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Thailand's Cross-border Trade in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Selected Social Issues

Srawooth Paitoonpong*

1. Introduction

This paper is basically based on the author's involvement with two collaborative research projects on cross-border trade in the Greater Mekong subregion (GMS). The first project, conducted in 2004, dealt with the cross-border economies of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The study is the fourth in a series undertaken by the Development Analysis Network (DAN), a research network of the above-mentioned four countries of the GMS. The second research is on "Reviewing the Poverty Impact of Regional Economic Integration in the Greater Mekong Subregion." The study is a collaborative effort of the same four countries in the GMS, initiated and coordinated by the Asian Development Bank under the Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) Project. In addition to the findings of the two research projects, extensive extant studies and secondary data have been utilized. This paper focuses on only a few selected social issues for the purpose of sharing knowledge and creating awareness of the importance of social problems emerging in the process of cross-border trade.

The growing integration of economies and societies around the world, as manifested by free trade agreements and free trade areas, is a complex process that affects many aspects of our lives. In general, the social aspects of cross-border trade are not usually reflected in trade figures in spite of their significant impact on the life of the people, particularly in the border areas.

Cross-border trade is broadly defined in this paper to include border trade and trade (exports and imports) of goods that go across borders, to and from neighboring countries, both formally and informally, and both locally or from/to other parts of Thailand. Border trade is

officially defined as trade of goods among local habitants or enterprises of border areas of both countries. The amount of border trade is usually small and the goods traded are usually for daily consumption or natural products (Ministry of Commerce 2006). Formal trade refers to exports and imports that go through customs procedure at formal border checkpoints. In this case, exporters and importers must be registered with relevant government agencies. Informal trade does not undergo regular customs procedures. It can be in the form of daily crossing of the border carrying a small quantity of goods or bringing goods across the border through informal or cultural checkpoints, or sneaking into the border or smuggling (usually cross-border trade does not include goods that are flown through the sea and airports).

Thailand has a border about 1,810 km. long with Lao PDR, extending from Chiang Rai province to Ubon Ratchathani province. The Thai-Lao border has 36 crossing points, 13 of which are permanent, two are temporary and 21 are informal. The border with Cambodia is about 800 km. long extending from Ubon Ratchathani province to Trat province. The Thai-Cambodian border has one international checkpoint and four temporary ones. The volume of Thailand's cross-border trade with Cambodia and Laos at various formal checkpoints is presented in Table 1. The figures refer to formal trade that are going through custom checkpoints only.

The border economy involves not only economic activities but also social ones, some, or many, of which are informal or even illegal. Indeed, along the GMS borders, considerable off-record or underground movements of goods and services take place in addition to the movement of people. Contagious diseases are carried in connection with such movements, particularly the movement of people. Examples of nontrade border issues in GMS include migrant workers or the migration of workers, human trafficking, drug trafficking, HIV/AIDS, smuggling, illegal

logging and trafficking, car stealing, border robbery, border ethnic minorities and the Mekong River ecosystem. This paper provides an illustration of three interrelated social issues; namely, migrant workers, human trafficking and HIV/AIDS in the Mekong region.

2. Migrant workers in Thailand

Cross-border trade generally involves movement of goods and services and movement of people across the border. The movement of people across borders includes formal crossing through international gates, informal crossing through informal or cultural gates, and illegal crossing at various secret or unnoticed spots along the border. An example of people crossing the border on a formal basis is illustrated in Table 2.

Informal or illegal crossing of people at the border are common. In the study areas of Mukdahan and Sa Kaeo, people from Laos and Cambodia cross the border regularly to find employment and medical services, or to attend educational, social or cultural functions. Some come in connection with smuggling and trafficking (TDRI 2006, Participatory Assessment: Thailand). In Sa Kaeo, some Cambodians during hard times even came to rob Thai villagers.¹ Some migrate to work at the village level and later move on into big cities or Bangkok.

As illegal immigration of workers is a part of cross-border movement of people, one can say that it is related to cross-border trade by definition. Nevertheless, it has been found that cross-border trade creates opportunities for the persons involved in movements across the border. For example, connections, corruption, trafficking or lack of efficient control at the border are main ingredients for illegal immigration. The opening of the border and the interactions of people at the border are also important factors affecting irregular migration.

Since the early 1990s, Thailand has become an important country of destination for unskilled migrant workers from neighboring low-income countries. In fact, the rapid economic growth in Thailand over the last two decades has effectively transformed the country from a labor-exporting country (during 1970–80) to a de facto labor-importing country by the early 1990s. Most migrant workers are from Myanmar, with relatively smaller numbers from Cambodia, China, Lao PDR and South Asian countries.

It may be said that the lack of effective migration law enforcement is a major cause of the increasing number of undocumented migrant workers in Thailand. Historically, the Thai government in 1973 required migrants employed in Thailand to obtain a work permit. It also listed a number of occupations and professions that were prohibited to aliens. In 1979, foreign workers were forbidden to undertake manual work. Yet, from 1988 up to the present, there has been an influx of migrant workers, particularly from Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR.

In 1992, the first registration of undocumented migrant workers was undertaken. Since 1996 there has been a relaxation of control on migrant workers, with re-registration occurring in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004 and 2005 (IOM 2004). The number of registered migrant workers increased from 99,974 persons in 1999 to 1,269,074 in 2004, of which 905,881 are from Myanmar, 181,579 from Cambodia and 181,614 from Lao PDR (Table 3).

It has been argued that one reason for employers to hire migrant workers is because Thai unskilled workers are “choosy,” preferring not to take “3D” (dangerous, difficult and dirty) jobs. Thus, migrant workers accept jobs that Thai nationals do not want, especially in fisheries, construction work and farming. Some female migrants are employed in the industrial and service sectors, working in factories, in the entertainment business, and as domestic workers. Yet, it may

be noted that the real reason for this may be that most migrant workers receive relatively lower wages than Thai workers (UNESCO 2005).

Migrant workers are employed in various jobs in agriculture and livestock, domestic work, construction, fishing or fisheries, rice mills and as stevedores. Many of them (30 percent) are in the “others” category (Table 4), which comprises services followed by domestic work, construction and fishing and fisheries (approximately 15 percent each).

Migrant workers can be found throughout the entire country, even in the Northeast where they comprise a major source of domestic labor; for example, there were 15,891 migrant workers in 2004 (Table 5). The majority of migrant workers are living in the Central and Southern regions, and Bangkok (24, 20 and 19 percent, respectively).

Migrant workers in Thailand pose a number of issues in the context of regional economic integration. These include:

- (i) management of undocumented migrants,
- (ii) security and crime,
- (iii) contagious diseases,
- (iv) human trafficking,
- (v) poor labor standard, and
- (vi) unemployment and low-wage problems of Thai unskilled workers.

To mitigate the problems of irregular migration and for mutual benefit, the Thai government signed a memorandum of understanding on employment cooperation with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar in 2002/2003.

3. Human trafficking

By and large, human trafficking is closely related to cross-border irregular migration. The illegality of much of this undocumented migration clearly makes migrants vulnerable to exploitation and to becoming victims of human trafficking. In the GMS, it appears that, in the vast majority of cases, the actual movement aspects of the trafficking are generally “voluntary” in the sense that the person him/herself has made the decision to travel for work, within the limited range of the choices available (Marshall 2001, 3).

Elsewhere, each year up to 350,000 illegal migrants from Mexico enter the United States, and as many as 800,000 migrants from other parts of the world enter the European Union. In 2005, 464 people died while crossing over from Mexico into the United States, and each year around 2,000 people drown in the Mediterranean on their way from Africa to Europe (*The Economist*, October 8, 2005, 18).

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), at least 2.45 million trafficking victims are currently toiling in exploitative conditions, and another 1.2 million are trafficked annually, both across and within national borders. The U.S. Department of State also provides an estimate that between 600,00 and 800,000 persons are trafficked across international borders each year, most for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation (UNFPA 2006, 44).

In Thailand, there is a dearth of in-depth research on the extent of human trafficking and the problems confronting the victims. There are several issues regarding trafficking and exploitation. Migrants must pay brokers to help them enter the country, and the migrants are at risk of being cheated or being arrested on the way. They have no information or any commitment regarding their respective jobs. Some are coerced into forced labor or prostitution, or are sexually assaulted. Many end up in a very poor working environment and living quarters (WVFT 2004, 1).

Very recently, some migrant workers from Myanmar were forced to traffic drugs by swallowing condoms filled with drugs, after which they cross the border (*Thai Rath*, December 31, 2005).

Human trafficking may be classified into three types. The first and largest category of trafficking is migrant workers who are brought into the country to take jobs of a low standard. It is a combination of migration and labor exploitation—the exploitation takes a range of forms including debt bondage, low or no wages, excessive working hours, unsafe conditions, etc. Some migrant workers are charged a high fee for traveling into Thailand as well as the additional costs associated with job seeking. Some of them have been robbed along the way and women have been raped. At the destination, industries hiring a high proportion of irregular migrants include factories and fisheries as well as domestic labor.

The second but highest profile form of trafficking is prostitution or sex work. Although in some ways similar to the other forms of labor exploitation mentioned previously, it falls into a slightly different category as it often has an illegal or ambiguous status. The third category of trafficking is those forms of “labor” that address demand, which society generally finds unacceptable. This includes the trafficking of young children for begging, such as from Cambodia to Thailand. It also includes the abduction of young boys in China and the trafficking of Vietnamese and Burmese women into China to become brides for sale.

There is a dearth of data on the number of trafficked persons because of the difficulty in assessing and distinguishing between (poor innocent) trafficking victims and economic migrants who are in the business on a voluntary basis. For the first category of trafficking victims—the migrant workers who are given poor jobs in substandard working conditions—the number of people at risk can be an indicator. For the third category, migrant child beggars, the number can

be observed from those arrested by the Thai authorities, some of whom are deported to Cambodia. The number of children beggars from Cambodia is estimated to be more than 10,000.

For the number involved in cross-border prostitution from neighboring countries, rough estimates have been made. In 1996, at least 12,607 women out of 77,094 prostitutes in Thailand were migrants (Kritaya and Pornsuk 1997, 24), but even this number is said to be an extreme underestimation. While it is difficult to differentiate between Thai prostitutes and migrant prostitutes, it is even more difficult to say who are trafficking victims and who are not.

Although it is difficult to quantify the number of persons involved or the extent of human trafficking in Thailand, two major studies provide information about the activity. One is a study by Kritaya and Pornsuk (1997), entitled “The Route of Women Workers from the Neighboring Countries into the Sex Industry in Thailand.” Another is a study by the World Vision Foundation of Thailand in collaboration with the Asian Research Center for Migration (2004), led by Prof. Supang Chantavanich. The former study describes characteristics of the trafficked victims and their problems as well as the process of trafficking of women into the sex industry in Thailand. The study is based on a survey of 128 female migrant workers (33 employed in the sex industry and 95 in other occupations) and 30 Thai women working in the sex industry. An in-depth interview was also conducted with 62 female migrant workers in the sex industry, 11 Thai female sex workers, 6 operators of brothels, 11 public health officials, 7 persons from NGOs, and 2 leaders of minority groups in Myanmar. The study was conducted in 18 provinces of Thailand. The World Vision publication, entitled “Research Report on Migration and Deception of Migrant Workers in Thailand,” is a survey analysis of 1,187 Burmese migrant workers in three areas: 395 from Mae Sai, 399 from Mae Sot, and 393 from Ranong.

An example of the findings is that traffickers can be classified into three groups by scale of operation: large organizations, medium-size organizations and small ones. Most of the organizations in Thailand are small (Kritaya and Pornsuk 1997, 57). Similarly, Marshall (2001, 4) divides traffickers into two categories: organized crime and cottage industry. Within the GMS, he maintains that trafficking resembles a cottage industry more than organized crime, with a range of small-scale operators along the way. It has been said that those people who facilitate migration which results in trafficking may often be the same as those who facilitate other forms of less exploitative migration. Such agents and even traffickers or smugglers are often seen as providing a service to the community.

The study by Supang (2000) seems to support the argument of Marshall (2001) that the process of trafficking can happen at the later stage of cross-border migration. For example, most migrant workers (96.5 percent) said that they were not deceived while they were in their hometowns. Only three respondents (0.8 percent) claimed that they were forced to walk to Thailand; one of the respondents was deceived and one was threatened. Deception while traveling, deception while seeking jobs and deception at the workplace accounted for 1.9, 1.1 and 4.1 percent of the total, respectively (WVFT 2004, 41–42).

The types of exploitation and abuse among women migrant workers found by the World Vision study are shown in Table 6: seven women migrants (1.8 percent) were forced into prostitution and nine (2.3 percent) were assaulted sexually.

The World Vision study is more limited in terms of areas covered, which may have some relationship with the degree of trafficking. It is possible that the deeper migrants move into inner cities or urban areas, the higher is the risk they face of being exploited. Another reason is that in

Mae Sot, Mae Sai and Ranong, there are higher concentrations of migrant workers than in the inner cities. Whether this hypothesis holds true is a subject for more research.

Figure 2 shows the trafficking routes within the GMS. Countries in GMS are known as source, transiting and/or receiving countries or areas. While the routes on the map focus on trafficking within GMS, the trafficking goes beyond the GMS boundary to other countries in Asia, Europe, North America, Australia, the Middle East and even South Africa.

As shown in Figure 2, women and children from Myanmar, Yunnan Province, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam are trafficked to Thailand and some are trafficked further abroad. In the late 1990s, more and more women and children from China, Myanmar and Vietnam were trafficked to places such as Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, Macao, Singapore, United States, Canada, Australia, Germany and the Netherlands (Caouette 1998, 13). However, there are no reliable estimates of the number of trafficked victims.

4. HIV/AIDS in the Mekong region

HIV/AIDS is a long-standing issue for countries in the Mekong region, and the region is known to be the epicenter of Asia's HIV/AIDS pandemic. At the end of 2001, approximately 40 million people were living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) worldwide, and of this, about 6.6 million were from Asia and the Pacific. Of the 6.6 million PLWHA in Asia and the Pacific, nearly 1 million were from the four countries of the lower Mekong region—Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam (Table 7).

According to a USAID study (2003), the first cases of HIV in the Mekong region were identified in Thailand in 1984 among males who had sex with males. Heterosexual transmission of HIV was detected in the country in 1985 and then began to occur on a wider scale by 1989.

Early on, Thailand documented high HIV prevalence levels in female sex workers and injecting drug users. Lao PDR and Vietnam reported their first cases of HIV infection in 1990; at that time, HIV prevalence was still low in Lao PDR. In Cambodia, the first case of HIV infection was found in 1991 in a man donating blood, although the virus was found in Cambodian refugees in Thailand as early as 1989. Since then, Cambodia has experienced the fastest-growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in Asia.

There are a number of reasons why HIV/AIDS spreads very quickly in GMS. First, drug use injection is a significant problem throughout the subregion. The “Golden Triangle,” comprising parts of Myanmar, China, Lao PDR and Thailand, is a leading supplier of opiates, particularly heroin. Drug trafficking routes crisscross GMS and provide easy access to illicit drugs. Second, the movement of people across national borders is a major factor in HIV/AIDS contacts. The border and urban areas in GMS are sites for the booming sex industry in Southeast Asia. Mobility, increased tourism, the presence of peacekeeping forces, the opening up of formerly centrally-planned economies, human trafficking, a lack of educational and economic opportunities for women and girls, poverty and other factors have contributed to the rapid growth of the sex industry (USAID 2003, 1).

It is claimed that migrant workers are especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS contacts and transmission. A study to confirm this hypothesis was undertaken in 1999 by CARE Thailand/Raks Thai Foundation, with the support of the Japanese Foundation for AIDS Prevention. The study does not, however, provide information with regard to evidence about or the extent of HIV/AIDS among migrant workers. Rather, it tried to identify the risk behaviors of migrant workers in three areas, namely, Samut Sakhon and Samut Prakan, Trat, and Chiang Khong.

Cross-border fishing is also a means for HIV/AIDS transmission. Thai fishermen who fish in Cambodian waters had a high chance of contacting HIV. Overfishing in Thai waters in the Gulf of Thailand has led to an increasing number of Thai fishermen entering Cambodian waters. This leads to increased contact among peoples of three nations: Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. The study maintains that fishermen are linked to outbreaks of HIV infection in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Irian Jaya in Indonesia. Prevalence data among fishermen in Ranong show increasingly high levels of HIV infection from 7 percent in 1991 to 14 percent in 1992, and 22 percent in June 1993 (Anthony et al. 1995, 9). Fishermen travel more than people in other occupations. In particular, they have many chances for docking at Cambodian and Vietnamese ports during a single trip that could extend over several months. Fishing boats have to dock occasionally in order to refuel, load ice, sell fish, allow the crew to rest and have recreation, repair equipment, stock up on food, meet friends and colleagues, engage in sex, go to bars and gambling dens, and avoid monsoons and other storms. It is very common among fishermen (both captains and the boat crews) to have sex with prostitutes in the ports they visit. The study indicates that condom use by Cambodian and Thai men in commercial sex establishments is extremely low. Besides, the men who are the clients in brothels and the sex workers themselves have many misconceptions about HIV/AIDS; some of these misconceptions include the belief that the disease is curable, that if one is healthy one cannot get AIDS, that unattractive commercial sex workers do not have AIDS, that clean people do not have AIDS, and that one cannot get AIDS by having sex with a virgin in a brothel (Anthony et al. 1995).

According to the TDRI study at the border level (TDRI 2006), the pattern of HIV/AIDS contact has changed slightly. IDU does not seem to be the major cause of HIV/AIDS. In Mukdahan, in the past the HIV/AIDS patients got contact through Laotian sex workers. Today,

teenagers are the vulnerable group for HIV/AIDS contact because of their behavior in changing sex partners frequently. Another vulnerable group is housewives who come into contact with HIV/AIDS from their husbands. In Sa Kaeo, the risk groups of HIV/AIDS infection are workers and old men who have contact with Cambodian sex workers. Here there is an increasing trend of infected wives but they do not seek treatment from local health care centers because they do not want other villagers to know. According to the study and rapid assessment, there seems to be a decline in HIV/AIDS in these two provinces recently.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is an example of the negative side of economic integration and the free movement of people across borders. Nevertheless, it can also be argued that the problem is due to income disparity and poverty, and economic integration should be considered as a means to solve the problem.

5. Conclusions

Economic integration along GMS borders needs to be looked at closely with regard to many nontrade issues if it is to achieve the ultimate goal of development. Quite a number of nontrade, informal or illegal issues reflect the fact that a large number of stakeholders are paying the price of increasing cross-border activities. Ways to ensure that economic integration can mitigate, if not eliminate, the negative impacts need to be identified.

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Endnotes

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¹ An interview with official at the cultural gate in Baan Khaodin, Sa Kaeo.

Table 1. Cross-border trade^a between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos by province, 2005
(US\$ million)

| Border provinces | Exports | Imports | Total trade |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| <u>Thailand - Cambodia</u> | | | |
| Trat | 284.60 | 0.69 | 285.29 |
| Chanthaburi | 58.91 | 2.79 | 61.70 |
| Sa Kaeo | 378.17 | 25.36 | 403.54 |
| Surin | 14.36 | 6.26 | 20.62 |
| Si Sa Ket | 3.77 | 3.28 | 7.05 |
| Subtotal | 739.82 | 38.39 | 778.20 |
| <u>Thailand - Laos</u> | | | |
| Nong Khai | 496.32 | 35.03 | 531.35 |
| Mukdahan | 134.28 | 23.87 | 158.14 |
| Ubon Ratchathani | 66.10 | 30.22 | 96.32 |
| Nakhon Phanom | 60.48 | 15.89 | 76.37 |
| Chiang Rai | 37.81 | 12.22 | 50.03 |
| Loei | 22.12 | 21.89 | 44.01 |
| Nan | 1.30 | 2.36 | 3.66 |
| Phayao | 0.06 | 1.20 | 1.26 |
| Uttaradit | 1.61 | 0.94 | 2.55 |
| Subtotal | 820.06 | 143.63 | 963.69 |

Notes: Exchange rate = 1 dollar U.S. / 40 baht.

a. This is de facto cross-border trade figure. It is de jure border trade according to official sources. In 2005, Thailand's total exports and imports from Cambodia were \$921.7 million and \$31.7 million; to Laos, Thailand's exports were \$774.5 million and imports were \$228.1 million.

Sources: Office of Commercial Affairs, Border Trade Unit, Bureau of Border Trade Promotion and Trade Initiatives, Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce.

Table 2. Number of people crossing at selected formal checkpoints

| | Inbound | Outbound |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Chiang Khong | | |
| Passports | 18,913 | 39,775 |
| - Thais | 2,210 | 3,425 |
| - Foreigners | 16,703 | 36,350 |
| Border pass | 37,563 | 37,265 |
| - Thais | 8,931 | 9,063 |
| - Foreigners | 28,632 | 28,202 |

Sa Kaeo (2003)

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| All categories | 3,794,562 | 3,796,326 |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|

Source: Development Analysis Network 2005. The Cross Border Economies of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam; TDRI, "Reviewing the Poverty Impact of Regional Economic Integration in the Greater Mekong Subregion."

Table 3. Registered migrant workers by country of origin and sex, 1998–2004

| | | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|----------|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Myanmar | Males | 59,968 | 58,701 | 257,354 | 196,520 | 134,812 | 497,372 |
| | Females | 29,350 | 32,023 | 193,981 | 152,744 | 112,979 | 408,509 |
| | Total | 89,318 | 90,724 | 451,335 | 349,264 | 247,791 | 905,881 |
| Cambodia | Males | 8,418 | 6,898 | 43,216 | 28,363 | 13,976 | 123,998 |
| | Females | 1,074 | 1,023 | 14,340 | 10,251 | 5,699 | 57,581 |
| | Total | 9,492 | 7,921 | 57,556 | 38,614 | 19,675 | 181,579 |
| Lao PDR | Males | 849 | 749 | 25,771 | 17,229 | 8,611 | 80,981 |
| | Females | 315 | 262 | 33,587 | 24,967 | 12,703 | 100,633 |
| | Total | 1,164 | 1,011 | 59,358 | 42,196 | 21,314 | 181,614 |
| Total | Males | 69,235 | 66,348 | 326,341 | 242,112 | 157,399 | 702,351 |
| | Females | 30,739 | 33,308 | 568,249 | 187,962 | 131,381 | 566,723 |
| | Total | 99,974 | 99,656 | 894,590 | 430,074 | 288,780 | 1,269,074 |

Source: Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2005. Population of Thailand in 2005.

Table 4. Migrant workers by activity (as of May 31, 2005)

| Activity | Migrant workers | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Agriculture and livestock | 182,791 | 21.5 |
| Maid | 126,343 | 14.9 |
| Construction | 124,614 | 14.7 |
| Related fishery | 74,500 | 8.7 |
| Marine and fresh water fishery | 60,655 | 7.1 |
| Rice mills, brick makers, ice mills | 16,702 | 1.9 |
| Stevedore | 4,312 | 0.5 |
| Mining and quarrying | 1,568 | 0.1 |
| Others | 256,145 | 30.2 |
| Total | 847,630 | 100.0 |

Source: Office of the Administrative Commission on Irregular Migrant Workers, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor.

Table 5. Employers and migrant workers' work permits granted under the Cabinet's Resolution on Migrant Workers (as of May 31, 2005)

| Region / province | Employer | Myanmar | Lao PDR | Cambodia | Total | % |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------|----------|
| Whole Kingdom | 204,818 | 632,454 | 105,134 | 110,042 | 847,630 | 100 |
| Bangkok | 64,332 | 105,134 | 40,177 | 17,709 | 163,657 | 19 |
| Central Region ^a | 38,555 | 156,874 | 24,815 | 23,840 | 205,529 | 24 |
| Eastern Region ^b | 20,394 | 34,965 | 15,272 | 53,781 | 104,018 | 12 |
| Western Region ^c | 11,107 | 46,685 | 3,850 | 2,105 | 52,640 | 6 |
| Northern Region ^d | 30,431 | 129,904 | 3,110 | 944 | 133,958 | 16 |
| Northeastern Region ^e | 9,038 | 2,832 | 1,063 | 1,464 | 15,891 | 2 |
| Southern Region ^f | 30,961 | 155,423 | – | 10,199 | 171,937 | 20 |

Notes:

a. Comprises Samut Sakhon, Samut Prakan, Pathum Thani, Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, Samut Songkhram, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Saraburi, Lop Buri, Chai Nat, Ang Thong, Sing Buri, and Uthai Thani.

b. Comprises Chon Buri, Trat, Rayong, Sa Kaeo, Chachoengsao, Chanthaburi, Prachin Buri, and Nakhon Nayok;

c. Comprises Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Suphan Buri, and Phetchaburi;

d. Comprises Tak, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Kamphaeng Phet, Nakhon Sawan, Lamphun, Lampang, Phitsanulok, Uttaradit, Phichit, Phetchabun, Phayao, Nan, Sukhothai, and Phrae;

e. Comprises Ubon Ratchathani, Kalasin, Nong Khai, Loei, Nakhon Phanom, Nakhon Ratchasima, Mukdahan, Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, Surin, Si Sa Ket, Sakon Nakhon, Buri Ram, Amnat Charoen, Chaiyaphum, Roi Et, Yasothon, Maha Sarakham, and Nong Bua Lam Phu;

f. Comprises Ranong, Surat Thani, Phuket, Phangnga, Chumphon, Songkhla, Pattani, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Trang, Krabi, Satun, Yala, Narathiwat, and Phatthalung.

Source: Office of the Administrative Commission on Irregular Migrant Workers, Department of Employment, Ministry of Labor.

Table 6. Types of misconduct and violation

| | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| None | 337 | 84.5 |
| Being forced into prostitution | 7 | 1.8 |
| Being assaulted sexually | 9 | 2.3 |
| Being forced into labor | 16 | 4.0 |
| Being forced into slavery | 3 | 0.8 |
| Escaped from arrest | 3 | 0.8 |
| No answer | 24 | 6.0 |
| Total | 399 | 100.0 |

Source: WVFT 2004, Table 3.11.

Table 7. Number of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in GMS, 2001 and 2004

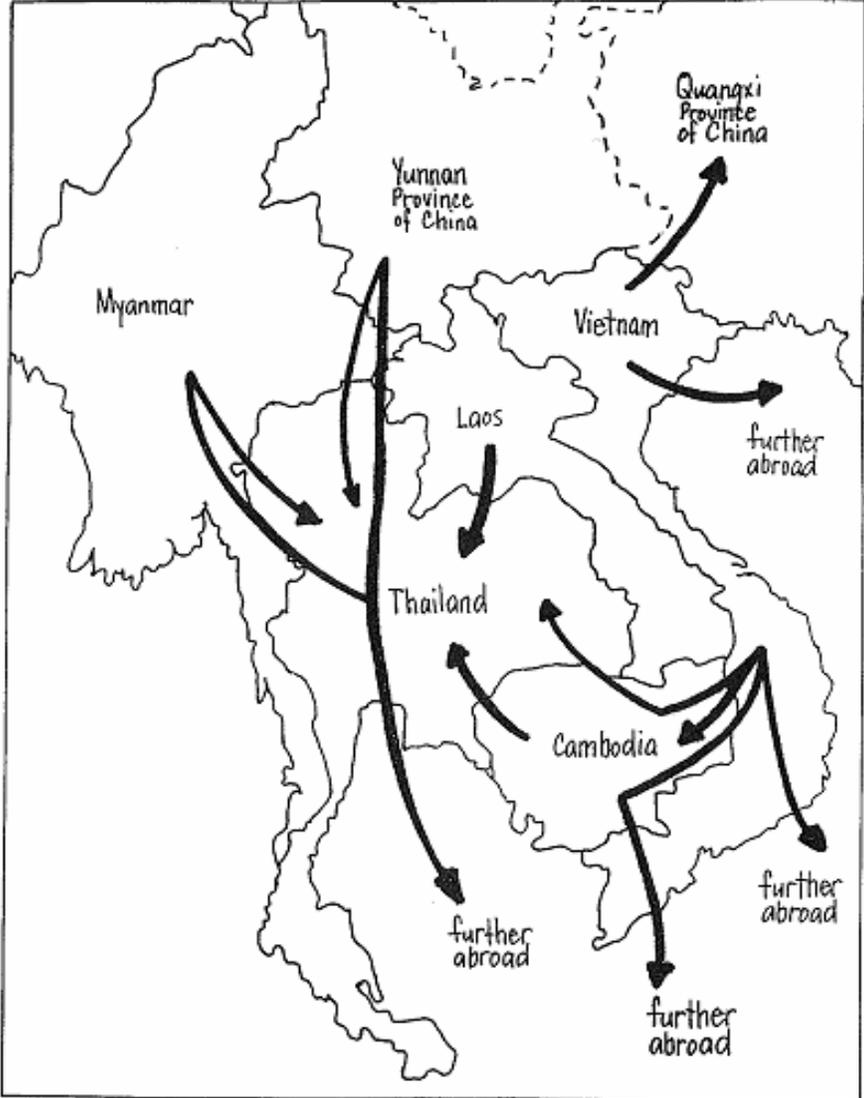
| Country | 2001 | | 2004 | |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| | Population | PLWHA | Population | PLWHA^a |
| Cambodia | 13,411,000 | 170,000 | 13,363,421 | 170,000 |
| Lao PDR | 5,403,000 | 1,400 | 6,068,117 | 1,700 |
| Thailand | 63,584,000 | 670,000 | 64,865,523 | 570,000 |
| Vietnam | 79,175,000 | 130,000 | 82,689,518 | 220,000 |
| Total | 160,603,000 | 971,400 | 166,986,579 | 961,700 |

Note:

a. Figure at the end of 2003. PLWHA = People living with HIV/AIDS.

Source: UNAIDS (2002) quoted in USAID, Bureau for Asia and the Near East, 2003. HIV/AIDS in the Mekong Region, www.avert.org/aidssoutheastasia.htm

Figure 2. Human trafficking routes within the Greater Mekong Subregion



Source: Caouette (1998, 8).

Box 1. Crossing the Thai-Lao border

Crossing the Thai-Lao border via the national gate in Wan Yai, Mukdahan, is different from crossing at the international gate in terms of eligibility, rules and regulations. The national gate opens daily from 6:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. Only Wan Yai and Sai Buri (in Lao) villagers are eligible to cross the border via the gate. For Lao people who want to cross the border to Thailand, they need an identification card with a valid photo attached. After the identification is checked by an official, the official will give the tag with brief personal information; then the migrant must pay a fee of five baht. In practice, the official will allow only Lao people who regularly cross the border. While Thailand has clear rules and regulations related to crossing the border, Lao rules and regulations are less clear, are narrowly informed and subject to the personal judgment of officers. Thai people in Wan Yai know about the Lao rules and regulations from local radio broadcasts and other villagers. The crossing fee from Thailand into Laos is 30 baht per person, which is six times higher than the fee collected at the Thai border.

Source: TDRI, 2006.

Box 2. Definition of human trafficking

Human trafficking has been defined as “the illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national borders, largely from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition, with the end goal of forcing women and girl children into sexually or economically oppressive situations for profit of recruiters, traffickers and crime syndicates, as well as other illegal activities related to trafficking, such as forced domestic labour, false marriages, clandestine employment and false adoption” (United Nations General Assembly 1994). However, this definition is incomplete. It does not include boys and men who are also victims of trafficking,

and the listing of situations is not exhaustive. Trafficking arises in a variety of situations beyond the list given, including trafficking for begging and use of people as agents of crime. A key element behind trafficking is coercion. Nevertheless, as discussed in this paper, it is possible that there are other situations where there is no coercion at the time of trafficking, but coercion nevertheless occurs when the person arrives later in a circumstance that is tantamount to slavery, such as being forced to work in appalling labor conditions or other illegal activities.

Source: MRLC et al. (1999, 33).

Box 3. Human traffickers arrested forcing migrant workers to traffic drugs in stomach

In Songkhla, Thailand, on December 29, 2005, the police arrested a Burmese man named Abi Rahman for trafficking drugs to Malaysia. At his house, the police found ten Burmese men who had detained. Abi Rahman confessed that the ten Burmese were smuggled into Thailand through Ranong Province and were in transit to be trafficked to Malaysia at the trafficking fee of 2,000–3,000 baht per head. The workers would be used to traffic drugs into Malaysia at a fee of 20,000 baht per shipment. To traffick the illicit drugs, Rahman forced the workers to starve and made them swallow a few condoms filled with drugs. Then the workers would be sent to Malaysia through the border fence. As soon as the workers arrived at the destination, the drug “bags” would be retrieved and the workers would be sent to work.

Source: *Thai Rath*, December 31, 2005.

Box 4. Trafficking from Laos

In Mukdahan province, trafficking of workers occurs in places remote from strict inspection at the immigration office. Such locations are along bordering villages such as Ban Wan Yai, Don tan, and Nong Lom. No foreign workers are found in Ban Soon Mai. There are two ways for

Laotians to illegally enter Thailand: (i) they can enter through a broker or (ii) sneak in on their own. For the first method, most leading brokers are Thais who usually fetch Lao workers at a rendezvous area in the woods along the Mekong river bank. These brokers (who are not local people) then hide the illegal migrants in the truck or van in order to deliver them to prospective employers in other provinces. In the second method, foreign workers disembark at an international gate where they give false information that they are going to be hired for rice harvesting or visiting a relative. In fact, some of them may stay at their relatives for a few days, but then make their way to Bangkok and other provinces, and not report back to the immigration control as required.

“A few days before the trafficking, a stranger drove into the village. He must be an illegal broker. After that, the Lao migrants disembarked from boat arriving in the wood close to the village”
(villager from Wan Yai)

Source: TDRI (2006).

Box 5. Imported HIV

“Many Cambodians who are hired for paddy harvesting also sell sex, as many as 7–8 girls out of 10; the rest of which are too old and the beginning ages 11–12 years old. Sex workers are not only girls, but there are also 11–12 year old boys and older. Service fees range from 300–500 baht, at wherever they choose to do so. These sex workers might spread the HIV too.” (Villager, Wang Mon, Sa Kaeo).

Source: TDRI (2006).

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