



10 things

you need to know about

human trafficking



World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Motivated by our Christian faith, World Vision works with the world's most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

Cover photo reproduced courtesy of Jimmy Lam:
In Bangkok rain, a child sells flowers to passing traffic.

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Exploding the myths

Slavery is no myth. It still exists.

This concept can be hard to grasp in our developed and globalised world, where every nation has illegalised the buying, selling and imprisonment of its citizens. Yet global statistics estimate that at least 800,000 people are trafficked across borders annually, and this figure is most likely just a fraction of all victims trafficked within borders.¹

It is also estimated that more than one third of victims of human trafficking come from, pass through or end up in South-East Asia.² This makes the region, and in particular the porous borders that make up the countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, the world's hottest spot for trafficking crimes.

The complexity of the industry, the enormous amounts of money involved, the tolerance or ignorance of communities where trafficking takes place, and the geographical breadth of the problem all add to the challenge in tackling this crime.

The dramatic images of women being trafficked into brothels and children trafficked into the commercial sex industry where foreign men prey on their vulnerabilities may have grabbed the world's attention. But the true picture of trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion is more subtle, more hidden and less understood.

In fact, boys and men are just as vulnerable to trafficking. A child in 24 hour confined domestic labour, even at a relative's house, is considered trafficked. A man who is subjected to ill-informed, fraudulent and deceptive migration practices should also be considered a trafficking victim. Anyone who is held or forced to work against their will is considered trafficked. Confiscation of identification papers by an employer should be considered a trafficking offence, as should bondage into labour to pay off a debt.

Isolation and exclusion are also trafficking terms, covering the forms of control exercised over a trafficking victim to keep them from the outside world - what they do, who they seek out or talk to, what they read or see, where they go.

Many trafficking victims do not know any of this, and may not even consider themselves trafficked. Some even pay their way into trafficking by migration brokers. They are usually children, teenagers or young adults under the age of 30, mostly unskilled, belonging to poor and large families in economically deprived areas, socially depressed or isolated communities.

Exploding the myths and mystique around the industry of trafficking clears a path for anti-trafficking campaigners to challenge all forms and incarnations of trafficking exploitation, at all stages of the trafficking journey.

Tell me something I don't know

Inside this book are testimonies from women, girls and boys who have lived through the fear or trauma of trafficking and now choose to share their experiences.

In the absence of accurate statistics, these stories from survivors become very important. They fill the gaps in our knowledge. They reveal not only the scope, but also the methods of trafficking, helping to identify emerging issues and find stronger means to combat them.

These stories reveal that, although poverty is a cause of vulnerability, it is vulnerability and not poverty that causes trafficking. They highlight the lack of protection or interest in areas where the most difference could be made – at family, community and authority level. And they paint a personal portrait of the industry, the tricks and trends of trafficking, and the heroes and villains enmeshed within it.

Whether your strategy to reduce trafficking is based on rights, law, or compassion, the broader view of the industry that these stories provide will enhance your arguments and increase your impact.



¹ | US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report 2007 <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/>

² Cited by UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/media/media_23871.html

What is World Vision doing to combat trafficking in the GMS?

World Vision has nearly 20 anti-trafficking initiatives operating across the Greater Mekong Subregion, including two multi-country projects to reach across borders, as well as projects in Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. They aim to reduce vulnerabilities, influence governments and assist trafficking survivors who have been exploited in the Greater Mekong Subregion, with particular emphasis on child protection, safe migration and improved policy.

Projects include:

In Cambodia, partnerships which works with government to improve the capacity of police officers to respond to child sexual exploitation cases

In Myanmar, emphasis on children to reduce the numbers of children trafficked or subjected to any form of exploitation both within Myanmar and from Myanmar to neighbouring countries

In Lao PDR, a project which encourages a peer approach to trafficking awareness, to reduce the number of young people from Laos trafficked into Thailand

In Thailand, projects to reduce the incidence and risk of trafficking among migrant and other communities in key source and transit locations



10 things

you need to **know** about

human

trafficking

I. Girls are trafficked into many industries besides brothels

Because of its sensational and heartbreaking exploitation, the selling of underage girls into brothels is the main trafficking story covered by media.

It is a fact that women and girls are being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation but it is also a fact that many women and girls are trafficked for other purposes.

These trafficking patterns receive insufficient attention in comparison; yet the abuse that occurs there, including sexual abuse, physical violence, and hazardous working conditions without any protection or recourse to labour laws, can also break hearts.

In fact, the majority of trafficking of girls and women takes place for purposes other than for sexual exploitation. Forced labour and slavery-like practices in workplaces including factories, private homes, fisheries and agricultural plantations across the region make it possible for these industries to remain profitable.

In the Thai border town of Mae Sot recent ILO research into the plight of Myanmar migrant child workers in factories³ revealed that 77.3% of interviewed workers were girls. Although many of

the interviewed children claimed that they had working permits, they were found conducting work that should be considered as worst forms of child labour. Around 30% of the children were forced to live at the factory. One girl featured in the report worked 12 hours a day, 7 days a week; she could not return home because the factory owner had falsified her age on her work visa and kept her original identification documents.

Domestic labour is an industry considered safe by most families to send their children into, though their unclear working status and lack of visibility there would imply the opposite. Most would not consider themselves trafficked despite long working hours and virtual imprisonment.

Girls trafficked into begging and vending are frequently found on the streets of Asia's largest cities. Myanmar children are trafficked to Thailand and Cambodian children to Vietnam specifically for this purpose, often for short-term assignments with the full knowledge of their parents. Conditions for these children are abysmal with no recognition of rights to family, education, or play.

No bed of roses

When Mya Islam was seven years old she was sold by her mother to a trafficking agent for just under US\$100. She was destined for Bangkok, to sell roses in a chic bar in Ekamai, one of Bangkok's most popular nightspots.

"My first Thai word was Yee Sip Baht (20 baht, or around US. 60 cents). My boss taught me to say it to bar customers."

Her family were illegal migrants from Myanmar living in the border town of Mae Sot. Her mother agreed to the sale because she was promised that around US\$200 a quarter would be sent back to the family.

But when she arrived in Bangkok, her new employer told Mya she had a debt to work off first, because it had cost 10,000 baht (US\$285) to get her to Bangkok.



Photo: Jimmy Lam

Each night she worked from 9pm to 6am, carrying around 100 roses to sell for 20 baht apiece.

“Sometimes, people bought all of my flowers,” Mya says in wonder. “They said children shouldn’t work and that I should go home. The first time this happened I was stunned. I always thought it’s normal for us to work.”

Mya recalls that in the beginning she cried a lot. “I wanted to go home. I missed my mother and my father. It took me a year for me to get used to the feeling.”

“Of course, I’d thought about escaping. But I wouldn’t dare. What if I had run into a cruel person? This woman was nice to me. I liked her and her family. They treated me well.”

During her fourth year of working on the streets of Bangkok, Mya and another Burmese child were arrested on their way home with the daughter of the employer. At the police station, they were told over and over again that they would be deported to Myanmar. “I was terrified,” Mya remembers.

The girls were first sent to the capital’s Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) and later transferred to Kredtrakarn Protection and Occupational Development Centre.

“After learning that Mya had been arrested in Bangkok we contacted all of the three migrant children centres. Although the name didn’t match with the record given by Mya’s father the description did,” says Paweena Chanseni, World Vision’s Mae Sot Anti-Human Trafficking staff.

Four months later she was able to accompany Mya, now 11 years old, home to Mae Sot.

“We needed some time to work with the parents to make sure that they fully understood that children are not merchandise,” Paweena explains. “I visited her house many times before we felt that it was really safe for her to go back.”

Mya’s experience reveals the resilience of children; she is relatively unscathed by her experience. Sadly, though her parents have agreed to send her to school, her status as an illegal migrant prevents her from enrolling.

“I go to WVFT’s (World Vision Foundation of Thailand) education centre. They gave me an ID. It’s my first one,” Mya says proudly, showing her card.

Recommendations on trafficking of girls and women:

- Governments should adopt broad and updated definitions of trafficking which cover all forms and industries.
- More research is still required into trafficking of women and girls for other purposes than sexual exploitation.
- Decrease tolerance of all illegal trafficking-related abuse of girls and women; challenge community and police perceptions that trafficking into prostitution is the only true trafficking crime.



2. Trafficking is visible; trafficking is accepted

The lines of exploitation are so blurred between child labour, migrant labour, exploitative labour, illegal labour and trafficking, that it can be easy to lose sight of the issue at hand.

Wherever any of these labour exploitation situations occur, a small to medium percentage of the workforce are likely to be victims of trafficking. They are working in mainstream and visible industries, including restaurants, street scavenging, begging, domestic work, agriculture and factory labour.

For instance, it is certain that children are trafficked for begging or other street work, then moved into small scale criminal activities as they grow older.

Separating these children from the vast numbers of children who work alongside their families on the streets of cities in the Greater Mekong Subregion is impossible without hearing their stories, and their stories are rarely heard. They are lost in the crowd.

In urban Thailand and Cambodia, it is not uncommon to have an additional member of the household, claimed as a relative, to perform household chores. While conditions vary, there may be round-the-clock working hours, or years of confined exploitation.

Sexual abuse and rape definitely takes place - an IOM study showed that 10% of female domestic workers had been raped and another 8% reported rape attempts by their male employers.⁴ The IOM study also found a relationship between sexual exploitation and rape of female domestic workers and prostitution.. Around 50% of the sample of sex workers had been domestic workers.

The potential for rights abuse in this industry is clear, but still little progress has been made to protect domestic workers from being trafficked. The acceptance of domestic labour, its source and its conditions, is just one example of the way that communities tolerate, even expect, the transactional nature of labour supply.

The horrifying case of murdered domestic worker Ma Suu shows at once the vulnerability of migrant labour and the horrific results of dehumanising labour through trafficking and “ownership”.

A 17 year old ethnic Mon from a poor family in Myanmar, Ma Suu paid a facilitator to help her cross the border and find employment as a domestic worker. In July 2002, after a year of living and working in Thailand, she was accused of stealing by her employers. When she refused to confess, she was severely beaten, set on fire and left for dead in a ditch. A man found her and took her to hospital in Nakhon Sawan where she died a couple of days later, but not before she was able to tell her story and identify her murderers.

The employers – an air force officer, his wife, and another accomplice – were not charged until 2004, and proceedings were delayed several times thereafter. Finally in March 2007 the case concluded in Uthaitхани Provincial Court with the air force officer convicted of murder and handed down a life sentence. His wife was given a five year sentence for depriving the victim of her freedom - and for hiring an illegal migrant.⁵

Over the years many “owners” have gotten away with abuse and murder of migrant workers. This case was a landmark in the severity of its sentencing, affirming a basic legal truth that crossing borders illegally does not strip people of their human rights.



⁴ Out of sight, out of mind; Child domestic workers and patterns of trafficking in Cambodia IOM 2007 <http://www.iom.int/jahia/jahia/cache/offence/pid/1674?entryId=14481>

⁵ Story reported by Asian Center for Human Rights, <http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/2007/2395/> and <http://www.achrweb.org/reports/Thailand/Thailand0105.pdf>

Lives for sale in the marketplace

In 2006, a NGO worker noticed something unusual at the Olympic Market in Phnom Penh – a crowd gathered around 10 young girls. The girls, like everything else at the market, were for sale.

When the NGO worker moved closer to the girls, one of them ran to her and begged her for protection. She tried to negotiate the freedom of the girl, without any luck. In the end, she had to pay the purchase price of around \$12.50 in order to save her.

The girls, aged between 14 and 17 years old, had been tricked from their village with hopes of well-paid jobs. Their alleged trafficker, a married woman in her late 20s, lived in the same village as them, while her sister lived in Phnom Penh, worked as domestic help and regularly visited telling tales of opportunity and riches.

All of the girls went willingly because they wanted to earn money for their families and were inspired by the stories the traffickers told them. Some did not tell their families they were going; others asked and were given permission.

The NGO worker contacted the police who were reluctant to assist in the matter because the girls were intended for domestic labour and not prostitution. With the help of LICADHO – a Cambodian human rights organisation – the rest

of the girls were located and a meeting was arranged between the buyers, the girls and their families to clarify exactly what had occurred.

At this meeting, the buyers claimed that they did not know that purchasing children for domestic servitude was illegal, while the girls and their families said they had not considered the dangers of taking a job among strangers in Phnom Penh.

The mother of one of the trafficked girls said, “The recruiter came to meet my daughter while I was out of home at work on the farm. She did not force me but she said that if I did not let my daughter go with her, there were other girls in the village that wanted to go. She also told me, at least two or three of them would stay in the same house. She wouldn’t separate them. I felt they would be safer in a group like that so I decided to let my daughter go to work in Phnom Penh.”

Follow-up discussions with the village headman and local authorities revealed that the alleged traffickers had committed this act three times already. They did not know that it was illegal or feel that they had committed a crime. Likewise, the victims never suspected that there was a law prohibiting the selling of people, or that this transaction might affect their ability to earn a fair wage or work safely.



Recommendations on public awareness and engagement:

- All children have a right to education. Whether they are working in rural areas, the city or with relatives, compulsory education policy needs to ensure they can be located and given the opportunity for education and protection from violence.
- Involve communities in combating trafficking by sharing stories of the dangers, encouraging and supporting survivors to tell their stories, and encouraging rights awareness especially in marginalised or minority communities.
- Domestic labour remains to be taken seriously as an industry, with its own laws on working hours, salary structure, leave and benefits documented. Advocacy for creation or adherence to these laws needs to take place at both government and community level, with strong public awareness strategies to familiarise domestic workers (mainly girls or women, non-educated and possibly illiterate) with their rights.

3. Dirty jobs fuel trafficking demand

It is essential to understand trafficking within the framework of migration and movement. Worldwide, labour known as “3D” – dirty, dangerous and degrading – attracts people who are desperate for work. And it is this desperation that feeds the trafficking industry.

The Greater Mekong Subregion has always been a busy thoroughfare for migration, with borders in close proximity, rivers easy to cross and cultures and dialects often shared by both sides. Most recently, the relative wealth of Thailand (and, outside the subregion, Malaysia) has shifted the balance of “3D” exploitation. But Thailand now suffers from a deficit of, and therefore an unprecedented demand for, cheap labour to keep industries profitable.

Exploitative labour, or for children, the “worst forms of child labour”, also exists closer to home. Every country in the Greater Mekong Subregion has industries where poor conditions or low wages are well-known. Because these industries struggle to attract willing workers, certain employers will turn to illegal trafficked labour.

The “owners” use many methods to control the labour force delivered to them by traffickers. Locks and guards are sometimes used, but it is more common that psychological chains bind the trafficking victim to their new environment.

Isolation from community or lack of language skills makes it hard for trafficked victims to understand their rights. Illegal immigrants are threatened with exposure and arrest, and choose exploitative conditions as the lesser evil of the two. Many do not even consider themselves trafficked, and work for years on the promise of a wage one day, after their debt of migration has finally been paid off.

Even if illegal workers have not been trafficked into their hazardous jobs but have come willingly, their status puts them at risk of on-trafficking. The risk also extends to their children. Because the parents are not working legally, the children are not able to attend school or receive healthcare or counselling. How this affects their options and decisions is still under-researched because of a general hesitation by illegal migrants (for instance, the Myanmar population of Ranong, or Chinese rural-to-urban migrants) to take part in surveys or answer questions.

Poor, uneducated, ethnically different people are the first choice for exploitative employers – it is easier to dehumanise them or abuse their rights. A 2006 survey conducted in Thailand on attitudes towards foreign migrant workers revealed very clearly that Thais did not believe their neighbours deserved the same pay or working conditions as Thai workers. Almost 60% of the respondents did not believe that migrant workers should enjoy freedom of expression.⁶

It is not just in Thailand that cross-border bigotry fuels trafficking. In 2004 Cambodian police estimated that of the 50,000 women and girls in brothels in Cambodia, up to 30% of them were Vietnamese. According to an IOM report from 2007, as many as 4,000 Vietnamese women may be trafficked into the country for this purpose each year. Vietnamese children and women in brothels in Cambodia report substantially more abuse and less protection from it.⁷



⁶ Thai Attitudes Regarding Foreign Migrant Workers in Thailand/ABAC (2006) <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/child/trafficking/downloads/abacpoll-english.pdf>

⁷ UNIAP 2008 SIREN report Vietnam <http://www.no-trafficking.org/>

Bunna works the night shift

Bunna looks at his watch and rushes to leave his home to make it to work on time. He lives in Cambodia and works in Thailand, and the border will close for the night at 6pm.

“I cross the Thai border by 6 pm and I return home at around 8 am. I pull fruit carts, and collect recyclable products. I sleep for a few hours at night when there is nothing to do,” says Bunna.

Bunna, now 17, has been working since his mother left his abusive father and moved the family to the border town of Poipet many years before. He never complains about the fact that he cannot play, go to school or be like other children.

The family supported themselves by selling fruit at first, but as they were unable to live on what they earned, Bunna and his mother started to cross the border each day for work while his brother stayed at home with his grandfather.

“After selling fruits for about two or three months, my mother and I went to Thailand in search of a job. We removed stems from chilies. We also searched for recyclable things to sell to get more money,” remembers Bunna.

In Thailand, Bunna and his mother lived illegally, without even a shelter. “We slept at the market, from one stall to another. When police chased us, we ran into the forest for safety.”

Then Bunna’s mother fell sick and she began to stay at home, while he continued to work. It was then that he met a woman who told him he could earn far more as an agricultural hand close to Bangkok. Instead of discussing it with his mother, who might have stopped him, he made his own decision to go, looking forward to the time he could return with enough money to turn the family fortunes around.

He had never expected that a woman who seemed so kind could be a trafficker. Bunna was taken deep into Thailand, and delivered to his new employer as a cowherd. In this exploitative situation he was not paid at all, spoke to nobody, and was forced to work long and hard hours. The inability to contact his family added to his pain – not only was he trapped, but he knew without his support, they would be struggling.

Eventually he ran away, and travelled back to the border region on his own. His mother broke down when she saw him and greeted him by saying, “Don’t ever go to Thailand again, even if we have nothing to eat.”

It is only because of the hardship that their family still faces that Bunna has ignored his mother’s advice. But now he knows the dangers, and he spends time telling other young people to be careful of deceivers like the woman who tricked him.

He says that he wants his brothers to go to school. “I want them to obtain a good job, but not what I am doing. If they are uneducated, they could be tricked and deceived like me.”

Recommendations on exploitative migrant labour:

- Advocate for improved cross-border recruitment and safe migration into monitored labour situations, plus a regional overhaul of migrant rights policies and procedures.
- Interlink policing of illegal immigration with social services to provide protection from police harassment and greater understanding of rights and redresses for migrants in exploitative labour.
- Research more into child workforces – is new legislation to prohibit child labour protecting children or simply pushing their services underground?
- Address corruption where it assists exploitative labour – for instance in taking bribes from illegal migrants to avoid deportation, or the collaboration between traffickers and people smugglers to bring people illegally across borders.



4. People smuggling is not considered trafficking

The definition of trafficking is surrounded by misconceptions and misunderstandings. The assumption that most trafficking victims are kidnapped and moved across borders for exploitation does not portray a true image of the dynamics of trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

In fact, most trafficking takes place within the framework of migration, where the trafficker/facilitator has initial consent from the victim. Once the victim is coerced or tricked into exploitative labour or the denial of their rights, trafficking has occurred.

The trafficking victim does not have to cross a border in order for it to be considered as trafficking. In China for example, most trafficking is internal. One of the major trends is for girls (sometimes underage) to be trafficked from rural Yunnan and other poor provinces for forced marriage.⁸

While it is a crime to carry people across borders illegally, smugglers can not yet be prosecuted under trafficking laws. Human trafficking is a crime against the individual, while smuggling is a crime against a nation. Smuggling requires the crossing of national borders while trafficking can also take place within the borders of a country. A smuggler provides the service of transport, either

forced or unforced, but is not considered part of the transaction resulting in slavery.

However, illegal immigrants smuggled across borders become extremely vulnerable to labour exploitation. Their smugglers may deliver them to traffickers, or become their traffickers – conversely, traffickers may also facilitate an illegal border crossing with their victims, becoming smugglers.

For this reason, the division of law between smuggling and trafficking becomes problematic for a holistic legal response. It should be, but is not yet, possible to prosecute accomplices at all stages of the trafficking journey on behalf of the individual.

The trafficker who instigates the transaction, the transporter, the crooked migration agent or corrupt border guard, the community members who offer “storage” for a price along the way, and the receiver, should all be subject to prosecution under trafficking laws, not smuggling laws.

The only people in all of this that should never be considered criminals are the victims. Any decisions trafficking victims have made that may have contributed to their enslavement are irrelevant against their rights to protection and support.

What is Human Trafficking? The UN definition

Article 3 of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000)⁹:

“Trafficking in Persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring and receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

A person is considered to have been trafficked even if they have given their consent to the above. And a child – anyone under 18 – can be considered trafficked if they have been recruited and transported into exploitive or slavery-like conditions even when they have not been deceived, forced, threatened, abducted or coerced.

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if it does not involve any of the means set forth”.



Terror lives on for Myanmar truck survivors¹⁰

In April 2008, 54 Myanmar people, mostly women, suffocated while being smuggled on a container truck across the Thai border and on to Phuket. The illegal immigrants had boarded the truck voluntarily on the promise of work opportunities in Thailand. Later interviews revealed that they had paid around 5,000 baht each (approx US\$150) for the arrangement, but had almost no understanding of the conditions in which they would be travelling or what they would be doing on arrival.

The truck was filled to capacity, the victims standing, when the air conditioning broke down and the air began to run out.

“We contacted the driver using a mobile phone, but he told us in Burmese to keep quiet and make no trouble,” one survivor told the Bangkok Post newspaper. “He switched off the phone and drove on.”

In desperation the migrants started banging on the walls of the container to no avail. So many died that when the container was finally opened the driver fled, and was arrested later.

After escaping from their deadly ordeal the remaining sixty-six survivors were incarcerated while their cases were considered. They included a widow who saw her eight-year-old daughter die because she could not lift her to the level where the air was

still breathable, a man whose wife of three weeks had suffocated beside him, and a 15-year-old boy who had taken the journey with his friend so they could afford school fees the following year. His friend did not survive.

For days, Thai authorities and NGOs and lawyers wrangled over the case, arguing that the survivors should be treated as victims of trafficking and not criminals. However, under the Thai law at the time, men could not be considered trafficked, nor had any transaction yet taken place.

The victims were fined; some of them who could not afford the fine served short jail sentences. Then they returned to Myanmar. While their treatment under the protection of social services departments on both sides was sympathetic, the law was simply not flexible enough to protect them as trafficking survivors.

In June 2008 a new Thai Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act was passed which adopts the wider definition of trafficking, giving further protection to those who fall victim to exploitative and deceptive migration practices. The new law acknowledges that men can be trafficked.

The driver was not charged with a trafficking offence, but with conspiracy to hide, help or smuggle illegal aliens into Thailand. In August 2008 he received a six-year jail sentence for his part

Recommendations on trafficking law:

- Align ratification and implementation of the United Nations Anti-Human Trafficking Protocol with the true definition of human trafficking.
- Train front line police units and other related staff (social workers, interpreters etc.) to identify a broad range of Support governments to recognise and show greater commitment to targeting all criminal aspects of the industry in order to protect their citizens, including migrant populations.
- Ensure punitive laws cover all trafficking crimes, and protect all trafficking victims including boys, men and potential victims.



in the crime. When asked why he had not stopped straight away, he testified that he was too frightened of the police.

Ten months later in February 2009, some justice was finally served when heirs of the deceased were awarded compensation under the Thai Traffic Accident Victim Protection Act. However, attempts to bring four more

defendants to court to face a criminal lawsuit filed by three survivors continue.

“I’m not here for the compensation money,” said one survivor. “It’s incomparable to my wife.”

5. Trafficking victims most often “rescue” themselves

Victims of trafficking are often portrayed as powerless people who are incapable of changing their situation. However, many of them do challenge or escape their captivity, prosecute or speak out against their traffickers, and find the strength to move forward in freedom and confidence.

Some even overcome the trauma of their exploitation and stand up publicly. These survivors of trafficking make powerful advocates, raising awareness and action on the issue.

Because of the media interest in sex trafficking, most of these spokespeople are women with considerable sexual abuse in their painful pasts. By speaking out, they break many taboos of morality and gender, motivated by their desire to prevent others from living through the same horrors.

Though their stories are inspiring, they also reveal that governments and communities fall far short when it comes to protecting their citizens from trafficking. For every child sex worker rescued by NGO or police raids, several will free themselves by creating or seizing opportunities to escape. Many trafficked victims return home without the assistance of social or rehabilitation services, and may never be documented at all.

Woman of the Year: Somaly Mam

Former trafficking survivor Somaly Mam has been recognised as a CNN hero and been awarded the Global Friends Award; in 2006 she was honoured as Glamour magazine’s Woman of the Year. ¹¹

Trafficked into a Cambodian brothel at 12, she was severely beaten and abused for three years until a customer gave her US\$3000. She used the money to free all the girls in her brothel and ever since she has been one of the strongest voices against human trafficking in Cambodia and elsewhere.

After many years with Cambodian anti-trafficking agency AFESIP, she has now set up her own Somaly Mam Foundation, which works to protect children and women from trafficking in all its forms.

World Vision Heroine: Srey Mom

Srey Mom says “I had my childhood and dignity stolen from me.”

When she was only 14, living in the care of her grandmother in a poor village in Cambodia, she was tricked into enslavement at a brothel in Thailand. She took multiple customers every day, many of them foreigners. Her chance to escape came when she was taken to a doctor after falling sick and climbed out of his bathroom window. After her ordeal, she received support, education and vocational training for a year at World Vision’s Neavear Thmey Trauma Recovery Centre in Phnom Penh.

Now 20, Srey Mom works at the Trauma Recovery Centre as a community advocate and spokesperson for World Vision against the sexual exploitation of children. As well as appearing before crowds of thousands at events in her home town, she has addressed teenagers in Singapore and ASEAN officials in Vietnam.

With a past that most people would rather hide or forget, she says she is determined to tell her story and teach other people how to protect themselves from similar exploitation.



Zar Zar joins the good fight

Zar Zar, once a victim of trafficking, is at 21 now a part of the campaign to eliminate it.

She was trafficked from Myanmar to Thailand at the age of 17, when she had just finished 10th grade and was about to attend university. The trafficker had been known to Zar Zar and her family for many years. At the time, she agreed to leave her home, family and university dreams behind; if she got a job she would be able to ease the burden for her family, and she could always come back to study later.

The job never eventuated; instead, told she owed the woman money for brokering fees, she was placed into a brothel in Chiang Mai, Thailand to repay the debt. She was given no food until she agreed to take clients, and threatened alternately with abuse and arrest whenever she asked to leave.

In 2003, after nearly a year, Zar Zar was freed from the brothel in an undercover operation to rescue girls from the sex trade. Zar Zar could not believe her good fortune when she learned that she was going to be helped to return home.

Coming back into familiar surroundings was not easy for her in the beginning. "I was ashamed and did not want to face the

community. I just stayed in my house, giving excuses to not visit relatives and fearing to meet them," Zar recalls.

Repatriation support from World Vision helped her and her family to get past this shame. Her family set up a small shop at the house, and Zar re-enrolled at university, majoring in geography. She also became outspoken on young people's vulnerability to trafficking. If she had been tricked by a woman she knew, how many more like her were still at risk?

In November 2006, Zar returned to Thailand with World Vision Myanmar to participate in an inter-country workshop on trafficking. There she shared her experiences on the difficulties that trafficked victims face in coming before courts, and encouraged women at Thailand's Baan Kratakan shelter to push past their fears and testify against their traffickers.

Visiting Thailand again strengthened Zar's determination to stay involved in protecting other Myanmar migrants from trafficking.

"I'm glad to know that my brothers and sisters, relatives and friends will at least never fall into the situation I have been in," says Zar.



Recommendations on finding and releasing trafficked victims:

- With the fishing industry as an emerging hotspot for trafficked victims, build capacity of coastal guards to monitor deep sea fishing vessels, with stricter punishments including substantial jail terms for using or intent to use trafficked labour.
- Improve children's understanding of their rights as juveniles. Fear of authorities is a major factor in controlling a child-based workforce. While the age of criminal responsibility varies from country to country, children should not be arrested or criminalised under the same laws as adults.

6. Adoption is still a trafficking risk

Amidst unconfirmed reports of the sensational and sinister - babies adopted by brothels or trafficked into organ donation - “baby-snatching” into the homes of childless couples is still a trafficking reality.

Where people live in poor, drug-affected, violent or transient communities, traffickers can easily prey on new-borns. Children of rape victims or sex workers are particularly vulnerable to forced adoption. Some families choose to sell one child in order to provide for the other children.

In China several traffickers who have sold babies for adoption from the poorer parts of China have been arrested. In 2007, a gang of 57 traffickers were arrested for trafficking more than 60 babies from Yunnan over two years. More recently, eight women, each nursing a baby girl, were arrested at Henan railway station and admitted they'd been paid to move the babies, who had been purchased for between 3,000 yuan (around \$440) and 4,000 yuan (around \$580) each. ¹²

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that a child always has the right to be cared for by his/her parents. Therefore a baby is considered trafficked if economic profit rather than the best interest of the child are in focus in the adoption process, or if legal or illegal actions have been undertaken which are prejudicial to the dignity of the child. If a child has been purchased from its natural parents, or if the biological parent's consent has been obtained

through fraud or considerable pressure, it is considered trafficking as much as if the baby has been kidnapped and its identity falsified.

The Hague Convention of 1993 was an international protocol on adoption based on three major objectives: to administer international adoption with respect to the child's best interest, to establish cooperation between States to protect children's interests and to assure recognition of adoptions passed between contracting States.

However the desperation of adoptive parents, coupled with the vulnerability of birth parents in developing countries, has meant that both parties are prepared to overlook both law and child rights, with traffickers happy to facilitate a transaction.

This is not to say that every individual adoption is illicit or unethical, but rather that the adoption system has become so intertwined with market behavior as to, in theory and practice, frequently permit child selling or coercion in the adoption process. Many governments in the Greater Mekong Subregion have taken steps to protect themselves from international adoption scandals, but in the face of domestic demand, adoption patterns may still be based on coercion, force or financial gain.

It can be a lucrative business. A baby girl in China may be sold within China for around 8,000 yuan (US\$1180) and a boy up to 20,000 (US\$2920).

Reports of trafficking in babies and unsafe international adoption practices have been found in Vietnam. The number of international adoptions increased after the US and Vietnam passed a MOU on adoptions. That agreement expired in 2008. An investigation found fraudulent adoption cases during the time in which the MOU was in force. In one case a grandmother put up a child for adoption without the parents' knowledge.¹³

In addition, the number of children adopted internally is immeasurable.



¹² "Gang trafficking over 60 babies cracked" China Daily, September 7, 2007; "China police break baby trafficking ring" Associated Press, September 7, 2007; "Henan police break up alleged baby-trafficking ring" Shanghai Daily, January 8 2009

¹³ "US-Vietnam adoption deal ended after corruption exposed" The Guardian 2 September 2008

Hoa still misses daughter Moon

Hoa, a teenage girl from a poor rural family, is still mourning the loss of her child.

Pregnant through rape at 16, she gave birth to a healthy little girl called Moon, who was sold at 6 months by Hoa's mother and stepfather to a childless Vietnamese couple living in the next province.

Hoa was raped by a man she called "Uncle", a neighbour who sexually assaulted her several times while she was working in his rice field. After the rape Hoa wanted to talk about the incident, but was prevented partly by the rapist's re-assurance that nothing was wrong, and also due to her young age, her shyness and feelings of shame.

"I intended to tell Aunt Binh," she says, "but Uncle Binh said that it's nothing to worry about with the first intercourse, and I felt so ashamed that I could not tell her, and I was so young at that time, I was very frightened. Afterwards, he laughed and said, "I already have a wife and children, it's you who will be ashamed."

Neither her mother or her stepfather cared about the fact that she had been abused. Though her paternal grandparents filed a complaint against the rapist, no intervention or action has ever been taken by the local authorities.

Although Moon was born from an unwanted pregnancy, Hoa loved her very much. She says Moon became a source of consolation to her in her family environment of neglect and abandonment.

Hoa did not know that her mother was discreetly searching for a couple who would adopt. Even when the adoptive parents (a teacher and his wife) were on their way to take Moon, Hoa's mother told her it was her little step-sister who would be given away.

After Moon had been taken from her, Hoa found out that her mother had received 5 million dong (around \$300). Though both mother and stepfather were accomplices in the sale, neither would take responsibility, both blaming each other to shield themselves.

Moon's trafficking happened four years ago. Since then, life has become even worse for Hoa, who has been forced by her mother to become a sex worker in a beer bar. All she hopes for now is to live independently one day, to rent her own room away from the parents that have mistreated her so badly. She also hopes that one day she will meet her daughter Moon again.

"I loved her passionately," she says, in tears.



Recommendations on ethical adoption:

- Promote universal birth registration to protect children from the time they are born, by providing them with clear citizenship and identity
- Combat corruption by ensuring full transparency of natural parents' permission, original birth certificates and other paperwork as part of any adoption process, domestic or international.
- Refer legislators and authorities to international protocols including the CRC and the Hague Convention 1993 and assess their conformity both on paper and in practice. At the heart of ethical adoption is the right of the child to have a family and not the contrary (the right of the family to have a child).
- Call on governments to improve their standards and monitoring of transit homes and orphanages for children who are homeless or have lost their parents, to lessen the risk of these vulnerable children

7. As many as one in five trafficking survivors fall prey a second time

People, in contrast to many other goods, can be sold over and over again. In a report from Laos from 2004 it was found that the re-trafficking rate was as high as 20%.¹⁴

One reason for this is weak social integration after being trafficked. When a trafficking victim returns home, either through official channels or their own initiative, life can be even worse than when they left.

For most trafficking victims, the reason for leaving home in the first place still exists – the sense that they are responsible for the fortunes of their families.

Being trafficked also creates new vulnerabilities - community stigma, depression, lack of self-esteem or increased anxiety and fear. These feelings can make it difficult to re-assimilate and increase the risk of being re-trafficked, especially within the first two years of the original trafficking incident.

Some traffickers will even stay in touch with their victims or their families and use these vulnerabilities to exploit them once more. This is particularly evident when the victims believe they are still in debt to their traffickers.

The individual trafficking experience also comes into play; girls who have been trafficked into brothels almost always face moral discrimination because of their past. This is another tool that traffickers use to drive a wedge between sex trafficking survivors and their families or communities.

It is for this reason that so many NGO shelters exist for girls and women who have been trafficked into brothels. Some rehabilitation programmes last as long as two years, working to provide the residents with valuable life skills, confidence and vocational training to face their future without dwelling on the past.

World Vision's Neavear Thmey trauma recovery project for child victims of sexual abuse or trafficking has been in operation since 1997. When girls complete their year at the residential centre and return home, World Vision social workers continue to visit, assess their progress and mediate in any problems they uncover between family and community. If the girls are considered to be at risk of violence, exploitation or re-trafficking, then World Vision will intervene to find them a new, safer home.



In this matter, World Vision and other NGOs continue to act as proxies for Government Social Service Departments. One major recommendation on this issue is that governments prepare to provide this level of protection to trafficking victims without the support of NGOs.

In the meantime, rehabilitation, repatriation, and reintegration support back into society remain among the most needed services for trafficking survivors.

¹⁴ As cited in Give2Asia Laos Safe Shelter Proposal 2004:
<http://www.humantrafficking.org/uploads/updates/LaosSafeShelterProposal.pdf>

Nary and the windblowers: the patterns of trafficking

Born into a poor and unstable family in Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia, Nary left school at 13 to work. Though her seven younger siblings were at school, she says she was embarrassed by how they lived. Unhappy at home, already dreaming of a better life and money for the future, she was extremely vulnerable to the promises of traffickers.

“I wanted to buy my own land,” Nary says simply.

Nary followed a “windblower”, one of Cambodia’s migration recruiters who earn their living visiting poor communities with offers of better work. Some of them have legitimate paid jobs to offer but many of them make their money feeding the illegal but lucrative industry of human trafficking.

This windblower made an illegal border crossing with Nary into Thailand. Once on the other side, with no papers, no friends and no Thai language, Nary realised how bad her situation now was.

“She told me she was going to sell me to a business man in Thailand and I would have to go,” she remembers. “I was so lucky that a girl rescued me, a girl who had been trafficked by the same woman years before.”

The girl paid the trafficker’s fee and even gave Nary enough money to return to Cambodia to her family. But when she arrived home, her stepmother beat her, and openly accused her

of taking up sex work. “She told me even if I owned a huge villa she would not stoop so low as to live in it.”

After only two weeks at home Nary ran away again, this time on her own and heading for Phnom Penh.

“On the road I met a woman who told me she could find me a job there. I don’t know why I trusted her. I should have known better by now – but her voice was so soft and comforting.”

The woman sold her to a brothel in Phnom Penh. Rescued and returned home by an NGO because she was underage, Nary’s troubles were far from over. Now everybody knew she had been involved in the sex industry, and she had lost what little value she once had to her family. After another beating, she left home again.

“This time I just walked,” she said. “I didn’t even know what direction I was going in.” She was trafficked into a brothel in Battambang the same day; then, escaping from there, trafficked again into the town of Bovil.

Though she is not sure how much she was worth in any of these transactions, her self-worth was by now extremely low. When eventually she fled the Bovil brothel, she returned back to Banteay Meanchey and took a job in a karaoke bar to support herself.



“One of the other girls asked me to visit her grandfather. I thought she was being friendly. But she took me to a private garden with many men in it and drugged me with wine. Then I was raped by those men, violently, till I fainted.”

Nary had had enough. The morning after the attack, she reported the girl and the rapists to the police. The main offender was arrested, tried and successfully prosecuted, while she moved into Rapha House, a shelter in Battambang for trafficked or sexually abused girls.

Nary has learned about child rights at the shelter and is starting to understand properly what she missed out on that made her so vulnerable to further exploitation – basic rights such as education, protection and a loving family.

Recommendations on protection for trafficking survivors:

- Call on governments to increase social services spending so that survivors of trafficking are not mass-processed, forcibly repatriated or left isolated from support networks.
- Ensure identities are protected, including clear guidelines or even legislation pertaining to journalists and NGOs who report on trafficking issues.
- Decrease community tolerance of traffickers through more successful prosecution, better understanding of trafficking laws and greater compassion for returned victims.
- Consult the victim. Not all trafficking survivors wish to return home. If families are not safe, strengthen other options such as foster families or group homes, where networks of care still exist.

8. Boys and men are trafficked too

The vulnerabilities of men and boys have rarely been addressed in past anti-trafficking efforts. The misconception has been that men are in control of their migration while women and children are trafficked.

Little is known about the patterns of trafficking that affect men. Because they have not been able to claim trafficking status until recently, they do not figure in statistics of returned trafficked victims. The figure often quoted of an estimated 800,000 trafficked victims worldwide include only around 20% males.

As the laws change across the region to acknowledge that boys and men are migrating into exploitative labour against their will, there is an urgent need to understand the mechanisms that make this possible.

It is quite normal for men in Cambodia or Laos to leave their homes and families for short-term labour contracts in other provinces or internationally. There are many brokers who work to source and transport the labourers, and many legitimate, albeit high-risk or underpaid, labour opportunities. Illegal border crossings add to the vulnerability of male labourers, as does geographical isolation in factories, quarries or fishing boats.

The fishing industry is emerging as a hotspot for male trafficked labour. The boats rarely come to shore. Strong, physically fit teenagers and young men are held captive through isolation, fear and 24-hour armed guarding. Of an estimated 200,000 migrant labourers on Thai fishing vessels, more than half of the workers are undocumented. An ILO survey also found that a majority of the fishermen interviewed were children between 15 and 17 years old.¹⁵

A significant number of boys are trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation. Again, there is little research, made even more difficult by the stigma and social stereotypes about men having sex with other men. Tourists and locals alike may admit to exploiting underage girls but stay silent about their behaviour with boys. However, research from Pattaya, Thailand, a notoriously open sex tourist haven, revealed that boys were in strong demand for commercial sexual exploitation and could earn as much as US\$ 280 on one night by having sex with foreigners.

Because of this, families and communities on the outskirts of Pattaya are very vulnerable to the offers of brokers supplying the child sex industry; in addition, the town attracts a large number of runaway boys and teenagers who can easily “disappear” into brothels.¹⁶

Strong and willing; Non's trafficking nightmare

Non was a fishing industry trafficker's dream.

A strong boy of 17, he had just arrived in the border town Savannakhet from his village in Southern Laos. He had very little education, could barely read and write, and was supporting his mother and grandmother.

Working for a small wage in a saw mill, Non met a young man who offered to take him to a well-paid job in Thailand. Non was told that Thai garment factories offered salaries of around 6,000 baht per month (US\$170).

"I really needed money and he was a fellow Lao person, so I believed and trusted him," Non said. He later admitted that his limited exposure to city life may have caused him to be vulnerable to the deceitfulness of recruiters.

"I thought it was completely normal to cross the river at night. I had no idea this was illegal," Non said.

When he reached the other side, Non boarded a van that wouldn't open its doors to let him out until reaching the coast of Thailand several hundred kilometres away. Stepping out of the van, he was immediately led onto a fishing trawler under the watchful eyes of men armed with guns.

"I was in shock when I saw the ocean and fishing boats," Non said, expecting to see a garment factory. His friend, now his betrayer, was also nowhere to be seen.

For two years he lived a hellish routine, working from the early morning into the darkness of night, heaving nets of fish without rest or break. He ate and slept little on a crowded deck with 40 other men. All of them were regularly beaten.

"I remember one of the labourers next to me was beaten until he was unconscious. I was scared but I had to look away otherwise I would get beaten too," Non recalled.

The boat would dock only once every six months, to replenish supplies. On one of these occasions, after two years of forced servitude, Non noticed his guards had finally left him alone. He made his move and ran – for days, through the jungle, afraid that if he went along the highway his captors would find and kill him.

Eventually he broke out of the jungle into the yard of a house. The woman who lived there was tending her garden when the frightened teenager suddenly appeared and begged for her help.

¹⁵ Pearson, E. The Mekong Challenge: Underpaid, Overworked and Overlooked (The realities of young migrant workers in Thailand) ILO: Bangkok and Raks Thai Foundation 2006 <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/child/trafficking/downloads/underpaid-eng-volume1.pdf>

¹⁶ US Department of State - Trafficking in Persons Report 2008 <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/ris/tiprpt/2008/>

“I could tell she was scared of me but I told her not to be. I told her I was from Laos and I was kidnapped to work on a fishing boat for two years. I was hungry, tired, and wanted to go home,” says Non.

As he told her his story, she listened, wept and embraced him. With compassion, “Auntie,” as Non affectionately calls her, fed him and gave him a bed to sleep in.

“Auntie gave me new life,” he says.

The next day, Auntie put money in Non’s hands, and ordered a taxi to take him to the Lao Embassy in Bangkok. From there, before he knew it, he was in a car heading for the border.

As he was greeted by World Vision staff at the Lao-Thai border and brought back to his village, there was only one joyful thought that crossed his mind. “I am alive. I will survive now.”

Today, Non actively shares his experience with all the teenagers in the village. He is working to raise awareness amongst young people to identify and expose recruiters who approach them with offers of work.

“I use my story as an example to warn my friends not to across the river and work in Thailand illegally. Recruiters may grab you and your life will be likely living in a prison,” says Non.



Recommendations for protection of boys and men from trafficking:

- Revisit existing information, legislation, campaigning tools and training materials. Are they inclusive of all forms of trafficking, including trafficking of men and boys?
- Research both into male trafficking and the industries that are known to use male trafficking labour.
- Revise structures for reintegration and rehabilitation of victims so that the experiences and needs of men and boys are represented.
- Governments should empower coastal guards to strictly monitor deep sea fishing vessels, and introduce tough punishments such as cancellation of business permits and long jail terms with heavy fines for business owners who use trafficked labour.



9. Disability is attractive to traffickers

The very factors that challenge people living with disabilities to take an active role in their communities are the same ones that make them attractive to traffickers.

People with disabilities are often worth less to their community and potentially more to traffickers, especially in the begging industry or in brothels. Their lack of participation or perceived value to the family, or even in some cultures a sense of shame or embarrassment to have a disability in the family, means that families may even seek out traffickers to relieve themselves of responsibility.

In Thailand, UNICEF claims brothel owners have specifically targeted deaf girls and women since they are less likely to communicate their pain and suffering, and find it harder to return home if they escape.¹⁷

People with disabilities are also in demand as beggars because of the sympathy they can provoke. More than 80% of people giving money to beggars in Bangkok indicated that they were influenced by the disabilities of the beggars.¹⁸

Traffickers can capitalise on this by deliberately sourcing children born with disfigurements and sending them onto the streets to beg. They tightly control their begging rings, making it hard for these marginalised children ever to leave.

In 2007 in China, around 1,340 people were delivered from forced labour in brick kilns in a series of government-instigated rescues. Many were children, and nearly one-third of them had intellectual disabilities.

The industry was exposed as a trafficking destination after 400 parents posted an online plea to locate their children kidnapped from railway stations.

One kiln foreman was quoted as saying: “It was a fairly small thing, just beating and swearing at the workers and not paying them wages.”¹⁹

The perpetrators of this scandal have since been arrested, but it is fair to assume that this is not an isolated incident in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Begging to buy back her father

Da's blind father went to Bangkok with a Vietnamese migration agent four years ago.

"My dad lost three fingers and his sight after stepping on a landmine during the war," says Da. "He played accordion in a band with his blind friends in Phnom Penh. They were quite famous."

It was at one of the band's performances that a Vietnamese woman approached Da's father and offered him a business opportunity in Bangkok.

"She told us that my husband could earn more than 19,000 baht (US\$585) in just one week, begging there. I didn't want him to go but he said he wanted to try his luck," said Da's mother.

That was in 2005. Da's father came back once with some money for the family, then after that there was no sign of him. A year later, Da's mother finally received news that her husband was trapped in Bangkok.

"I was so excited when my mum told me we're going to see my dad in Bangkok," said Da. "I thought that finally we could be together."

They crossed the border illegally, took a bus to Bangkok and searched through the city for four days before they finally found him. Unfortunately, it was far from a happy reunion.

Da's father was not allowed to speak to them, but the Vietnamese woman he worked for told them that there was a price owing for his return.

"She said we had to pay her 30,000- 40,000 baht (US\$860-\$1140) if we wanted him back. How was I supposed to find that much money?" says Da's mother.

The only thing Da's mother could think of to do was to go begging herself. The next day she took Da to a Bangkok overpass and left her there while she went to sit at a spot nearby.

"My mum told me to sit there and beg for money. I felt completely lost. I thought we were going home. The ground was so hot. I wanted to tell her that I didn't want to do it but I knew it wouldn't change anything," remembers Da.

It didn't take long for the police to pick up Da and her mother and put them both in jail pending transfer back to Cambodia.

¹⁷ Cited by USAID http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/gender/wwd.html
¹⁸ The Nature and Scope of the Foreign Child Beggar Issue in Bangkok, Friends International/UNAP 2006

¹⁹ <http://www.friends-international.org/resources/FI/UNAP-Report.pdf>

²⁰ "Slave 'owneg's' busted in Shanxi and Henan brick kilns", Asia News June 18 2007 <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9584>

Before she left, Da's mother had a visit from a social worker.

"She gave me World Vision's number and explained that my daughter would be sent to a shelter. She said 'Contact World Vision after you return to Cambodia. They will help bring your daughter back.'"

Nowadays, Da is living at a centre for vulnerable children in Thailand, preparing to return home with a combination of schooling and vocational classes. At 15, she is still in grade 4.

Her mother regrets that they ever went to Bangkok, or that she asked Da to beg. She wants Da to return home.

"I've made mistakes in the past but this time it'll be different. When my daughter returns I want her to study. I can see that she's learnt a lot at the centre. Every time I visit her she teaches me things. I can see now that school is important."

Da's father has never returned.



Recommendations on protection from disability trafficking:

- Enhance disability participation, through partnerships between NGOs and government social services, to improve the social worth of children who are living with disabilities.
- Ensure children with disability are at school or in other ways visible to their communities.
- Recognise and address stigma and discrimination that exists at community level towards people living with disabilities, to ensure fair access to livelihoods, community services and legal rights.



10. There is no one profile of a trafficker

It would be a reasonable assumption, given the scale of human trafficking worldwide, that it is driven by organised crime networks and syndicates; however in the Greater Mekong Subregion the opposite is usually the case.

This region is characterised by small-scale ad-hoc networks, where opportunistic traffickers use basic tricks to exploit people as the chance presents itself. They may provide each other with a loose network of support, but most of them are acting on their own, often in “mom and pop” businesses within full view of the community.

The profiles of the traffickers are hard to detect and analyse. They often involve people who know the victims well enough to invite trust. In Vietnam UNICEF found that 41% of child sex workers are introduced to the commercial sex trade by a friend or acquaintance.²⁰

But traffickers can also be strangers who manage to convince an illegal migrant that a better job might await, or gangs who kidnap the victims, especially babies or children. There are as many profiles as there are ways to exploit people.

Traffickers come from all walks of life and both genders. Female traffickers know how to appeal to women and girls in vulnerable situations, while men are more likely to play an authoritative role. A significant percentage of men and boys agree to travel with female traffickers into exploitative situations, because the women seem “nice”.

There is a shockingly high number of documented cases of child victims sold by their parents, either deliberately into exploitation or (to give them the benefit of the doubt) with ignorance or a blind eye towards the dangers of sending their children unsupervised away from home.

However, this should never be considered “normal” cultural behaviour. Desperation or dysfunctionality in households with extremely limited resources are usually the reasons behind this decision. In many cases the parents have been the ones tricked by traffickers, including friends or family, and genuinely believe that their children will be better off.

“I am a beggar now”

Tin, 14, has been begging for nearly two years on the streets of Vietnam’s largest city, Ho Chi Minh City. He has come from a small rural village, where he dropped out of school young to start working after his father died.

In 2007, Tin heard from his uncle that one of his male cousins was working in Ho Chi Minh City, sending large sums of money back to his family. The uncle said that he could find a similar job for him. Tin talked to his mother about the opportunity, and she agreed to let him go because she trusted his uncle to take care of him.

On the day of departure, they discovered that it was not his uncle but another woman who would travel with him to Ho Chi Minh City, along with her own family and some other boys who were looking for work. She seemed nice, and reassured him and his mother that he would get a good job with a decent salary.

“I thought it was strange though,” says Tin, “that she told us we were forbidden to talk to people on the way.”

After arriving in Ho Chi Minh City, the woman began training the children on how to beg for money in the streets. It was not at all what Tin had expected, and it made him feel very ashamed.

“In the beginning I did not know how to do it, so I had to ask another boy to accompany me. It took a long time to memorise all the words I needed to beg for money. I learned from the woman and the other boys. Eventually I came to accept the fact that I am a beggar now.”

Like the other boys in the gang, Tin had no days off. Everyday, he was expected to beg for 30,000 VND (around US\$1.75) in the morning and 40,000 VND (around US\$2.25) in the afternoon and the evening.

“I could only ever raise 20,000 to 30,000 dong maximum. When I did not get enough money, I was slapped on my face and scolded bitterly. Also, that woman would not give me money to buy food. Sometimes I was so hungry that I begged for food instead.”

The boys, who had come from different villages in the same province, were encouraged to keep watchful eyes on each other and report any laziness or disobedience they witnessed back to their “owner”. However, they were also kind to each other, sharing around money or food when the woman was not watching. They understood that they were all in the same predicament.

“Every time we asked for our money, she would say that half of it had already been sent to our parents and the other half



was used to cover our living expenses. I wanted to run away, to flee from this woman, but I did not know where to go.”

Tin has now been in Ho Chi Minh for almost two years. He does not know if his family gets any money or if the woman has lied to him. He misses his mother and wishes he could go home, go back to school, and look after buffaloes for his neighbours to earn extra money.

Apart from the long hours of continuous work, Tin says he often feels ill with tiredness, soreness, coughs, cold or fever. He says even when they fall sick, they still have to beg or the woman says she will throw them out. They move house often, usually every month, but life homeless on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City is an even worse alternative.

Tin is not optimistic about his future. He says he still dreams that he will become a well-paid worker so he can see his family supported, but he is finding it harder and harder to believe that this dream will ever come true.

Tin first told his story in early 2008 as part of World Vision research into child beggars. Since then, there has been better news from him. After World Vision introduced him to a social worker from a local NGO, he gathered enough courage to refuse to work for the begging gang any longer.

In January 2009 he was preparing for his journey home to see his family once more. “It’s over two years since I last met them,” Tin said. “I’ll continue my school and won’t ever return to the city with strangers.”



Recommendations on identifying, detering and prosecuting traffickers:

- Enforce trafficking legislation to expose traffickers, especially those who work opportunistically, and weaken community tolerance or trust of these people.
- More research is needed into the motivation of the traffickers, some of whom might claim they are just performing a service.
- Promote laws through public media to ensure better knowledge by small time traffickers or accomplices of both the crime and the penalties.

10 things

governments can do



1. **ESTABLISH** bilateral relationships with countries who are not members of existing regional anti-trafficking initiatives (such as the COMMIT process in the Greater Mekong Sub-region), for the better protection of the rights of trafficking victims, and to provide effective rights-based, gender and child-sensitive services.
2. **INVOLVE** trafficking victims in designing national and regional policies that increase protection.
3. **SET UP** safe places where legal, travel and migration documents and information, as well as opportunities available in neighboring countries, can be obtained.
4. **DEVELOP** National Plans of Action to combat human trafficking and ensure these plans are funded.
5. **RATIFY** all international treaties related to human trafficking.
6. **ENACT AND STRENGTHEN LAW** on human trafficking and other related themes such as international adoption (to stop child trafficking via adoption) and juvenile related laws (to protect all children, including those in conflict with the law.).
7. **STRENGTHEN** implementation of anti-trafficking laws by giving law enforcers guidelines to help them distinguish between victims of trafficking and smuggling.
8. **DEVELOP NATIONAL GUIDELINES** for the protection of victims of trafficking. Consult children, other vulnerable groups and civil society on the creation of these guidelines.
9. **ENSURE EDUCATION** for all children, including those who are influenced by migration.
10. **PROTECT** all children who are born in country by registering their birth so they can access education and health care.

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Useful websites/articles

Asia Foundation – Combating Trafficking in Women and Children
<http://asiafoundation.org/pdf/Trafficking.pdf>

Asian Human Rights Commission
<http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/2007/2395/>

ILO – Preventing Human Trafficking in the GMS
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/child/trafficking/index.htm>

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http://www.notrafficking.org/content/SIREN/SIREN_pdf/vietnam%20datasheet%20final%20november%202008.pdf

UNIAP
http://www.no-trafficking.org/uniap_frontend/default.aspx

UNIAP – SIREN Project
<http://www.no-trafficking.org/content/SIREN/SIREN-reports.htm>

USAID – Women in Development
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/gender/wwd.html

Web Resource for Combating Human Trafficking
<http://www.humantrafficking.org/>

World Vision Asia Pacific Human Trafficking
<http://wvasiapacific.org/humantrafficking/>

World Vision Australia – Don't Trade Lives
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