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# EXAMINING CONTEXTUAL FACTORS' EFFECTS ON USAID THAILAND CTIP INTERVENTIONS AND AT-RISK POPULATIONS



**USAID THAILAND COUNTER TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS**

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# List of Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATIP	Anti-Trafficking in Person
CTIP	Counter Trafficking in Persons
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MDTs	Multi-Disciplinary Teams
RDMA	Regional Development Mission for Asia
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UNHCR	United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development





## INTRODUCTION

This Learning Paper Series was developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Thailand Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) project with the overall aim to learn from previous and current programming to better inform future work. Winrock International is the lead implementing partner of the USAID Thailand CTIP project.

The USAID Thailand CTIP project seeks to reduce trafficking in persons (TIP) and better protect the rights of trafficked persons in Thailand by reducing the demand and incentives for using trafficked labor, empowering at-risk populations to safeguard their rights, and strengthening protection systems for survivors. The project works mainly with migrant and informal workers in Thailand's agriculture, fishery, and construction industries. The intervention is conducted in cooperation with the Royal Government of Thailand. The USAID Thailand CTIP intervention poses the Theory of Change that if we reduce opportunities for trafficking in workplaces and supply chains; and if we equip at-risk populations with skills, information and access to support, then trafficking in Thailand will be reduced and prevented. In addition, if we can identify those already trafficked and have improved access to strengthened support systems, survivors will live free and dignified lives, and the likelihood of human trafficking will decrease.

Based on the wealth of experience within USAID Thailand CTIP, this Learning Paper Series was developed to highlight crucial learnings to be widely disseminated to USAID, Winrock staff, and other stakeholders working in CTIP that want to ensure high quality program design and delivery.

The papers in this series are meant to be limited in scope, tackling specific areas of concern in the general programming models. In the future, CTIP partners can better address identified shortcomings and ensure that program activities are evidence-based and impactful for survivors.

The learning question explored in this paper is, **"What key contextual factors in Thailand can affect USAID Thailand CTIP interventions and at-risk populations?"** Contextual factors are by nature unique to specific contexts, but the working definition of contextual factors used in this paper is "all intervening factors that affect a complex phenomenon." (Ploeg et al., 2019). This paper answers the learning question by exploring six key contextual factors/learnings that emerged from the research, as described in the Methodology section below.

The six key contextual factors/learnings are:

#### LEARNING 1

**COVID-19 related health and socio-economic impacts and restrictions created new vulnerabilities for migrants and challenges for the USAID Thailand CTIP project**

#### LEARNING 2

**Agriculture, fishing, and construction are sectors where forced labor and/or TIP vulnerabilities remain**

#### LEARNING 3

**There is an emerging trend of Thai nationals being lured into TIP and forced labor in neighboring countries through online recruiting methods**

#### LEARNING 4

**USAID Thailand CTIP staff and partners face challenges in their engagement with bureaucratic structures and processes**

#### LEARNING 5

**The expansion of armed conflict and displacement following the military coup in Myanmar is a new push factor for migration into Thailand, increasing vulnerabilities to TIP and forced labor among at-risk groups**

## METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this learning paper are based on mixed methods research, including an endline survey with 863 migrant workers, a public opinion survey with 1,080 Thais, 29 key informant interviews, and a desk review.

The quantitative endline survey was conducted in the six Thailand CTIP target provinces (Bangkok, Chiang Rai, Phuket, Sa Kaeo, Surat Thani, and Trat) with representative samples of 863 migrant workers selected based on the following criteria: had stayed in Thailand for at least 6 months; had worked in fishing, seafood processing, agriculture or construction; were both registered and unregistered migrants; and 10 percent of respondents were other at-risk populations including stateless persons and ethnic minorities living in Thailand.

The population survey was conducted with a sample size of 1,080 Thai people aged 18 to 54. The survey data was collected through an online access panel. Because access panels are not representative of the whole Thai population, screening criteria and sample quotas were used to extract a sample that reflects the general population. The final sample was weighted based on sex, age, and geographic area to ensure an equal representation between men (n=524) and women (n=556) across regions (Bangkok n=666 and up-country n=414).

The research team conducted 29 key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, including project management staff, partners, sectoral experts, private sector actors, and representatives of migrant workers. The interviews provided insights based on direct experience with the Thailand CTIP project, as well as lesson learned based on experience implementing the project.

In addition, a desk review was conducted of USAID Thailand CTIP project documents from each year of the project. The baseline study and other supplementary research papers and articles are included in the reference list at the end of this paper.

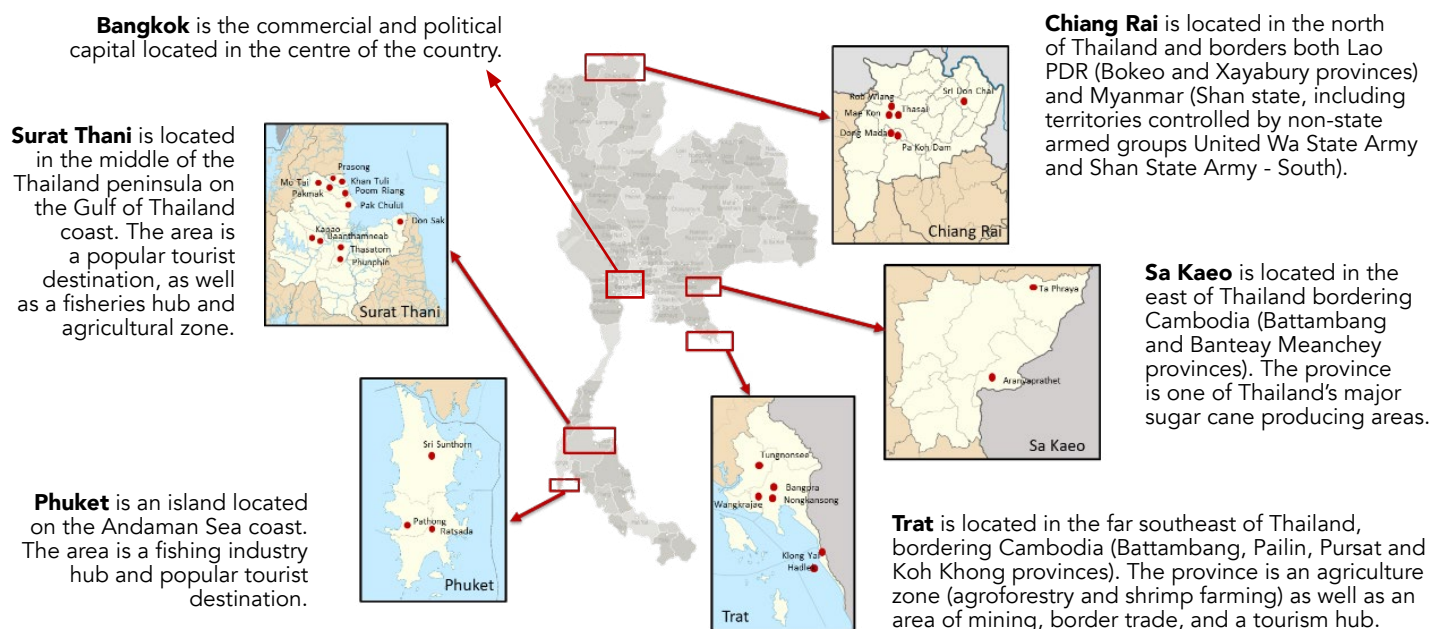
# OVERVIEW OF USAID THAILAND CTIP INTERVENTION

According to the Thai Ministry of Labour, as of December 2021, there were 2,131,751 registered migrant workers in Thailand (International Labour Organization, 2022). Other sources estimate an additional two to three million unregistered migrant workers, meaning that a conservative estimate of the total number of migrant workers in Thailand is four million (Kunpeuk, 2022; Harkins, 2019). However, it is difficult to know exactly how many of these four million migrants have been victims of trafficking.

Thailand is uniquely situated in Southeast Asia as an origin, destination, and transit country. Thailand is a middle-income country that shares borders with four other Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) countries: Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Malaysia, and Myanmar. Because of this, migration patterns and vulnerabilities related to TIP vary widely across Thailand's 77 provinces.

USAID Thailand CTIP focuses on six target provinces with high populations of migrant laborers and/or which are located on or near common TIP routes. The six USAID Thailand CTIP project's target provinces are Bangkok, Chiang Rai, Phuket, Sa Kaeo, Surat Thani, and Trat (Figure 1), all of which have significant migrant worker populations or are located near trafficking routes. There are contextual factors that affect USAID Thailand CTIP interventions and at-risk populations nationwide, as well as contextual factors that have unique effects in each target province (Table 1).

**FIGURE 1: SIX TARGET PROVINCES OF USAID THAILAND CTIP**



**TABLE 1: KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS AND KEY AT-RISK POPULATIONS IN THE USAID THAILAND CTIP PROJECT'S SIX TARGET PROVINCES**

Target Province	Key economic sectors	Key at-risk populations
<b>Bangkok</b>	Hospitality; Construction; Manufacturing; Domestic Work	Migrant workers from Cambodia and Myanmar (including displaced and conflict-affected people)
<b>Chiang Rai</b>	Agriculture; Construction	Migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar (including displaced and conflict-affected people)
<b>Phuket</b>	Fisheries; Hospitality; Construction	Migrant workers from Myanmar (including displaced and conflict-affected people)
<b>Sa Kaeo</b>	Agriculture; Construction	Migrant workers from Cambodia and Lao PDR
<b>Surat Thani</b>	Fisheries; Hospitality; Construction; Agriculture	Migrant workers from Myanmar (including displaced and conflict-affected people)
<b>Trat</b>	Fisheries; Construction; Agriculture	Migrant workers from Cambodia

The USAID Thailand CTIP program aims to reduce TIP and better protect the rights of trafficked persons in Thailand through the achievement of three key objectives: 1) reduce demands and incentives for trafficked labor; 2) empower at-risk populations to safeguard their rights; and 3) strengthen protection systems for survivors. Table 2 provides an overview of some CTIP interventions implemented across the six target provinces.

**TABLE 2: THAILAND CTIP INTERVENTIONS**

<b>Target Province</b>	<b>Thailand CTIP interventions</b>
<b>Bangkok</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National-level government advocacy and coordination</li> <li>• Information, Education and Communication materials development on labor exploitation, labor trafficking and COVID-19 measures and policies</li> <li>• Trainings to provide knowledge of the labor protection and welfare complaint form for migrants</li> <li>• Social and Behavior Change Communication national campaign ‘Inside Khonnok’ launched on the project Facebook page in parallel to Instagram Exhibition</li> </ul>
<b>Chiang Rai</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with Provincial Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) Committee</li> <li>• Bilateral Memorandum of Understanding for cross-border coordination between Chiang Rai and Bo Kaew provinces</li> <li>• Terms of Reference on cross border referral</li> <li>• Provincial level roundtables</li> <li>• LGBTQI+ pilot project in the Chiang Rai TIP shelter</li> <li>• Border Cooperation on Anti-Trafficking in Persons mechanism</li> <li>• Established district-level ATIP Committees, which played a key role in coordinating and securing the repatriation and referral of Thai nationals trafficked into Lao PDR</li> <li>• Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) trained</li> </ul>
<b>Phuket</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migrant Development Center established, including a complaint mechanism, provision of legal consultation, assistance services to employers, and training response units</li> <li>• Inclusive response protocol</li> <li>• Connectivity at Sea pilot</li> </ul>
<b>Sa Kaeo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with Provincial ATIP Committee</li> <li>• Provincial level roundtables</li> <li>• Border Issues Group for Children network</li> <li>• MDTs trained</li> <li>• Engaged sugarcane farm owners and workers to test the Verifik8 application and train on labor rights, as part of the Labor Transparency Project with FairAgora.</li> </ul>
<b>Surat Thani</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with Provincial ATIP Committee</li> <li>• Provincial level roundtables</li> <li>• MDTs trained</li> <li>• Rights training workshops for migrants</li> <li>• Employer information sessions</li> </ul>
<b>Trat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with Provincial ATIP Committee</li> <li>• Provincial level roundtables</li> <li>• MDTs trained</li> </ul>
<b>Nationwide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Inside Khonnok’ (ข้างในคนนอก) campaign targeting key media professionals and online influencers to “open dialogue and challenge discrimination against migrants in Thailand as well as to amplify migrant voices” to change public perception.</li> <li>• Thailand Migrant Protection Resource Toolkit</li> <li>• Doc2Work application to guide migrant workers in obtaining and maintaining their work documents, support regularization and reducing vulnerability to TIP</li> <li>• MayDay Messaging Bot on the LINE application providing migrant workers important information and assistance maintaining documents (currently in Burmese, Khmer, and Lao languages)</li> </ul>



# LEARNINGS

## LEARNING 1

### **COVID-19 related health and socio-economic impacts and restrictions created new vulnerabilities for migrants and challenges for the USAID Thailand CTIP project**

In Thailand, during the COVID-19 pandemic, TIP risks and vulnerabilities continued despite the official closure of all international land border crossings. Smuggling people across borders continued, although at a slower pace. Some migrant workers lost employment but were stranded in Thailand with little social and financial support.

*“Right now, the borders between Thailand and neighboring countries are closed, but there is still smuggling of people across the borders due to instability. There is a question whether the people who are being smuggled have access to protection systems and are being victims of trafficking.” (USAID’s Bangkok-based Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) Officer)*

The socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as loss of income and food insecurity, increased the levels of assistance and protection required by migrant workers in Thailand. These impacted the USAID Thailand CTIP interventions as the project tried to adapt to meet these new needs.

*“We started helping migrants more in general, as opposed to ‘TIP’ survivors prior to COVID.” (Chief of Party USAID Thailand CTIP Winrock)*

USAID Thailand CTIP partners adapted their strategies and approaches to the new context, such as by establishing new channels of coordination with government agencies.

*“There was no victim identification screening process at borders in Thailand due to strict securitization concerning Covid-19 prevention and control priorities. As a result, potential victims were apprehended of being smuggled into Thailand and deported back to their origin countries as illegal migrants without being identified as victims of human trafficking. In response to the issue, World Vision has successfully coordinated local task forces in Chiang Rai province such as immigration and office of provincial social development and human security in conducting victim identification screening interviews on highly potential victims.” (Project Manager at World Vision)*

The health and prevention restrictions the Royal Thai Government imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the USAID Thailand CTIP project’s interventions. For example, CTIP activities such as Provincial ATIP Committees, MDT meetings, and training workshops needed to take place online. Key informants reflected that holding meetings and online training workshops limited effectiveness because online communication reduced organic interaction and discussion among participants. Fostering trust, relationship building, and collaboratively developing solutions and strategies is an important aspect of USAID Thailand CTIP’s work, and all were more difficult through online interactions. Key informant interviews suggested that there has been limited awareness and under-reporting of forced labor and/or





## LEARNING 2

### **Agriculture, fishing, and construction are sectors where significant forced labor and/or TIP vulnerabilities remain**

TIP vulnerabilities in the agriculture, fishing, and construction sectors.

*“Many organizations, including the Thai government, pay more attention to the fishing industry because, you know, they may have pressure from international organizations in international communities. And we need to take them into consideration, including construction, agriculture, and also domestic work. Because I think we know a little in terms of trafficking in the sector that I mentioned, and we have less understanding about that situation.” (USAID’s Bangkok-based RDMA Officer)*

Most USAID Thailand CTIP target provinces are inhabited by migrants working in the agriculture, fishing, and construction sectors, but specific contexts vary from province to province. For example, one key informant identified Chiang Rai and Sa Kaeo as particularly vulnerable to forced labor.

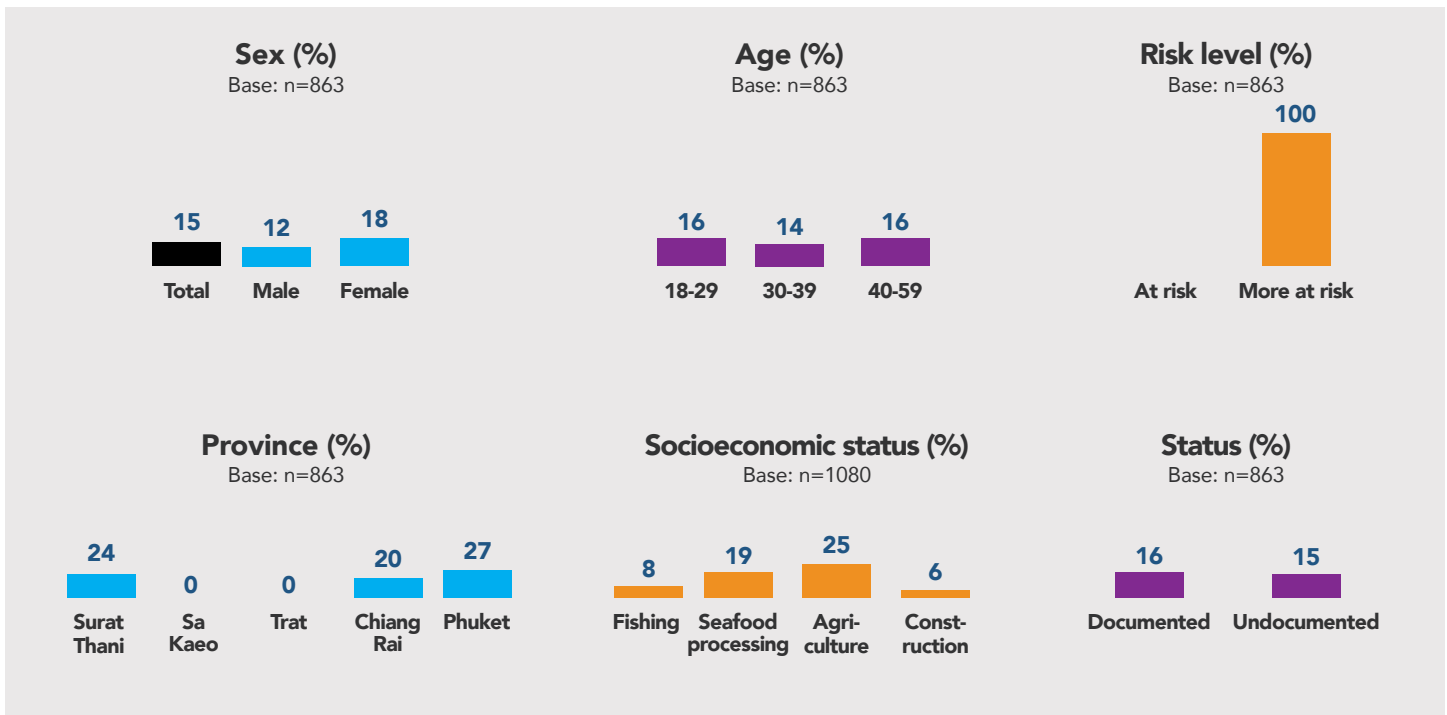
*“At border provinces, in particular Chiang Rai and Sa Kaeo provinces, there are lots of forced labor cases that haven’t been identified, whereas there have been the pooling of migrant movements occurred across the borders, specifically agricultural sector in rural areas within those provinces.” (Project Manager at World Vision)*

The survey data on levels of at-risk and undocumented migrant workers provide insight into which USAID Thailand CTIP target provinces host migrants who may be more at-risk and undocumented at higher levels, as shown in Figure 2.

More survey respondents in Phuket (27 percent), Surat Thani (24 percent) and Chiang Rai (20 percent) met the criteria of being “most at-risk”<sup>1</sup> migrant workers, compared to none in Sa Kaeo and Trat. The absence of most-at-risk migrant workers in Sa Kaeo and Trat could result from travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic leading to fewer migrants in both provinces. The agriculture (25 percent) and seafood processing (19 percent) sectors had relatively higher percentages of “most at-risk” respondents compared to fishing (8 percent) and construction (6 percent).

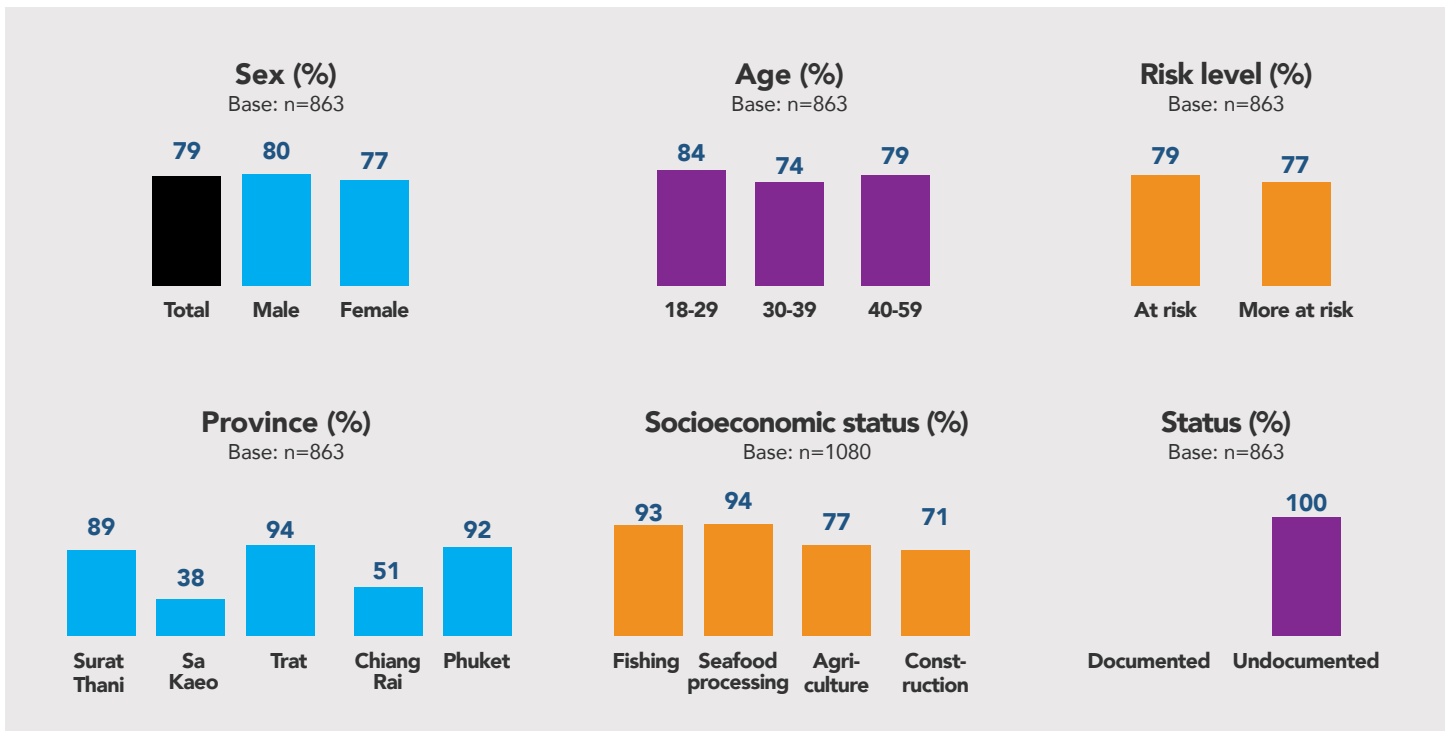
1 In our survey, “at-risk” is defined as migrant workers in Thailand and “most at-risk” is defined as migrant workers coming from ethnic minorities and stateless persons.

FIGURE 2: MOST AT-RISK INDIVIDUALS BY SEX, AGE, AND OTHER CHARACTERISTICS



The survey found a relatively high percentage of undocumented migrant workers in the provinces Trat (94 percent), Phuket (92 percent) and Surat Thani (89 percent), as shown in Figure 3. In contrast, Chiang Rai (51 percent) and Sa Kaeo (38 percent) had a relatively lower percentage of undocumented migrant workers. The survey found no “most at-risk” migrant workers in Sa Kaeo and Trat.

FIGURE 3: UNDOCUMENTED INDIVIDUALS BY SEX, AGE, PROVINCE, AND SECTOR



### LEARNING 3

#### **There is an emerging trend of Thai nationals being lured into TIP and forced labor in neighboring countries through online recruiting methods**

Thailand is presently largely a destination country for migrants. Still, Thailand has also been an origin country for migrant labor, with Thai nationals often migrating to the Middle East or other countries in Asia. According to the Thai Department of Employment, as of February 2022, there were 156,818 Thai nationals working outside of Thailand, which is relatively small compared to the estimated 4 million migrants currently in Thailand (International Labour Organization, 2022). Despite the relatively small number of migrants originating from Thailand, the recent phenomenon of TIP and other types of labor exploitation perpetrated against Thai nationals is concerning.

*“In terms of labour trafficking, many Thai workers are tricked into working in neighboring countries such as Myanmar, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Traffickers use online applications to lure Thai citizens into crossing the border and becoming trafficked into forced labour.”*  
(USAID’s Bangkok-based RDMA Officer)

The conventional way that TIP happens is through face-to-face interactions. However, there is an emerging phenomenon of Thai nationals getting lured into trafficking situation through social media and other online platforms. In late 2021 and 2022, media stories emerged of Thai nationals being trafficked into forced labor in neighboring countries, often through online employment scams.

*“With the recent emergence of a new trend whereby Thai nationals are being smuggled and trafficked across the border from Thailand into Cambodia and Lao PDR. In the past few months, it has been reported that there are at least 2,000 cases of Thai nationals who were lured to work illegally for call center gangs of shell companies operated by Chinese investors in Cambodia.”* (Project Manager at World Vision)

New forms of online sexual exploitation have emerged in Thailand, with young women being lured into live-streaming pornography online.

*“In terms of sex trafficking, traffickers are now luring young women to live streaming and sharing online pornography.”* (USAID’s Bangkok-based RDMA Officer)

Thai nationals lured into forced labor in neighboring countries should be monitored in Sa Kaeo and Trat as they share borders with Cambodia, and Chiang Rai, which share a border with Lao PDR.

*“The evolutionary forms of human trafficking follow the online trend. Particularly, online sexual exploitation, which has become much more prevalent, is exemplified as one of the new recruiting forms of human trafficking being used by traffickers. On top of that, online employment scams are the current form of trafficking in the digital era. Thus, job seekers would be recruited through online advertisements for some legitimate jobs.”* (Project Manager at World Vision)

The district-level ATIP Committees, which the USAID Thailand CTIP project helped establish, have played a key role in coordinating and securing the repatriation and referral of Thai nationals trafficked into Lao PDR. The methods through which traffickers can exploit new technologies to perpetrate TIP, forced labor, and other labor exploitation of Thai nationals are important to monitor.

## LEARNING 4

### USAID Thailand CTIP staff and partners face challenges in their engagement with bureaucratic structures and processes

The USAID Thailand CTIP project has successfully built relationships with the highest levels of the Royal Thai Government. Through these connections, the project has gleaned key insights about the legislative process in Thailand. Whilst Thailand has strengthened laws and policies, implementation and enforcement are limited. This concern was expressed by several stakeholder interviews, with one saying.

*"In the last 5 years, Thailand has made progress in legislation by ratifying the International law for labor convention, e.g. fisheries. However, based on the assessment that we have conducted, we found that although there is progress in law, there is no progression in implementation, and we think that the situation right now is improved in the law but not in practice." (USAID's Bangkok-based RDMA Officer)*

Supporting the government in implementation is an opportunity for the USAID Thailand CTIP project. However, one challenge when dealing with bureaucratic structures and processes is the variation in government bodies and their respective interests and mandates. The lack of shared goals and visions makes long-term cooperation challenging for the successful implementation of CTIP interventions.

*"The police or immigration police view TIP through the lens of security and see the people who cross the border as a threat to the security of the nation. Whereas government agencies, such as the Ministry of Social Development, understand the need to treat migrant workers humanly and provide them with their rights and entitlements." (USAID's Bangkok-based RDMA Officer)*

Key informants mentioned that turnover was one of the challenges faced by the USAID Thailand CTIP project when working with government agencies. After spending time building a strong relationship with an official, they were often replaced, and the process would need to begin again with a new person.

*"One of the challenges is that the government staff rotate a lot. So you'll work with someone for a year, then they'll disappear, and you're starting again on all levels. There was a huge turnover in the five years I've done this project. In the five years, there were four different heads of the Department of Anti Trafficking in Persons." (Chief of Party, USAID Thailand CTIP Winrock)*

Similarly, rotation of government staff was challenging. Stakeholders stated that such rotations were frequent, often annually. New officials were not always privy to the existing relationships and goals, resulting in disruptions to the continuity of CTIP interventions.

*"They rotate an official once a year or two years. But to effectively do the counter-TIP work, we need officials that have experience and know the situation on the ground." (USAID's Bangkok-based RDMA officer)*

Budgetary issues also caused disruptions. Stakeholders reported that budget cuts to some provincial government agencies caused planned CTIP activities to stop or be redirected. One stakeholder expressed:

*"Budget cuts in provincial government agencies caused anti-TIP activities to be forcibly frozen due to a lack of funding for related expenses and activities. Therefore, some of World Vision's budget was repurposed to support certain activities of local government agencies that weren't funded by the federal agency." (Project Manager at World Vision)*





## LEARNING 5

### **The expansion of armed conflict and displacement following the military coup in Myanmar is a new push factor for migration into Thailand, increasing vulnerabilities to TIP and forced labor among at-risk groups**

The rise of armed conflict and displacement in Myanmar following the February 2021 military coup created regional instability along the Thai-Myanmar border. It resulted in people fleeing from Myanmar into Thailand, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking and labor exploitation.

The USAID Thailand CTIP project target provinces of Chiang Rai, Surat Thani, and Phuket will likely be most negatively affected by this situation due to those provinces' proximity to Myanmar. The endline study also identified more at-risk migrant workers in these provinces (see Figure 3).

The widespread violence following the coup pushed hundreds of thousands of Myanmar civilians into displacement, with Kayin and Kayah states, states bordering the northwest of Thailand, being the most affected (UN News, 2022). Along the Thai-Myanmar border, the large number of Internally Displaced Persons, estimated to be over 200,000, continue to face significant risk of oppression and violence, and may attempt to enter Thailand (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022). Once migrants cross the border, they are at risk of trafficking, exploitation, abuse, and deportation due to the lack of legal status. Since February 2021, over 20,000 refugees have fled to Thailand, with many located outside the Temporary Safety Areas (UNHCR, 2022). From that number, thousands were deported and could face brutality at home (Mixed Migration Center Asia, 2022).

The research conducted in Thai-Myanmar border cities identifies that irregular migrants are at high risk of exploitation by trafficking, debt bondage, coercion, abuses, exploitative working conditions, and forced labor (Meyer et al., 2014). Additionally, many Thai-Myanmar border cities, such as Mae Sai district in Chiang Rai province, are areas where human trafficking and child labor occur, especially in the construction, manufacturing, service, and sex industries. These workers interviewed experienced poor working conditions, long working hours, and received low or even unpaid wages (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

## NEXT STEPS

Based on the contextual factor learnings, the following recommendations will enable the USAID Thailand CTIP project to improve interventions to benefit at-risk people in the future.

### **Re-calibrate COVID-19 response adaptations.**

As COVID-19 restrictions in Thailand and neighboring countries begin to ease, USAID Thailand CTIP should re-calibrate adaptations made in response to the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The USAID Thailand CTIP project quickly responded to the pandemic by moving activities online. Whilst necessary, it was not ideal for many activities. Online activities enable efficient coordination with implementing partners and the private sector. However, activities that require engagement with beneficiaries, such as training, will be more effective if carried out face to face.

### **Review where USAID Thailand CTIP interventions have the potential to most effectively reach at-risk people in the agriculture, fishing, and construction sectors.**

The dynamics of migration appear to have changed since the emergence of COVID-19 in Thailand. Although not covered by the endline survey, the coup in Myanmar will likely change the migration landscape of at-risk groups in Thailand. Therefore, the USAID Thailand CTIP project should review where future interventions should be targeted to reach vulnerable migrants in agriculture, fishing and construction sectors.

### **Implement a research initiative to examine the scope and drivers of Thai nationals being recruited into forced labor online, and design appropriate interventions.**

Many Thai nationals have become victims of trafficking and forced labor in recent years, recruited mainly through online platforms. USAID Thailand CTIP should implement a research initiative to examine the scope and drivers of this trend and design suitable interventions to address the emerging needs in this area.

### **Streamline and standardize training processes for new actors involved in sub-national level coordination mechanisms.**

To address the challenge posed by the continual rotation and turnover of government staff, USAID Thailand CTIP staff and implementing partners should identify ways to reduce the time and effort needed to build relationships and train newly appointed government officials and MDT members. The project has developed standardized training material for newly appointed government staff and MDT members. These training materials should be mainstreamed and made into e-learning modules that can be more easily deployed. A more standardized approach should also encourage better synergy between different government departments.

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