

**Sexual Exploitation of Children in Lao People's Democratic Republic**  
**Submission**  
for the Universal Periodic Review of the human rights situation in Lao PDR

Submitted by  
**Alliance Anti-Traffic and ECPAT International**

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*Alliance Anti-Traffic (AAT) is a non-profit, non-partisan and non-religious organization that aims to protect women and children in Southeast Asia from sexual exploitation. AAT works in Thailand, Laos, Northern Myanmar and Vietnam. AAT protects women and children who have been victims, provides them with legal assistance, repatriates them home and empowers them to be economically autonomous and to participate to protect others.*



### **ECPAT International**

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*ECPAT International is a global network of civil society organisations working for the eradication of all forms of sexual exploitation of children. For the past 29 years, ECPAT has acted as the international watchdog, monitoring States' response to sexual exploitation of children, and advocating for robust international measures to protect children from sexual exploitation. ECPAT International currently has 109 network members operating in 96 countries.*

## Justification for submission

1. The present submission is an update to review the progress that has been made by the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) to end sexual exploitation of children (SEC) and assess the level of implementation of the UPR recommendations on children's rights made in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Specific recommendations to end SEC in Lao PDR will be made. Recommendations made in this report are in line with the commitment made by the GoL to eliminate all forms of violence against children, including sexual abuse and exploitation with the adoption of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015.<sup>2</sup>
2. The content of this submission is based on Alliance Anti-Traffic (AAT) and ECPAT International's work experiences and desk research. Its scope is limited to SEC and its different manifestations, including exploitation of children in prostitution,<sup>3</sup> online child sexual exploitation (OCSE), child sexual abuse materials (CSAM),<sup>4</sup> trafficking of children for sexual purposes and sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism (SECTT)<sup>5</sup> and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

## Status and developments of sexual exploitation of children in Lao PDR

3. Lao PDR is ranked as a medium human development ranking with the 139<sup>th</sup> place out of 189 in the global ranking.<sup>6</sup> In 2012 (latest available estimates), 22,7% of the population was living under the international poverty line of USD 1,90 per day<sup>7</sup> and according to the latest available estimates from 2016, in Laos, 10% of children were involved in child labour.<sup>8</sup> Of the total population of almost 7 million people, over 39% are children.<sup>9</sup> Vulnerability to fall victim to SEC varies, with some discernible groups being most at risk, particularly among poor children, children from ethnic minorities<sup>10</sup> and street children.<sup>11</sup>
4. Birth registration is quite low with 75%, as compared to 100% in neighbouring Thailand and 96% in Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> Birth registration and issuance of birth certificates are of great importance in the prevention of SEC, as children at risk or victims can be easier identified. Proof of identity and age is essential to gain access to basic services and exercise fundamental human rights. Moreover, it is essential in order to prove the age of SEC victims.<sup>13</sup>
5. **Exploitation of children in prostitution.** As prostitution is forbidden in Lao PDR, the sex industry is not openly played out in brothel industries. Nevertheless, sex is traded in nightclubs, bars, guesthouses and hotels, where children receive a commission on alcohol sold and are encouraged to offer sex services.<sup>14</sup> Local police officers and taxi drivers from Luang Prabang and Vientiane reported that *Sao Borikan* (female sex workers) are often provided by owners of rental accommodation to migrant workers.<sup>15</sup> From AAT experiences, clients are Lao men, but also tourists or migrants workers from China and Korea.<sup>16</sup> According to AAT's experience, there are cases of underage *Sao Borikan*.<sup>17</sup> The phenomenon of *sao meu teu* or 'mobile phone girls', who may or may not be linked to a bar that charges them a fee, is growing.<sup>18</sup> Victims are both girls under 18 and adult women who pretend to be younger in order to meet clients who request school age girls.<sup>19</sup> Some girls wear casual clothes like tourists, in order to meet clients in tourist areas, bars, or karaoke.<sup>20</sup> Internal trafficking in girls for

sexual exploitation, including for the sale of their virginity was brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children during her visit to the country in November 2017, as well as cases of girls sexually exploited in karaoke bars by locals and foreigners, with the complicity of authorities.<sup>21</sup> Exploitation of girls in prostitution can also be found in entertainment places and casinos.<sup>22</sup> This is somehow connected with the fact that sometimes Lao children, moving from a community within the country to another, who are not identified as minors because the process in place to grant them authorization to stay in their new city does not require verifying their age. Indeed, in Lao PDR, people on the move receive an authorization card, which does not mention the age, from the owner of the establishment where they are working and living. Thus, brothel owners and owners of entertainment places can issue these documents to victims of sexual exploitation in prostitution. Usually, when checking authorization cards, the police does not verify the age of the migrants, and does not ask for IDs.<sup>23</sup>

6. **Trafficking of children for sexual purposes** is prevalent and aggravated by the low per capita income in Laos in comparison to other countries in the region.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Lao PDR is predominantly a source country for trafficking.<sup>25</sup> Although available estimates suggest that about 90% of persons trafficked from Lao PDR arrive in Thailand,<sup>26</sup> AAT noted they rescued less Lao girls trafficked for sexual purposes in Thailand than the previous years and that the number of Lao girls trafficked for sexual purposes in Thai government shelters has drastically decreased since 2018.<sup>27</sup> This would suggest an increase in trafficking of children, especially girls, within the country's borders as well as towards China.<sup>28</sup> In 2014, according to the Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 157 Laotian victims of trafficking had been returned including 135 children of which only two were male.<sup>29</sup> No newer data were available online at the time of writing. The need for a serious and systematic data collection system is widely recognised by all child protection professionals. The GoL should set up a comprehensive data collection system with the support of all relevant stakeholders on all manifestations of SEC, and should be disaggregated by, *inter alia*, age, sex, disability, geographic location, ethnic origin and socioeconomic background in order to facilitate analysis of the situation of all children. In 2018, 15 girls were rescued from domestic trafficking thanks to a collaboration between AAT with the local police. Similarly, in 2019, AAT rescued three girls and the police two girls.<sup>30</sup>
7. As in most countries, due to the ever-expanding use of the Internet, **OCSE** and **CSAM** are growing issues. Although still relatively low, Internet usage and access to mobile phones and 3G in Lao PDR are increasing at a fast pace with 52.6 mobile phones for every 100 people and 25.5% of the population using the Internet in 2018.<sup>31</sup> The GoL stated in its 2014 state report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the OPSC, that child sexual abuse materials exist and are in circulation and available to download in CD shops.<sup>32</sup> No updated information on this issue are available.
8. As the Global Study on Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism found, no country is immune to **SECTT**.<sup>33</sup> 23% of alleged SEC offenders in the four Mekong countries studied by World Vision in 2014 (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam) were foreigners, including long-term residents, economic migrants and tourists.<sup>34</sup> Travel and tourism is expanding fast in Lao PDR. A total of 3,2 million international arrivals were counted in 2017, double the number of 2010.<sup>35</sup> Lao PDR influx of travellers and tourists is relatively low compared to other Southeast Asian States, but can provide opportunities for travelling child sex offenders with weak legal protection for children, corruption,

facility of travel, growing Internet use and the vulnerability associated with poverty.<sup>36</sup> Many Western business travellers, teachers, volunteers and development workers have been identified as travelling child sex offenders in the Mekong Region, though most are East Asian or regional.<sup>37</sup> Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are also relevant to SECTT, as they attract gamblers from different countries, including China. Cases of sexual exploitation of girls were brought to the attention of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children.<sup>38</sup>

9. ECPAT is of the view that **CEFM** can be considered as a form of SEC where the marriage is conducted in exchange for goods, payment in kind or a 'bride price' between families and the child is used for sexual purposes. Child marriage can also increase the likelihood of subsequent sexual exploitation, due to risks of abandonment, poverty and girls resulting to the sex trade to survive.<sup>39</sup> According to the latest available estimates from 2016, in Laos, 9% of girls were married at 15 years of age and 35% of girls at 18 years of age.<sup>40</sup> CEFM is part of the traditional customs and practices of Laotian ethnic populations. In Hmong culture, *Tshoobzawjis* a practice where a woman is forced to marry a man. The Hmong or Khmu practice of bride theft, or *Tshoobnii*, involves the kidnapping of girls as young as 12 or 13 years old. A bride-price is commonly exchanged between the families of the bride and groom among ethnic groups.<sup>41</sup> Another issue is Laotian girls marrying to Chinese citizens, in the north of the country. They are sold by their families or convinced to marry them.<sup>42</sup> Recently, the GoL has been applying stricter policies to curb this practice making it harder for Chinese men to bring underage girls into China. Lao authorities had informed the population that sale of girls for marriage is illegal and that parents will be fined during field visits and information transmission through television. However, families whose daughters disappeared are afraid to be fined, also because of the corruption of some police officers, and therefore do not ask for authorities' help. Moreover, reportedly, Chinese men now wait for the girls to turn 18, before taking them to China. Meanwhile, they pay a dowry to the girls' families, cover expenses for the girls to learn Chinese language and cross the border in order to engage in sexual activities with their future wives.<sup>43</sup> During the country's last UPR, Chile and Sierra Leone recommended the GoL to establish legislation which penalizes early marriage and to ensure the implementation of national laws in this regard.<sup>44</sup>
10. During the country's last UPR in 2015, the report of the Working Group formulated 20 recommendations related to children's rights, but only two of them were directly related to SEC and specifically on CEFM.<sup>45</sup>

## Legislative framework

11. The GoL has acceded to key legal instruments to protect children from SEC, such as the CRC, OPSC and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children. As Lao PDR works towards a rule of law state in 2020 through its Legal Sector Master Plan, the formal legal and justice system is still embryonic with a matching level of legal literacy and awareness of rights among the population.<sup>46</sup> There are three systems of justice in Lao PDR: the formal at the national level; the semi-formal at the village level; and the informal customary law and practice of ethnic groups.<sup>47</sup> Customary laws are sometimes contrary to – what are considered generally accepted – basic human rights, such as equal rights for men and women.<sup>48</sup> This makes it

challenging for the GoL to guarantee rights granted in its international legal framework. One key law to protect children from SEC is the Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons, adopted in 2016. Another important legal standard is the definition of a child as any person below the age of 18, as codified in the Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons and the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children.<sup>49,50</sup>

12. The Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children focuses on the prohibition of sexual relations with children in exchange for money or a benefit.<sup>51</sup> Sex with children under 12 years of age is considered a statutory rape, while the Penal Code criminalises sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 15.<sup>52</sup> Other sexual activities with children do not appear to be illegal.
13. Rape as such is only criminalised if committed against women.<sup>53</sup> However, the Lao delegate reported to the CRC in 2015 that the Penal law has been revised to criminalise rape of boys as well.<sup>54</sup> No information on the implementation of this new prohibition is publicly available.
14. The GoL introduced a new provision in its Labour Law prohibiting hazardous work for all persons under 18 in compliance with ILO Convention No. 182, in order to prevent human trafficking, trade or deception into the sex industry or solicitation of prostitution, photography or pornography.<sup>55</sup>
15. **Exploitation of children in prostitution** as such is not adequately defined or criminalised. Article 131 of the Penal Code criminalizes engaging in or facilitating prostitution and article 132 criminalizes the procurement of female minors into prostitution.<sup>56</sup> However, by criminalising the engagement in prostitution, the Penal Code may *de facto* allow for the prosecution of child victims who “engaged” in the sexual activity. Moreover, the Penal Code does not provide specific protection to boys exploited in prostitution.
16. **Trafficking in persons** - The Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons complies with international legal standards.<sup>57</sup> It criminalizes all forms of exploitation indicated in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Article 89 of the Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons provides that any person who has committed an offence of trafficking in persons shall be punished with five to 15 years of imprisonment and shall be fined from 10 million to 100 million Kip (from US\$1,149 to US\$11,492 as of July 2019). In case of child victims, these penalties increase from 15 to 20 years of imprisonment and 100 million Kip to 500 million Kip (from US\$11,492 to US\$57,460 as of July 2019) fine. The Law on Development and Protection of Women, which focuses on trafficking in women and children, criminalises attempts and participation as an accomplice, organising or directing others.<sup>58</sup>
17. Some conducts related to **CSAM** are criminalised through the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children,<sup>59</sup> although the penalties are low with a maximum of three years’ imprisonment and a fine of up to 6 million Kip (US\$689 as of July 2019). Gaps in the legislation to counteract CSAM and OCSE include – as expressed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2015<sup>60</sup> – the lack of legislation criminalization for mere possession and online grooming of children. There is also no legal requirement for Internet service providers to report suspected child sexual abuse material cases to law enforcement or other appropriate authorities.

18. The Laotian law does not have specific legislation to counter **SECTT**. Article 48 of the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children<sup>61</sup> prohibits children from serving in nightclubs, guesthouses, hotels and restaurants. However, cases of child victims exploited for sexual purposes in such places in Vientiane were reported to the police, and no action has been taken by law enforcement.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, there are no vetting requirements for foreigners working in the country with direct child contact.
19. **CEFM** - The Lao PDR Family Law of 1990 requires the mutual consent of the couple who wish to marry and that they both be at least 18 years old.<sup>63</sup> However, the law also states that “*in special and necessary cases, this limit may be lowered to less than eighteen years of age but not less than fifteen years of age*” for both boys and girls. There is no further elaboration on what is a ‘special and necessary case’ for lowering the marriage age.
20. **Extraterritoriality** - Article 162 of the Law On the Criminal Procedure which was amended in 2012<sup>64</sup> states that Lao courts have jurisdiction over Lao nationals committing a crime abroad. Article 4 of the Penal Law<sup>65</sup> provides that Lao citizens as well as aliens and stateless people residing in Lao PDR guilty of penal infractions committed outside the territory of Lao will assume penal responsibilities of the committed infraction as mentioned in the Penal Law.
21. **Extradition** – Article 272 of the Law On the Criminal Procedure (Amended Version)<sup>66</sup> states that for the purpose of judicial assistance with foreign countries including for the purpose of extradition, Lao PDR follows the agreement it has signed with other countries or follows international conventions. However, Article 6 of the Law of Nationality<sup>67</sup> provides that Lao shall not extradite its own citizens to a foreign state.

#### *Recommendations to the GoL*

- Adopt legal provisions to criminalise all forms of sexual exploitation of children in compliance with international legal standards, specifically on sexual exploitation of children in prostitution, online child sexual exploitation, including ‘grooming’ of children for sexual purposes, sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism and child marriage;
- Existing legal provisions should be duly implemented in the country in order to afford substantive protection to all children including those working in hazardous conditions such as in entertainment venues and those belonging to ethnic minorities.

#### **General measures of implementation**

22. In Lao PDR, there is no national information management system that systematically collects data on incidents or trends of abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect against children, nor on activities currently in place to protect children. However, in 2011 the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, UNICEF Lao PDR, UNIAP, Save the Children and World Vision collaborated for the Study on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.<sup>68</sup> In 2014, the Lao Statistics Bureau and the National Commission for Mothers and Children conducted a national household survey on violence against children.<sup>69</sup> To date there is no newer data collection specifically on SEC.

23. The GoL did not adopt specific National Action Plans to tackle SEC. A National Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking was drafted in 2006. The Lao government reported to the Committee on the Rights of the Child that this explicitly included exploitation of children and had been adopted in 2008,<sup>70</sup> although other reports claimed this was being finalised in 2012. In any case, whether new or updated, in late 2012 the Lao government adopted an unprecedented national anti-human trafficking strategy.<sup>71</sup> The 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020 includes targets such as establishing a social fund in all 18 provinces to improve the life of victims of trafficking and the creation of networks in 800 villages to protect the rights of children as well as combat human trafficking.<sup>72</sup> The Laotian government adopted the first National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020.<sup>73</sup> As in remote areas, child marriage is still common, was include in the NPAMC 2016-2018 the objective to decrease child marriage ratio.<sup>74</sup>

#### *Recommendations to the GoL*

- Collect data on the sexual exploitation of children annually disaggregated by manifestation, age and gender of the victim;
- Adopt a specific national action plan addressing the sexual exploitation of children in all its manifestations.;
- Collaborate with non-governmental organizations in order to take actions in communities, enforce the legislation, protect children and prosecute child sex offenders.

#### *Coordination and evaluation*

24. Under the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children, it is the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare that is tasked with prevention of SEC and other violence against children and developing protective policies. The Ministry established a Committee for Protection and Assistance to Children.<sup>75</sup>

25. In 2017, the National Commission for Mothers and Children and the National Commission for the Advancement of Women were merged to form the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children.<sup>76</sup> It has been tasked with awareness raising, data collection and reporting activities related to children's rights. In 2014, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children and the Lao Statistics Bureau implemented the National Violence against Children Survey in Lao PDR.<sup>77</sup> The National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children also developed the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children 2014-2020,<sup>78</sup> which seeks to address violence against children, however this national plan does not address SEC.<sup>79</sup> No reports on the activities conducted by the Commission were available online. Based on confidential information received by an NGO working in the country, the only monitoring activity was conducted directly by the GoL, therefore concerns arise regarding the level of transparency due to governmental censure.

26. In 2004, the Law on the Development and Protection of Women established a National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Persons, which is chaired by the Deputy-Prime Minister and responsible for legal proposals and regional coordination.<sup>80</sup> In 2015, the Law on Anti-Trafficking in Persons has assigned the National Committee on Anti-Trafficking in Persons to monitor, inspect encourage and support relevant bodies to research and study policies, strategic plans and laws relating to anti-trafficking in Lao PDR, as well as coordinate and cooperate with relevant national and international sectors.<sup>81</sup> However, no report is available online on the activities conducted by the National Committee on Anti-Trafficking in Persons.
27. During the country's last UPR, Malaysia recommended to the GoL to continue its efforts in training for government and law enforcement officials in dealing with the issue of trafficking in persons.<sup>82</sup> In 2018, IOM and the Department of Immigration of the Lao PDR (DoI) have launched a first training by DoI Master Trainers for police and frontline border guards to increase the country's capacity to tackle human trafficking and people smuggling nationwide.<sup>83</sup> However, there is no information on such cooperation to eradicate specifically SEC.
28. Bi-lateral law enforcement cooperation between Lao PDR and Thailand is of the utmost importance, since many Laotian victims are trafficked to Thailand.<sup>84</sup>

#### *Recommendations to the GoL*

- Strengthen the coordination and cooperation between child protection stakeholders to address the sexual exploitation of children in all its manifestations;
- Strengthen the cooperation with neighbouring countries to tackle all forms of sexual exploitation of children with a cross-border element, especially by investigating and suppressing criminal networks facilitating the trafficking of children for sexual purposes.

#### **Prevention**

29. Most initiatives on awareness raising on topics related to SEC are implemented by NGOs and intergovernmental organisations, such as the End Trafficking in Persons (ETIP) programme by World Vision implemented from 2011 – 2016<sup>85</sup>. The GoL issued a code of conduct for corporates, with a focus on the tourism sector, to engage them in the protection of child rights and prevent SEC.<sup>86</sup> AAT organised awareness raising campaigns in communities with migrants in Champassak, Bokeo, on safe migration, and human trafficking with the Lao Federation of Trade Unions and the Lao Women's Union. AAT also conducted campaigns in factories and entertainment venues in Champassak, and regularly campaigned for safe migration at the border check point of Vang Tao, Champassak in the period 2009 to 2017. Since 2017, AAT has been leading campaigns in communities, especially targeting ethnic minorities, and has been using social media to disseminate information on safe migration and protection from forced marriage and as channels to report cases of child sexual exploitation.<sup>87</sup>
30. In 2015, the GoL reported to have trained 735 law enforcement agents on human trafficking issues.<sup>88</sup> AusAID supported a regional project to prevent SECTT by raising awareness and building community resilience. Community police were trained and participated to some workshops.<sup>89</sup> From 2012 to

2014, the UNODC, with support from the AusAid Initiative Project Childhood, developed a national curriculum on Investigating Sexual Exploitation of Children for use in national police training academies.<sup>90</sup>

31. In 2017, the Ministry of Public Security mentioned to the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children that the lack of awareness and understanding of the law enforcement authorities of the crimes of sale and sexual exploitation of children remained a challenge. In the framework of the National Plan of Action to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons (2017–2020), the Ministry planned to organize training activities on victim identification, first targeting officials and then the public at large.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, even if the Supreme Court of Justice provided training to judicial personnel on how to approach and address children, interviews were still not child-friendly during Special Rapporteur’s visit. It happened that the child could have contact with the offender.<sup>92</sup>

#### *Recommendations to the GoL*

- Promote and implement wide-reaching awareness-raising campaigns on sexual exploitation of children targeting all population and using different languages (Lao, Khmu, Hmong, Akha etc.). These campaigns should be conceived, planned and implemented in collaboration with civil society in order to increase their effectiveness;
- Train law enforcement personnel, as well as professional from the tourism sector to all manifestation of sexual exploitation of children in collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

#### **Protection of the rights of the child**

32. During the country’s last UPR, Lebanon recommended to the GoL the adoption of a law combatting human trafficking and sexual exploitation, as well as to ensure victim rehabilitation.<sup>93</sup>

33. The principle of child participation<sup>94</sup> is embodied by the Lao Revolutionary Youth Union (LYU), responsible by law for raising public awareness on trafficking in persons.<sup>95</sup> However, LYU is not active in rural areas.<sup>96</sup>

34. Hotlines and helpline services are available and offered by Peuan Mit (Friends International) in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, free of charge (1191), Lao Women’s Union (1362), the National Police (191),<sup>97</sup> and the Lao Federation of Trade Union (1512).<sup>98</sup> However, some of these services are not available 24 hours a day therefore reducing their effectiveness and the level of trust in and use of these services by the population.<sup>99</sup>

35. Regional cooperation is facilitated through the ASEAN on e.g. its Strategic Framework on and Plan of Action for Social Welfare, Family and Children, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children and the ASEAN Guidelines for the Protection of the Rights of Trafficked Children.<sup>100</sup>

36. Although rights to services are explicitly afforded in the Law on the Development and Protection of Women to women and child victims of trafficking<sup>101</sup> and in the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children,<sup>102</sup> there are few services provided by the GoL due to lack of resources and

capabilities. The limited services provided are mostly given by NGOs or intergovernmental agencies.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the NGO Sengaven runs a shelter in Savannakhet and the GoL through Lao Women’s Union also runs a shelter.<sup>104</sup> Village Focus International runs a shelter in Champassak. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, in collaboration with Village Focus International, runs a shelter for 35 child victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation and violence in Vientiane.<sup>105</sup> AAT conducts a wide range of activities aimed at providing support to child victims of trafficking. In particular, AAT organises safe repatriation between Thailand and Lao PDR through cross borders actions, holds rescue operations, in order to save children from working in the entertainment places, and provides reintegration activities for victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, such as vocational trainings and career alternatives. AAT also conducts protection activities against forced marriage of Laotian girls being sold as wives in China.<sup>106</sup>

### *Recommendations to the GoL*

- Create a specific mechanism for monitoring children’s rights;
- Ensure that enough shelters for children victims of sexual exploitation are properly funded, staffed by well-trained personnel and able to offer integrated services (psychological, legal, medical, etc.) with a child-friendly approach;
- Ensure that law enforcement agencies have the funds, resources and skills to identify, investigate and respond to the sexual exploitation of children, and are able to use adapted protocols when dealing with child victims;
- Ensure effective collaboration between law enforcement and non-governmental organizations for joined actions in order for child victims to be rescued;
- To create more and better tailored services for victims. For example, vocational trainings and alternative work should be offered to former victims with the collaboration of education and business sector so that former victims are enabled to generate sufficient income for themselves and thus are not at risk to be re-trafficked.

<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Council. (2015), “[Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review – Lao People’s Democratic Republic](#)”, A/HRC/29/7, 23 March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Development Goal Targets 5.2, 8.7, and 16.2.

<sup>3</sup> ECPAT prefers the term ‘*exploitation of children in prostitution*’ instead of ‘*child prostitution*’ in line with the recently widely adopted Terminology Guidelines. ECPAT International (2016), “[Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, adopted by the Interagency Working Group in Luxembourg, 28 January 2016](#)”, Bangkok: ECPAT, 29.

<sup>4</sup> ECPAT prefers the term ‘child sexual exploitation material’ or ‘child sexual abuse material’ over the often in legal context still used ‘child pornography’ in line with the recently widely adopted Terminology Guidelines. *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> UNDP. (2019). “[Human Development Indicators – Lao People’s Democratic People](#)”.

<sup>7</sup> The World Bank. (2012). [Poverty & Equity Data Portal – Lao PDR](#).

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF. (2017, December). [The State of The World’s Children 2017](#), 183. New York: UNICEF.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Alliance Anti-Traffic. (June, 2019). Personal communication.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Council. (2019). [Visit to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material](#), 21 January 2019, A/HRC/40/51/Add.1, 24 and 58.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF. (2017, December). [The State of The World’s Children 2017](#), 183 to 185. New York: UNICEF.

<sup>13</sup> Plan International. (2009). [Count Every Child – the right to birth registration](#). 9.

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- <sup>14</sup> UNICEF. (n.d.). [“Children on the Edge: Protecting Children from Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in East Asia and the Pacific”](#), 3 and 4.
- <sup>15</sup> *World Vision International*. (2014). [Sex, Abuse and Childhood](#). 63.
- <sup>16</sup> Alliance Anti-Traffic. (June, 2019). Personal communication.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Child Frontiers. (2011). [“Report on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Lao PDR”](#), 20.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Interview with CHAS January 2010, 21.
- <sup>20</sup> Alliance Anti-Traffic. (June, 2019). Personal communication.
- <sup>21</sup> Human Rights Council. (2019). [Visit to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material](#), 21 January 2019, A/HRC/40/51/Add.1, 11 and 17.
- <sup>22</sup> Alliance Anti-Traffic. (June, 2019). Personal communication.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Sengsavang (n.d), [“Human Trafficking in Laos”](#).
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Alliance Anti-Traffic. (June, 2019). Personal communication.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Vientiane Times. (2015). [“157 Victims Rescued in 2014”](#), The Nation, 19 March 2015.
- <sup>30</sup> Alliance Anti-Traffic. (June, 2019). Personal communication.
- <sup>31</sup> ITU. (2018). [Lao PDR Profile](#).
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