, the TIJ is working to bridge global debates and local practice, and is looking to enhancing justice reforms within the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region”, said Professor Dr. Kittipong Kittayarak, Executive Director of the TIJ.

The subversive nature of trafficking further underscores the difficulties in detecting cases and identifying victims. While limited information is a global challenge, it is particularly acute in Asia. Maritime movements are opaque and the flow of boats around and between national waters are too unregulated to generate data. Crimes including migrant smuggling often remain hidden amongst daily traffic.

To help combat migrant smuggling, UNODC runs a secure, online database – the Voluntary Reporting System on Migrant Smuggling and Related Conduct (VRS-MSRC) for the collection and sharing of law enforcement data between member countries. UNODC Regional Coordinator, Benjamin Smith, highlighted that, “As migration flows grow and crimes such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling become more complex, increased law enforcement cooperation and information sharing is essential.”

There is growing awareness among target countries on the necessity of better data collection and better documentation. This includes initial measures to accurately report on investigations, arrests, prosecutions, and convictions of cases involving trafficking. In undertaking systematic national collection methods regularly and consistently, a basis can be established on which to conduct further research, identify trends and patterns, and develop informed policies and countermeasures.

Download the report, *Trafficking in persons from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar to Thailand*: <http://bit.ly/2wsAMjr>

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For further information, please contact:

Jessica Wong
Regional Programme Consultant
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific
Jessica.wong@unodc.org
+66 22 88 1219