



## Human trafficking - Combatting contemporary forms of poverty *Laos*

Poverty is the main cause of human trafficking, which is becoming increasingly widespread. In Laos, traffickers contact families living in remote areas who have teenage children, especially girls, and offer them the prospect of a comfortable job abroad. However, the reality is very different when these girls reach their destination: forced labour and prostitution, inhumane conditions, and few opportunities to return home. From 2014 to 2018, AIC Laos volunteers worked with the Daughters of Charity to combat human trafficking and support victims.

### Context

Due to the practice of Lao ancestors' culture, girls in remote areas are not encouraged to go into higher education. The expectation is that after marriage, girls are housewives who raise children and only do housework. Some trafficking agents take advantage of this to meet families with teenage children, especially girls, and claim that by working abroad, they will have more freedom. They suggest that they will not have to work very hard, but will get a very high salary, which they will be able to use to alleviate themselves from poverty.



## Context (continued)

However, when reaching the destination, the girls have to do various jobs that are different from the ones discussed with their parents before leaving home. For example:

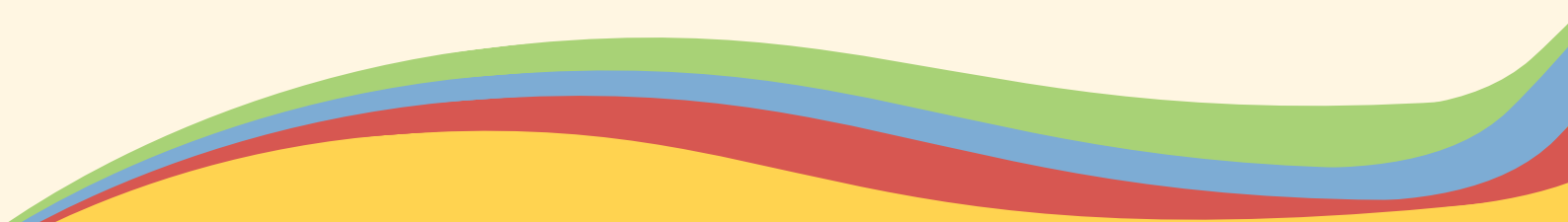
- They are abused by their employers and made to do jobs that citizens do not want to do or to work for more than 12 hours for a tiny income. If they raise any questions, employers reply that their wages are reduced because they have to reimburse the travel costs.
- They are forced into prostitution and treated in an inhuman way.
- They have no access to medical facilities and no leave days (they work 7 days a week).
- Girls are forced into fake marriages in families where they are obliged to work all day and be a common wife of many men (in one case with 6 men) living under the same roof at night-time.
- They have almost no possibilities to come back home since they have no cash and their passports are hidden by the agents. Even if they can escape, they reach home only with the minimum amount just for transportation.

This has the following consequences:

- They are rejected by their own family, their community and/or their own society.
- They have unwanted pregnancies.
- They are carriers of HIV.
- They get psychologically affected and traumatized.

## Project activities

From 2014 to 2018, a Daughter of Charity set up an anti-trafficking project to help victims of this labour market. AIC volunteers took part in this project. Although this project has come to an end, the Daughters of Charity and the AIC volunteers continue to make individual visits to the victims and continue to provide them with support.



## Project activities (continued)

For those returning to their country they offer:

- Healthcare:
  - Psychological support and counselling
  - Payment of medical expenses, taking care of girls during their pregnancy and after the delivery
- Nutrition: from time to time, volunteers provide basic food to the mother and encourage mothers to breastfeed their newborn babies.
- Finding light work to enable them to be self-sufficient

For those who still want to work abroad with the intention of having better living conditions, the church provides:

- Necessary information for legal travel (through Ministry of Labor or legal agencies)
- Necessary information for self-support and self-protection
- Information about how to contact Lao embassy in that country, their family members or close friends for help.

## Future prospects

Volunteers hope to will find sponsors to restart the project with full support.

