



Women in Migration Research

In Vientiane Capital and Khammouane
Province, Lao PDR

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Executive summary

This report reveals that migration is very important issue in Lao PDR. In this era of mobility of the workforce, this report explores women's experiences of migration and analyses these stories against the backdrop of Laotian culture. At the same time, this report will also serve the purpose of providing the CEDAW Committee, with information about the actual situation in Lao PDR.

What this report shows is that protective mechanisms for migrant workers are not strong enough. In most of the cases provided in this study, women did not know about the obligation of the state laws and policies to protect their rights. Legal mechanisms are not so successful in addressing the wide array of difficulties that women might experience and are thus failing to prevent and protect women migrants.

The stories of migrant workers are stories of difficulties, struggles, despair but also hope. With an aim higher than themselves, these brave women seem to be very resilient in the face of all the pressures they face along the way. Fear blended with excitement for new discoveries, dreams blended with better reality are what these women were and still are going through. In many cases, dreams of the grass being greener on the other side make women take the "leap of faith" and step outside of the zone of what is well-known. Often informed only through "informal channels" of friends and relatives, they set off on a journey that is often to change them forever. This dream of having a better life has many surprises in its suitcase. Some women, deterred by the sight of new shores or after suffering some unpleasant experience, return promptly or decide only to endure for a short time for the sake of family. Others, usually those surrounded by caring people and employers, are able to tackle their own fears and limitations and grow through the process. Some women enjoy their new life so much that they recommend it further to their friends or family at home.

Care for the family seems to be a very strong incentive for women to go and search for better opportunities. Most of the respondents see migration as a means to create better opportunities for both themselves and their families. Such aspirations include; to build a new house, to support education for their siblings, to provide food for the family, buy medication for ill members of the family, pay off the debt or simply to satisfy their own consumer needs, all these incentives for their work are legitimate and equally important.

Migration has a large impact on individuals and on societies globally. For some women, the impacts are extremely positive, for some extremely negative, but there are also many women whose experiences can be found in between these two extreme poles. In their wish to improve their lives and lives of their families, many women find themselves in dangerous situations. And this report discusses the risks of migration for the women who participated in the study. For some women, migration changes their life irreversibly, and perhaps not in the way they have desired. The information that follows is certainly enlightening as it reveals the lives of women behind the collective name of "migrant workers", their hopes and dreams, fears and struggles but also triumphs and resilience.

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discuss and share with us their experiences of migration including their plans to migrate. We respect you and honor your courage in stepping forward to talk about your experience.

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
DAW	Discrimination against Women
GDG	Gender and Development Group
GDP	Gross National Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IDRC	International Development and Research Centre
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organizations
LWU	Lao Women Union
MoLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
NCAW	National Committee for the Advancement of Women
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
NPA	Non-Profit Associations
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
UNDP	United Nations for Development Program
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
VAW	Violence against Women
WID	Women in Development

Table of contents

Executive summary.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Abbreviations.....	5
Table of contents.....	6
List of tables.....	10
1 Introduction and background to the study.....	11
1.1 Gender and Development in the Lao PDR.....	11
1.2 The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).....	13
1.2.1 Definitions of Migration.....	14
1.2.2 International migration.....	14
1.2.3 Internal migration.....	15
1.2.4 Patterns of Migration in Lao PDR.....	15
1.2.5 External migration from Lao PDR to Thailand.....	15
1.2.6 Internal migration.....	16
1.3 Gender dimension of migration.....	17
1.4 Lao PDR national legislation related to migration.....	18
1.4.1 Laws in Lao PDR.....	18
1.4.2 Law on Development and Protection of Women.....	18
1.4.3 Penal Code.....	20
1.4.4 Memorandum of understanding.....	21
1.4.5 Universal declaration of Human Rights.....	21
1.4.6 Prime Minister Decree 68/2002.....	22
1.4.7 The Ministerial Decree No. 3824/LSW.....	22
1.4.8 ILO Conventions about people's right at work.....	22
2 Background to this report.....	23
2.1 History and Background of the Gender and Development Group (GDG).....	23

3 Methodology	25
3.1 Research Design.....	25
3.1.1 Training for interviewers	25
3.1.2 Pilot study	25
3.1.3 Learning from pilot study.....	25
3.1.4 Cooperation in the field	26
3.1.5 Interviews	26
3.1.6 Translation.....	26
3.1.7 Sampling.....	26
3.1.8 Respondents.....	26
3.2 Site descriptions	27
3.2.1 Sangthong district, Vientiane province.....	28
3.2.2 Thakhek District, Khammoun Province.....	29
3.3 Limitations of the report	29
3.4 Approach taken to migration categories	30
4 Why women migrate.....	30
4.1 Home context.....	32
4.2 Financial support	33
4.3 Education	33
4.4 Debt.....	34
4.5 Health.....	35
4.6 Consumer desires	35
4.7 Family networks.....	35
4.8 Independence and new experiences.....	36
5 Experiences of migration.....	37
5.1 Documentation.....	38
5.2 Living and working conditions.....	39
5.2.1 Factory work.....	40
5.2.2 Sales.....	40
5.2.3 Domestic work.....	41
5.2.4 Entertainment and the commercial sex trade	41

5.2.5 Working in restaurants.....	42
5.2.6 Other	43
5.3 Expectations, tensions and negotiations	44
5.3.1 Independence and freedom.....	44
5.3.2 Comparisons between old home and new home	45
5.3.3 Would you recommend migration?	46
6 Mobility	48
6.1 Moving between jobs	48
6.2 Moving between Laos and Thailand	49
7 Networks	49
7.1 Networks invoked in the decision to migrate	49
7.2 Networks while working away.....	50
7.3 Family left behind	51
7.4 Relationship with employer.....	51
7.5 Reasons for returning and future plans	53
7.6 Reasons related to their employment.....	53
7.7 Reasons related to their family	53
7.8 Reasons related to their relationship.....	54
7.9 Achieved goals.....	54
7.10 Temporary visits home	54
8 Impacts of migration.....	55
8.1 Life better or worse than before?.....	55
8.2 Intimate relationships	56
8.3 Remittances	57
8.4 Loss of human resources.....	59
8.5 Community impacts	59
9 Risks of migration	59
9.1 Stigma.....	60
9.2 Illegality and dealing with the police.....	60
9.3 Trafficking	61
9.4 HIV/AIDS and health services.....	64

10 Discussion	64
10. 1 Addressing the root causes of migration.....	65
10.1.1 Financial difficulties	65
10.1.2 Debt	65
10.1.3 Funding education.....	65
10.1.4 Funding family healthcare.....	65
10.1.5 Networks.....	65
10.1.6 Consumer desires	66
10.1.7 Desire for new experiences.....	66
10.2 Forms of violations of migrant workers' rights.....	66
10.2.1 Labour exploitation	66
10.2.2 Restriction of liberty	66
10.3 Awareness of rights and awareness of risks.....	67
11 Concluding recommendations.....	68
Bibliography	69
Annex	72

List of tables

Table 3.1.8.1 Number of respondents within each category

Table 3.1.8.2 Age of respondents

Table 3.1.8.3 Ethnic identity of surveyed women

Table 5.1 Documentation of the migrant workers

Table 5.2 Occupation of interviewed migrant workers

1 Introduction and background to the study

This report outlines the finding of a qualitative research study by Gender Development Group looking at women and migration in Lao PDR and linking these findings to the existing academic literature in this field.

In this introductory section we set the study within the broad context of gender and development in Lao PDR, within the more specific field of migration. We go on to explore the links between these two fields and examine the relevant policy and legislation context in Lao PDR. Finally we introduce Gender Development Group (GDG) the non-profit association which carried out this research.

1.1 Gender and Development in the Lao PDR¹

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is located in the centre of the Mekong Region, one of the fastest growing regions of South-East Asia in economic terms. The country is land locked and is bordered by Thailand, Myanmar, China, Vietnam and Cambodia. It is sparsely populated with 5.8 million inhabitants and a land area of 236,800 square km. Agriculture is the largest sector of the economy with 51% of Gross National Product (GDP), followed by services (26%) and industry (23%). Lao PDR is classified as one of the Least Developed Countries. Despite its abundant natural resources with high potential in forestry, agriculture, hydropower and mining, the basic infrastructure such as roads, telecommunications, water and electricity is underdeveloped. Per capita GDP increased from US\$ 322 to US\$ 491 between 2001 and 2005. Approximately 75% of the population lives on less than 2 US \$ per day and 25% on 1 US\$ per day.

In the Lao PDR, women are often the poorest among those living in poverty. Not all women are poor, but within poor households, women and girls are often more disadvantaged. The varying positions of women and men in the Lao PDR also depend on the diverse economic and socio-cultural contexts where they live, as the country is a multi-ethnic society spread across diverse geographical regions. Women living in rural and remote areas, especially among the ethnic minority groups are the most vulnerable and poor.

Lao women play critical roles in agriculture and other economic activities, and are primarily responsible for maintaining their families' food security and health². Women continue to work on farms and within the household. They are also involved in informal small-scale income earning activities, and handicraft production in order to supplement family incomes. Generally, Lao women are providing security at household level through their income generation activities, handicraft and agricultural production. Vegetable gardening for family and some extra for the market is usually the responsibility of women, as well as keeping pigs, and poultry raising.

In spite of their major economic contribution, women are generally not considered as workers. However, Lao women, particularly Lao Loum³ women, do control household budgets and share in financial decision making. Men and women make different contributions to food security and

¹ This section of the report is taken from the GDG Strategic Plan 2008-10

² GRID/LWU-World Bank (2006) Gender Profile

³ Lao Loum is collective name for several ethnic groups, used in former division of population by ethnicity

household income. Both men and women spend similar amounts of time on agricultural work (2.5 hours and 2.3 hours respectively), and in total (including agricultural work), men spend 5.2 hours on income generating activities, versus 4.5 hours for women.

While men and women both enjoy equal access to land under the laws of the Lao PDR, customary practices often over-ride official laws. The matrifocal and bilateral practices of the majority Lao Loum mean that women do most often have control of the land in Lao Loum areas.

Men are described as the heads of the households representing their families at all official meetings to discuss village development activities. Many women, especially in remote ethnic villages are illiterate. Women are not confident enough to express their opinions, and do not demonstrate simple meeting skills, such as taking turns to speak out. Therefore women cannot participate in the village development activity process fully.

Attention to gender equality in Lao PDR was given more specific attention since the mid nineties. In the Lao PDR, the legal framework for promoting gender equity consists of the Constitution (1991), the new Law on Women Development and Protection (2004), among other laws. Article 24 of the Lao Constitution grants women and men equal rights in political, economic, cultural, social, and family affairs. The objective of the Law on Women Development and Protection is to protect women's rights (political, economic, socio-cultural and familial) and benefits, promote equality between women and men, combat trafficking in women and children, and reducing domestic violence. It also promotes women's health, education and skills development by enhancing knowledge and capacities in professional training.

The policy framework for promoting gender equity is articulated in the Government's National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES), the sixth five year plan: the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2006-2010, and policies regarding population, human resource development and education, etc. In the NSED 2006-2010, gender is presented as a separate topic under the chapter of General Social Development⁴ of the plan. It is the first evidence that Gender established within general national level planning.⁵

The national plan states that "the participation of women (especially of ethnic and poorer women) is significant for achieving the goals of the poverty reduction program, education development and health development; therefore the overall strategy for Gender development in the national framework will be:

- (1) support the income generation activities of women;
- (2) improve access to basic service such education, health care and to various resources required for production;
- (3) promote the participation of women in decision making at local levels;

⁴ Sixth national five-years socio-economic development plan for 2006-2010, Part II. 6.3. /point 7

⁵ New NSED is still in draft and thus cannot be used in this study

- (4) increase the participation of women in addressing their suggestions and needs and incorporating them into the process of national planning and national policy formulation⁶”.

Gender mainstreaming, according to the national plan, aims to involve more working women in the state system, in implementation of development projects/programmes, and promoting women in decision making roles at local levels. Gender issues such as fighting violence against women (VAW⁷) in general or in areas of human and woman migrant workers/human trafficking/ and discrimination against women (DAW) are not raised in the frame of national planning. Only a few specific gender study reports on DAW and VAW in specific areas inform that the poverty of rural ethnic women is a cause of excluding women from access to means for improving their life. The lack of access to information on general development is a cause that inhibits the active participation of women in development and reduces their confidence in protecting themselves and claiming their (and their families’ rights) for their daily survival.

The main actors among the national state institutions are the Lao Woman Union (LWU) and the Lao National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCAW). The last institution was established in support of implementing the international Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The LWU and Lao NCAW are constitutionally mandated and politically endorsed to represent and protect the “rights and interests” of Lao women from all ethnic groups. The Lao government has signed CEDAW in 1979 and ratified it in 1981 but the Lao government has become more active in fulfilling its obligations only recently. The NCAW was established in 2000 which means 19 years after ratification of CEDAW, and has to ensure that CEDAW is implemented within the country, reporting every four years on progress to the international CEDAW committee

Many International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) in the Lao PDR have a gender component or programme, and this holds true for other implementing development agencies and donor programmes. The work for promoting gender equity and empowerment by these organisations is diverse, while many activities focus on raising the basic gender awareness at all levels in society, developing gender tools for awareness raising, promoting gender mainstreaming in the implementation of development projects and programmes, and promoting women’s participation and empowerment.

1.2 The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1979 and was ratified by Lao PDR in August 1981.

The Convention seeks to address all forms of discrimination against women but pays specific attention to the trafficking of women and prostitution of women. Article 6 of the convention states

⁶ Sixth national five-years socio-economic development plan for 2006-2010, Part II. 6.3. /point 7.A

⁷ VAW is used more or less synonymously for gender based violence and domestic violence

that:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”

In the concluding observations in response to Lao PDR’s sixth and seventh periodic CEDAW reports, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women “urges the State party to adopt a comprehensive gender-sensitive migration policy.... The State party is also urged to introduce gender-responsive policies, legislation and programmes to protect outgoing, returning and incoming women migrant workers, including those who go abroad through informal channels, from all forms of violation of their rights.”

The CEDAW Committee is concerned at the continued feminization of migration and that Lao women now constitute some 70 per cent of the Lao PDR’s migrants, and that women workers who migrate to other countries and regions in search of work opportunities through informal channels remain vulnerable to becoming victims of various forms of exploitation, violence and trafficking. In general CEDAW recommendations draw attention to migration in terms of issues of: gender inequality, traditional female roles, the gendered labour market, and global feminization of poverty and labour markets. More specifically it has recommended that the Lao PDR address issues such as: the root causes of migration, potential risks of migrant employment, all forms of violations of migrant workers’ rights, and that migrants be fully aware of their rights (CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/7: 12).

The concluding observations also emphasise the specific issues of trafficking women, prostitution and women working in garment factories as areas of particular concern.

1.2.1 Definitions of Migration

This report focuses specifically upon labour migration and does not discuss other forms of mobility or resettlement. According to the ILO, “migration for work is becoming an increasingly permanent feature of today’s labour markets” (ILO 2008:vii).

Migrant workers are people who leave home to find work outside of their hometown or home country. Persons who move for their work in their own country are ‘domestic’ or ‘internal’ migrant workers. Persons who move for work to another country are commonly called ‘foreign’ or ‘international’ migrant workers (ILO 2008:7).

Migrant workers can be ‘regularly admitted’ and ‘regular migrant workers’ when their entry and work are following immigration laws of the country. When migrant workers are employed without being regularly admitted, they are considered ‘irregular’ or ‘undocumented’ migrant workers (*Ibid*).

1.2.2 International migration

Research conducted by ILO shows that growing inequality between and within countries is resulting in people exploring the economic opportunities abroad.

According to the proponents, migration relieves unemployment pressures at home, filling labour

market shortages in the host country, providing workers with skills development abroad and generating remittances that can boost home economies. However, opponents claim that migration signifies the failure of the sending country to create work and causing the “brain drain”, pressure on working conditions due to inflow of migrant workers, fewer opportunities for local unskilled labour, lower productivity gains and possible threats to national security and sovereignty (ILO 2008:vii).

1.2.3 Internal migration

For the purposes of this report, internal migration refers to mobility within a country for the specific purpose of finding employment. Although there is mobility from rural to urban centres in the provinces and between provinces, most of the limited focus on internal migration in Lao PDR has been from the provinces to the capital city of Vientiane.

Writing specifically about internal migration, Phouxay (2010) explores the “feminization of rural-urban migration” in Laos with particular reference to the predominance of women working in industrial garment factories and the effects that this has on gender roles and women’s status (pg. 49)

1.2.4 Patterns of Migration in Lao PDR

Flaherty (2008) points out that migration is a two way process and that “as well as being a country of origin Lao PDR is slowly becoming a destination country for migrants” with 28,428 foreign workers reported in Lao PDR. between 2000 and 2007, mainly from Vietnam, China and Thailand [cited from The Mekong Women’s Forum ‘Lao PDR Country Profile’ presented at “Women’s Solidarity and Empowerment Against Human Trafficking and discrimination” 12-13 July 2007, Hanoi, Vietnam p.1]. This study, however, focuses purely on Lao women who migrate either within Lao PDR or to Thailand, the primary destination country for international migration.

1.2.5 External migration from Lao PDR to Thailand

The geographical position of Lao PDR makes it a transfer point for labour migration in the region. In addition, over the past decades, Lao PDR has experienced changes in its political, social and economic conditions and demographic situation which have led to an increase in population mobility. The implementation of the New Economic Mechanism reform by the government in 1986 resulted in the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented economy, in the opening of international borders, more foreign investment, regional diversification and infrastructure investments. As Laos shares borders with five countries with different political regime, cultures, levels of socioeconomic development and economic disparities, the incentives for international migration have significantly increased (Phouxay, 2010). Based on the report “Labor Migration Survey in Khammouane, Savannakhet and Champasack provinces” conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and ILO, approximately 7 per cent of the population was migratory in 2006. 74 per cent of the migrants were aged between 18 and 35 years. The primary destination country for international migration is Thailand due to the low unemployment rates, higher wages and a demand for low skilled workers. Migration to Thailand is further facilitated by cultural similarities between the two countries, including language. The number of women migrating to Thailand is slightly higher than the number of men. According to the 2007 registration by Thailand’s Ministry of Labour, the proportion of females among migrants was 53 per cent.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Lao PDR and Thailand in 2002 and in 2006 a formal system was established whereby licensed recruitment agencies recruit Lao workers for employment in Thailand. However, informal recruitment remains common, with Lao migrants either entering Thailand illegally or obtaining documentation through the use of existing networks and/or informal brokers, possibly because of the costs and extended time required to migrate through formal agencies.

“Data provided by the Lao Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW) covering the period of 1st January 2006 till 3rd January 2008 shows that a total number of 7,835 Lao migrant workers have been authorised by the Lao authorities to work abroad. Out of this total figure, 7,521 Lao migrants were recruited and sent abroad by the nine recruitment agencies that are licensed to do so, and a further 314 went independently.”(Phouxay and Huijsman, 2008). This data, however, is inevitably incomplete given the high prevalence of migration occurring out with the formally established procedures. Bertrand (2007) suggests that “estimates put the number of Lao workers in Thailand at several hundred thousand, including more than 30,000 young people, many under 15 years old”.

It is also suggested that numbers of migrants from Lao PDR to Thailand are growing. Rigg (2007:169) cites two unpublished studies, undertaken in late 2000 and 2001, which indicate that mobility between Lao PDR and Thailand is increasing, with up to 20% of some villages in Salavan working in Thailand. Both studies found that women were more likely to migrate to work in Thailand than men.

A 2007 UNIFEM report stated that only 3,105 workers from Lao PDR had actually gone to work in Thailand, of whom 1,114 were women (36%). Most women were working in the food processing, garment factories and small industrial plants. School leavers, particularly young girls may be more easily influenced by the members of their families, their friends, relatives, including recruitment agents (legal and illegal) and traffickers. Other push factors for migration include boredom with the rural lifestyle, low level of education and constant exposure to the Thai media.

1.2.6 Internal migration

Less has been written about internal migration within Laos but there can be little doubt that mobility from rural areas to urban centres is increasing (Martin 2003). Most reports tend to focus on external migration and specifically on trafficking. Therefore, in addition to women who migrate from Lao PDR to Thailand, this report explores the experiences of women who are internal migrants and seeks to highlight issues related to their experiences.

Phouxay (2010) draws on international migration literature (Mills 1997) to suggest that that “in many parts of the world, moving from rural areas to cities is seen by young people as an opportunity to earn an income but is also often regarded as an initiation into adulthood and Western culture and/or a possibility to become a ‘modern woman’ through economic independence and access to urban consumer products”. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that Thai culture, as experienced through television shows and popular music may be an even bigger draw than Western culture. The

reality, however, often varies from the expectations and “in many cases these aspirations are constrained by persistently low wages and harsh working conditions in gendered urban labour markets” (Phouxay 2010, citing Fan 2003).

Phouxay (2010) suggests that internal migration may be influenced by socio-economic development which brings increased mobility and “creates opportunities for local people (farmers) to move and seek temporary jobs in cities, and for young age groups to move for employment and higher education in the capital city, for instance”.

Internal migration is a vital field of study in itself since it may have profound effects upon all areas of the life of the women who moves (Ibid). It is also, however, important to examine the links between internal and external migration and Martin (2003) discusses that internal migration may lead to external migration:

“In some cases, the phenomenon is voluntary. For example, young women employed in factories in their home countries learn skills that can be transferred to better paying jobs in developed countries. In other cases, it may be because of lost economic opportunities in the home country.” (Martin 2003: 15)

Phouxay (2010) extends this exploration of the complex interrelationship between internal and external migration suggesting that:

“The different forms of migration must also be analyzed in relationship to each other. In general, some of the following relationships have been identified between internal and external migration. Internal migration may trigger or impede international migration, where: international migration is often preceded by internal migration, for instance, to urban centres; or internal migration may impede international migration if an internal location is the most attractive destination for potential migrants. Destinations abroad may also have a constraining effect on internal migration. International migration becomes a common alternative to internal migration, in countries with a small population and low income and may lead to less migration to urban centres, large-scale emigration and brain-drain” (Phouxay 2010:32)

1.3 Gender dimension of migration

In 1960 47 per cent of all migrant workers were women and up to year 2000 this percentage has raised up to the 50 per cent, with astonishing 95 million female migrants (ILO 2008:14).

The number of women migrating alone for work abroad appears to be growing. There is evidence that women migrants who are primary breadwinners in the family usually go abroad several times over their life cycle, some even permanently (Ibid).

Migration involves women of all age groups and educational and social backgrounds. Some women migrants have high qualification and are able to find the work consistent with their qualifications. Others come from the low-income backgrounds and with low education, usually ending up in low skilled-jobs. The employment that female and male migrants tend to undertake is different and

traditional female roles are still determining the demand for women within certain sectors: domestic work, nursing and personal care services, cleaning, entertainment and the sex trade, among others (ILO 2008:15).

Phouxay et al (2010) examines the current feminization of rural-urban migration during economic transition in Laos, with a specific focus on how migration to urban centre-based industrial factories affects gender roles and women's status in the industrial garment factories. The study also looks at the characteristics of this process in Laos, against a background of similar processes in other Southeast Asian countries, and seeks to highlight some consequences of economic transition in terms of gendered migration and the labour market. Based on fieldwork with migrant workers in a fast-growing small industrial area (Phonpapai) in Vientiane, a household survey showed that most migrant households had moved to the village between 1996 and 2005. The majority of migrants were of a young age (15-29), and within this age group there were significantly more female than male migrants. Young women had moved especially from the northern and central provinces, while more men had moved from the southern provinces. In the garment factories the great majority of workers were women, mostly from the Northern provinces. (pg. 49)

1.4 Lao PDR national legislation related to migration

1.4.1 Laws in Lao PDR

"Laws in the Lao PDR are formulated by the National Assembly. The Lao Criminal Justice System consists of the Supreme Court, three Appellate Courts (Southern, Northern and Central Region), a People's Court in each of the eighteen Provinces and 41 District Courts. Village chiefs and their deputies also have an important measure of legal authority, though they are not usually listed as part of the formal Criminal Justice System. Offences committed by villagers are supposed to go through the village mediation system first and only if satisfactory solutions cannot be found at this level, do cases go to the district court." (Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People 2006.p.v)

At the village level, illegal migrants or their families are fined a substantial amount, approximately 100,000 kip per person, per year that they are in Thailand. The following are the legal mechanisms within Lao PDR that may be used to combat trafficking.

1.4.2 Law on Development and Protection of Women

The Law of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on Women's Development and Protection was passed by the National Assembly on the 22 October 2004 and contains a specific chapter (Part IV chapter 1) that defines and criminalises human trafficking.

Article 24 defines trafficking as:

"Trafficking in women means the recruitment, hiding, moving, transportation, transfer, harbouring, [or] receipt of women, within or across national borders, by means of deception, the giving or receiving of bribes, threats, the use of force, [the use of] other forms of coercion, abduction, debt bondage or by other means[,] for forced labour, [for] prostitution, [for] publishing pornography and

what is in contradiction to fine national culture, [for] the removal of various body parts, or for other unlawful purposes. If these acts are committed against children under 18 years old, then even though there is no deception, threat, force, or debt bondage, trafficking shall be regarded to have occurred.”

Article 25 outlines the rights which victims of trafficking are entitled to. Victims have the right:

1. To ask for assistance from any individual who is nearby;
2. To notify police officers;
3. To testify and present evidence relating to the case to concerned officers;
4. To request compensation and rehabilitation in order to be reintegrated into society;
5. To receive protection and care to ensure personal safety;
6. Not to be prosecuted and detained on any charge related to the act of trafficking in women and children, such as prostitution or illegal immigration;
7. Not to be photographed, [and] not to have any video recorded or broadcast, where such would affect personal honour;
8. To receive suitable assistance in the form of shelter, food, clothes, medical services, vocational training, repatriation and others;
9. To have other rights according to laws and regulations.

Article 26 outlines the duty of society with regards to victims of trafficking. It states that:

“Individuals or organisations that discover victims of trafficking in women and children or receive data or information concerning such trafficking shall report to the village administration, the police or other concerned authorities, and shall, at the same time, give assistance to victims.”

Article 26 also places an obligation on government organisations to disseminate information on trafficking to society and to establish a national committee for prevention of trafficking in humans.⁸

Article 27 deals with criminal proceedings relating to offenders and obliges police officers to investigate the case immediately while maintaining the confidentiality and safety of the victim. They must also forward an investigation file to a prosecutor if sufficient evidence exists.

Article 28 requires that assistance be given to victims and places a responsibility on police to refer the victim to support services when criminal proceedings commence. It states that:

“During the process, police officers must cooperate with concerned counterparts such as doctors, social workers and other parties in order to give necessary and urgent assistance, to provide medical treatment and counselling services to the victims and to

⁸ The translators of this document are unsure as to whether the government ‘shall’ or ‘may’ establish a national committee for the prevention of trafficking in humans.

send them to safe shelter”.

In the case where the victims are children, there shall be special treatment to restore [their] physical and mental health and to provide assistance to [meet] the specific needs of the children, in order to ensure that those children have guardians and to help them to return to their family and society.”

Article 28 also states that the Lao embassy must provide protection and urgent assistance in the case where the victims are abroad.

Other relevant Articles include Article 49 which outlines the punishment for those convicted of trafficking in women and children; Article 51 which sets down the criminal sanctions that may be taken against an individual who does not provide assistance to a victim of trafficking, where he or she is capable of giving such assistance; and Article 52 which provides a civil remedy for victims of trafficking when the offender has been convicted.

Most of the provisions of this law would also apply to cases of internal trafficking.⁹

1.4.3 Penal Code

The Ministry of Justice in Lao conducted a review of the penal code in 2005. One of the new articles inserted was Article 134, which deals with human trafficking:

“Human trafficking means the recruitment, moving, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of any person¹⁰ within or across national borders by means of deception, threats, use of force, debt bondage or any other means [and using such person in] forced labour, prostitution, pornography, or anything that is against the fine traditions of the nation, or removing various body organs [of such person], or for other unlawful purposes.”

As can be seen the wording of this Article closely resembles the definition of human trafficking in Article 24 of the Law of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic on Women’s Development and Protection. However, it uses the word ‘person’ rather than specifying women when identifying victims. This enables prosecution against traffickers when the victims are men.¹¹ Other relevant Articles of the penal code include the following:

- Article 75 which prohibits “...encouraging and misleading people into fleeing abroad, migrating or immigrating in contravention of the laws...”
- Article 100 - Although this Article does not use the word trafficking it does include “...trade

⁹ Huguet, J.W and Ramangkura V ‘The Long Road Home: Analysis of Regional and National Processes for the Return and Reintegration of Victims of Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region’ International Organisation for Migration, Thailand, 2007 p19

¹⁰ Emphasis authors own.

¹¹ Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking ‘Gender, Human Trafficking, and the Criminal Justice System in Lao PDR’ December 2003, revised April 2006 p. 28

and abduction of human beings for ransom, sale or other purposes...”

- Article 133 - prohibits forcing another person (male or female) into prostitution.

1.4.4 Memorandum of understanding

The primary legal framework regulating formal labour migration from Lao PDR to Thailand is The *Memorandum of Understanding - MOU on Cooperation in the Employment of Workers* signed in 2002. In addition to the MOU, a number of other legal instruments exist at the international, regional, and national levels to address formal recruitment and the protection of workers. The purpose of the MOU is to manage external labour migration from neighbouring countries and to control irregular cross-border migration into Thailand. (ILO 2008:12)

MOU content

Articles I-IX of the MOU cover the process of formal recruitment from Lao PDR into Thailand. Article V states that authorized Thai agencies (consulting companies) shall inform recruiting agencies in the sending countries of job opportunities and provide them with details on the number and qualifications of workers needed, the period and conditions of employment and the remuneration offered by Thai employers. Article VI of the MOU specifies that authorized agencies (formal recruitment agencies) shall then provide their counterparts with lists of selected applicants, including workers’ ages, permanent addresses, and references. Article VII details the requirements for immigration and job placement, including the signing of employment contracts by workers. Article VIII states that recruitment agencies are responsible for the administration of the list of workers from the beginning of the recruitment process to the termination of the employment period. Article IX sets the period of employment at two years, with the possibility of an additional two-year extension. Article XI indicates that workers must make a monthly contribution of 15% of their salary to the savings or deportation fund set up by authorized agencies in the host country. Article XVIII states that workers are entitled to the same wages and benefits as local workers. It should be noted that there is no article mentioning recruitment fees in the MOU (ILO 2008:13).

The MOU describes in very general terms the institutional framework for the employment of Laotian workers through recruitment agencies. It identifies the Thai Ministry of Labour and the Lao Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MOLSW) as the authorised agencies to carry out the MOU (Article 2). The process of labour migration from Lao PDR to Thailand is described in more detail in the Prime Minister Decree 68/2002 *Export of Lao Workers Abroad* (2002) and in guidelines No. 2417/MOLSW *On Implementation of Decree on Export of Lao Workers Abroad* (2002). In addition, document number 3824/MOLSW sets out a series of restrictions on the recruitment of certain types of professions for labour abroad (2002). Prime Minister Decree 68/2002 outlines in Article 1 the main motivations for sending Laotian workers abroad.

1.4.5 Universal declaration of Human Rights

Despite much talk about migrants’ rights the Universal Declaration on Human Rights is rather ambiguous about migration. It states in Article 13 (2) that ‘everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own and to return to his country’. Hence, the Universal Declaration does *not*

include a right to work in a country other than one's own or an obligation that a third country should accept migrant workers. However, it is important to note that flows of capital, which in most cases subsequently need labour, are subject to quite different governing frameworks. (Phouxay and Huijsman 2008: 10)

1.4.6 Prime Minister Decree 68/2002

Prime Minister Decree 68/2002 outlines in Article 1 the main motivations for sending Laotian workers abroad. Through regularisation of labour migration, the Lao government aims to expand the quantity and variety of workplaces available to Laotian workers; other pragmatic objectives include upgrading the skills, knowledge, and expertise of Laotian workers in both technical and professional fields (2002). The Decree further outlines the criteria Laotian workers must meet in order to be considered for recruitment through formal channels. Article 3 stipulates that migrants must hold Lao PDR citizenship, be 18 years or older on the date of application, have completed primary school education, be in good health, and be a good citizen (2002). In practice this means that potential migrants must minimally have a family book to prove their age and citizenship (or an identity card or passport), a school-leaving certificate, a criminal clearance reference from local authorities, and a health certificate. Document 3824/MOLSW (2002) provides a further set of limitations regarding the recruitment of Laotian workers abroad. Part 2 of document 3824/MOLSW lists three categories of vocations that are banned from labour migration: 1) unskilled workers such as cleaners, domestic workers, and porters; 2) vocations that are inappropriate and incompatible with the Lao tradition, culture and law, such as work in the sex sector, work with narcotics or illegal political activities and 3) dangerous occupations such as open sea fishing, exposure to radioactive radiation, etc. (ILO 2008: 16)

1.4.7 The Ministerial Decree No. 3824/LSW

This decree is dated 19 December 2002. It prohibits Lao Migrants from working in professions or locations that are illegal, toxic or “disgraceful”. Accordingly, Lao workers are not permitted to migrate to work as house maids and cleaners.

Note on domestic work

Domestic work has one of the largest amounts of Lao workers in Thailand, more than other specific work such as agriculture or construction. The Thai government acknowledges domestic work as a sector where migrants can register and receive a work permit. However, protections issues are not taken fully into account. Under the Thai and Lao Labor law, domestic work has not been fully protected as a form of labour and the issuing of working contracts for this kind of workers has not been practiced. Consequently, domestic workers, mostly women, cannot obtain visa and permits to stay and work legally and are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse as they are not recognized as workers (Phetsiriseng, 2007).

1.4.8 ILO Conventions about people's right at work

Lao PDR has also ratified three of the eight Fundamental ILO Conventions about people's right at

work: Convention 29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour, Convention 130 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

2 Background to this report

This report was funded by UN Women in order to address gaps and omissions in the data for several key indicators related to women and migration in the previous round of CEDAW reporting. The report combines the findings from a qualitative research study looking at women's experiences of migration and a consideration of existing literature looking at migration in Lao PDR.

The key objectives of the report are:

- To collect data on migrant women workers for the 2011 submission to the CEDAW Committee;
- To identify gaps between policies and reality in relation to women's rights in Lao PDR in areas of migrant women workers;
- To build capacity of GDG staff and member organizations on data collation and analysis
- To suggest improvements in the mechanisms with which to support women who are affected by migration in Lao PDR.
- This report will look at both internal and external migration with less specific focus upon trafficking in order to focus upon the gaps in existing information. It will integrate data collected for this study with existing relevant literature.

2.1 History and Background of the Gender and Development Group (GDG)¹²

GDG is a transformed version of the earlier Women in Development (WID) network that was formed at the end of 1991. In collaboration with the Lao Women's Union, International NGOs, UNICEF, and other donors active in women and gender development, this group was formed to focus on gender issues in the Lao PDR.

In 1995, with support from the WID network, a large group of INGO's and the LWU participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China. After the group returned from Beijing, more meetings and discussions were held to share information and experiences from the Forum with others within the INGO's that were unable to attend.

In 1996 WID held a consultative meeting to brainstorm, plan, and strategize. It was agreed at that meeting to change the name of WID to the "Gender and Development Group (GDG)" in order to reflect the goals of the group more accurately. This includes focusing on both women *and* men in the area of development. Additionally, it was also agreed that the newly named group should be guided by an umbrella organization. World Education was then selected to be GDG's first umbrella

¹² This section of the report is taken from the MTE Terms of Reference

organization.

However, in the middle of the year 2000, World Education closed its office in the Lao PDR. GDG then organized an evaluation with assistance from an outside consultant. The resulting report recommended that GDG set up a meeting with its advisory committee and member organizations to decide GDG's future. A meeting was set up, and it was decided that GDG would continue its activities while improving its structure, goals, and objectives. CUSO Lao PDR then became the new umbrella organization for GDG.

In October 2000, a new team of the GDG advisory committee was established and GDG moved to the headquarters of CUSO Lao PDR in December of that year. Since August 2005 Concern Worldwide has been the new umbrella organization for GDG.

In August 2005, GDG moved to the new umbrella of Concern Worldwide, and at the same time obtained funding from Roncolli International Foundation in Canada. With this and as recommended by an evaluation carried out in 2000, a Women's Empowerment pilot project in Sangthong District, Vientiane Capital was initiated; in December 2006 funding was received from Oxfam Novib to continue phase II of the Women's Empowerment pilot project.

Currently, there are twenty three INGOs and Non-Profit Association (NPA) members that contribute to GDG's operational costs as members by paying an annual membership fee of US\$300. GDG has also received past project funding for its Violence against Women Research Project from the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC) and Canada Fund, and for the Sustainable Women's Empowerment project from the Roncolli International Foundation, as well as past core funding from CUSO Lao PDR and Global Fund for Women. In the period 2008-2010 GDG funding support came from Oxfam-Novib, UNIFEM/UN Women and GEF/UNDP. New funding partnerships are also agreed with the French Embassy and the Asia Foundation. In the meantime, Oxfam-Novib and UN Women will continue to support the work of GDG according to the current Strategic Plan 2011-2015.

Within the strategic plan for Gender Development Group (GDG) for the period 2011-2015 the vision is that *"GDG wants to contribute to a society where women are empowered and can live in society without violence and discrimination. Therefore, GDG wants to achieve that women can work along with men to reduce poverty and benefit from opportunities for development."* Thus, the mission claims that to achieve the vision, *GDG will work for more joint action, information, knowledge and expertise on gender mainstreaming and gender based discrimination.*

Action areas of Gender and Development Group are:

- a) Facilitating the involvement of civil society in CEDAW monitoring.
- b) Strengthening GDG as a resource centre on Violence Against Women
- c) Facilitating increased cooperation, learning, accountability, good governance and leadership among member and partner organizations.
- d) Focus on gender issues with different ethnic groups

- e) Promoting women's income and empowerment in rural areas.
- f) Working towards institutional and financial sustainability

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Training for interviewers

Interviewers conducting this study were 6 GDG interns, mainly students from the Faculty of Social Science and Environmental Studies. They have been trained in skills of interviewing and understanding the concept of migration as well as understanding the qualitative and quantitative survey. Training on personal skills was conducted during data collection in the field. Gender and Development Group had an external freelance consultant to assist the interviewers along the process. Interviewers could learn and practice their skill during the 2-days workshop and pilot studies - 2 days in Vientiane and 1 day in Sangthong. The questionnaire was drafted by an SNV volunteer and during the course of the workshop it was changed and modified to fit the needs of research.

3.1.2 Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted in Vientiane central, by the river Mekong, around the monument of Patouxay, at central and south buss stations in central and south Vientiane. Pilot interviews lasted for one and a half days and half a day was planned for feedback. In Sangthong, the pilot study was conducted in the village Ban Khokhe for one day.

3.1.3 Learning from pilot study

The aim was to explore the target group and test the skills of the interviewers, speed of interviews and the ability to access the details (depth of interviews). Also, a very important part of the pilot study was to explore the target group. What the team learned about the target group is that it was easy to find internal migrants in the villages but not external/international migrants. However, would-be migrants were difficult to find and those that were willing to share their plans did not provide enough information to analyse their situation. This is why findings from would-be migrants have not been included in analysis. Interviewers noticed that it was fairly difficult to identify returnees and would be migrants in public places in Vientiane. However, some potential interviewees were found by the international platform at the bus station, travelling to Thailand. The team were able to meet returnees and potential would be migrants in Sangthong. The pilot study in Sangthong was carried out by new volunteers and these were the same interviewers for a pilot study about Domestic Violence that GDG was also conducting. The fact that the interviewers had to do the pilot study on Domestic Violence one day and Migration next day meant switching from quantitative to qualitative methods in one day and had some consequences on the results of the pilot study. However, what the team found most difficult during the study was time deficiency. Although the interviewers were advised to ask more questions when they heard some interesting information, they found this difficult given the short time allocated for every interview.

3.1.4 Cooperation in the field

During the research, District staff of Lao Women's Union was part of the team. This successfully facilitated contact with local people, but at the same time made the team coordination difficult. Close cooperation between interviewers and Lao Women's Union staff was essential as this contact has built trust among interviewees to tell their stories.

3.1.5 Interviews

Interviews had been conducted according to already prepared questions (see Annex). The technique used was "snow-ball sampling", asking women who had already been interviewed if they knew more people who would fit the criteria of the research. However, this caused some small degree of uneasiness among women who were afraid of being in trouble, supposedly by revealing information. Lao Women's Union district staff has been accompanying the interviewers to the field and this has also caused a fear of revealing information about others. Prior to the interviews, criteria had been given to LWU. However, there was a misunderstanding about criteria and there were difficulties in finding target groups. Another important observation is that volunteers were following the questionnaire and did not have space for deeper discussions. In some situations, interviews had to be done very fast since people were waiting in lines. During the pilot study, interviewers could relax, but for the time of field research interviewers had to work faster and be more efficient. At the same time, technical device for recording of the information has not been used, due to budget limitations.

3.1.6 Translation

The team had difficulties with translation, because only one translator was doing the work. There was no time to translate all information after every day on the field. This delay in translations also caused difficulties in receiving feedback from the international external consultant, thus interviews could not be improved and adjusted.

3.1.7 Sampling

There were 3 types of migration studied during this research: internal migrants, returnees and would-be migrants. Internal migrants were surveyed in public places where they usually gather or in the places where they presumably could work. Criteria for this group were young women below the age of 25, coming from other provinces, as it has been perceived that women of this age usually migrate within the country.

Returnees and would-be migrants were found and interviewed in the villages. Using the given criteria, Lao Women's Union and village police chose the respondents and directed the team to these women.

3.1.8 Respondents

The total number of surveyed women was 99. Breakdown of this number by categories, age and ethnic group is shown below.

Categories	Internal migrants	Returnees	Would-be migrants
Number of respondents	31	57	11

Table 3.1.8.1 Number of respondents within each category

Age	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Internal		1	1	1	4	4	3	3	1	6	1	5	1	
Returnee	2		3	5	3	8	8	5	4	6	2	7	2	2
Would-be migrants			3	3		1	1	1	1			1		

Table 3.1.8.2 Age of respondents

	Not mentioned	Lao Loum	Phouthai ¹³	Khamoo	Hmong	Thaidam ¹⁴
Internal	8	7		7	4	3
Returnee	43	16				
Would-be migrants	5	5	1			

Table 3.1.8.3 Ethnic identity of surveyed women

3.2 Site descriptions

Research was conducted in two provinces: Vientiane and Khammoun. Closer description of the research sites follows.

¹³ According to the former division of ethnic groups, Phouthai belongs to the Lao Loum ethnic group

¹⁴ According to the former division of ethnic groups, Thaidam belongs to the Lao Loum ethnic group

3.2.1 Sangthong district, Vientiane province¹⁵

Sangthong District is the poorest district in Vientiane Prefecture. It is located between the Phouphanang mountain range and the Mekong River. In the north the district shares a border with Hinheub District, in the south with Sykhotthabong District, in the east with Phouphanang Mountain and in the west with Thailand. There are 37 villages in this district, made up of 4,503 households with the total population of 23,349 people. Women make up nearly half of this population (11,434 people). The majority of the population are farmers working on rice cultivation. Although Sangthong district is only about 75 kilometres from Vientiane, access to the district is very poor. In the dry season, people leave the district to find better jobs in Vientiane or across the river to Thailand. The main income generating activity in the district is making sheets of plaited bamboo, to be used for walls. The sheets are sometimes sent to Thailand and sometimes sold in the village.

Villages involved in the research are:

Donkangkhong village: about 21 km from the district centre and 10 minutes boat ride from land. The village was formed in 1986, when people from the Lao Loum ethnic group had moved here from many villages. The population of the village is 442 people (221 women) forming 79 households and 80 families.

Samphanna village: about 25 km from the district centre. The village is populated by Lao Loum ethnic group who settled down here already in 1620. The population of the village is 1,717 people (780 women), forming 358 households and 362 families.

Hinelup village: about 12 km from the district centre. People from the Lao Loum ethnic group moved here from many places in Vientiane; they came to visit their relatives and stayed here permanently since 1970. The population of the village is 413 people (201 women), forming 79 households and 84 families.

Hitay village: about 7 km from the district centre. People from the Lao Loum ethnic group moved here from Donkhamphorm to explore farming land and the village was established in 1878. Village population is 1,658 people (821 women), forming 225 households and 238 families.

Huaykham village: about 13 km from the district centre. People from the Lao Loum and Khamoo ethnic groups came to this village as part of an initiative by the Government in 2002 to give poor and homeless people a place to stay. The village population is 950 people (474 women); forming 173 households and 164 families.

Parktone village: about 16 km from the district centre. People from two ethnic groups Lao Loum and Khamoo live in this village where the Ton stream meets Mekong and people named the place Parkton village. There is a population of 1,524 people (774 women), forming 305 households and 229 families.

Other places of the interview were **Chao Anouvong Monument** by the Mekong riverbank and

¹⁵ This part has been used from GDG report on Rural Domestic Violence, 2004

Patouxay Monument in Vientiane city centre.

3.2.2 Thakhek District, Khammoun Province

Thakhek district is a district in the centre of Khammoun province. Due to its position, many government offices are located there. District area is 91800 hectare. Thakhek shares borders with Hinbun district and Nyom mala district in the North, Nong Bok district and Xebanfay district in the South, Mahasay district in the East and a Western border is with Thailand. It comprises of 91 villages in 5 sub-unit villages. The district has 15 965 households, 16 321 families and the total population is 85 580 people (44 066 women). People in the area are mainly working on their rice fields and paddy fields. Growing vegetables, flower and fruit are also common occupations. Export from this area is very strong, mainly agriculture products and non-timber forest products. One interesting development in this district is that third friendship bridge has been built and officially opened recently, aiming to open the district to increased tourism in the near future.

Thakgnam village: about 20 km from the district centre. Members of the Lao Loum ethnic group moved here from Nongkue village after villagers got problems with diarrhoea and the village was established in 1866. The village population is 2,000 people (1,030 women), forming 333 households and 312 families.

Nayawai village: about 5 km from the district centre. Members of the Lao Loum ethnic group has moved here from Namueng village to explore farming land and the village was established in 1970. The population of the village is 623 people (321 women), forming 126 households and 138 families.

Dongtai village: about 15 km from the district centre. People from the Lao Loum ethnic group lives in this area since 1835. The village population is 1,772 people (931 women), forming 310 households and 297 families.

Southern Bus station: The bus station where all the buses to the South of Laos leave from and come to the district. Also **3rd km Market**, located 3 kilometres from the central province has been a place of the interviews.

3.3 Limitations of the report

This is the first research on migration that Gender and Development Group has conducted. The team is still learning about qualitative research and the practicalities of doing research in Laos.

By using volunteers, GDG had to manage the limitations of their skills and knowledge about qualitative research and migration issues. However, this was done intentionally so GDG staff will learn how to conduct qualitative research. Another limitation connected to the volunteers is that the drop-out and changes in personnel through the research process were very high.

There was a certain reluctance of village authorities to give information on migration and potential migrants. Also, the team has faced the difficulty of finding the would-be migrants. Furthermore is important to emphasize that women who have chosen to stay in Thailand (or other countries) are not represented in this study. However, this limitation is somewhat mitigated by the inclusion of

several case studies from women who express an intention to return to Thailand.

There were limitations in methodology and there are changes that would be made in hindsight. Focus was on collection of qualitative data. However, techniques of data collection had to be improved from one case to the other and given the high turn-over of interviewers and training limitations this was a very challenging task.

Interviews were conducted during the election for the members of parliament and this has caused difficulties in the villages. During this time, government has appealed for all people over age of 18 to come back to Laos for election and level of security in the villages was high. This is why cooperation with village authorities was problematic and without this cooperation it was difficult for GDG team to move through the villages. Furthermore, the research team was not allowed to stay in the villages, which means opportunities to interview right people at times convenient to the women involved were diminished and limited.

3.4 Approach taken to migration categories

This study seeks to emphasise the experiences of internal women migrants, whose experiences have been under-represented in the literature so far. The stories of the women who participated in the study suggest that, while economic migration to urban centres in Lao PDR may be a positive experience for some women, it also exposes women to many of the challenges and risks associated with external migration. Several women who participated in the study move between the two categories at different points in time and the relationship between internal and external migration is complex and fluid.

Therefore, for the purposes of this report the case studies of women's experiences of internal and external migration have been considered together, although where appropriate attention is drawn to the places where particular themes are more relevant to one group or the other.

4 Why women migrate

The following four sections examine the case studies provided by the women who participated in this study and links the themes emerging from these case studies to the available data on women and migration in Lao PDR.

Section 3 examines the reasons that women in this study gave for migrating to look for work. It is important to point out that most women did not give one distinct reason; rather they expressed some combination of reasons. Therefore bearing in mind that some women gave more than one reason for their decision to migrate, the most common reasons discussed were, in order of frequency and divided into internal migrants and returnees from Thailand:

Internal migrants:

Family financial support (19)

Independence and new experiences (7)

Education (4)
Debt (1)
Consumer desires (1)

Returnees:

Family Financial Support (42)
Independence and new experiences (7)
Consumer Desires (6)
Health (5)
Debt (4)
Education (3)
Following family networks (1)

Whilst emphasising the complex interlinks between ‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ factors involved in the decision to migrate Rigg (2007) suggests that “there is little doubt that the prevailing force driving mobility in Laos – and I would also think in other countries in the region – is economic” (pg. 169). This would seem to be supported by the accounts given by the women who participated in this study. As Rigg suggests, however, it is important not to reduce these accounts to a simple desire for financial gain. The need for money to provide education and healthcare hints at wider social themes and challenges.

Molland (2010) suggests that relative poverty (a comparison between one’s own socio-economic situation and the socio-economic situation of others) rather than absolute poverty is a key factor in decisions to migrate. This is supported by quantitative evidence which suggests a correlation between migration and villagers with medium levels of income and also suggests that (with a possible exception of people who have been resettled being vulnerable to trafficking: MLSW/UNICEF, 2004) the poorest of the poor tend not to migrate (Adams and Page, 2003; MLSW/UNIAP, 2001; MLSW/ILO, 2003; MLSW/UNICEF, 2004).

The rationale behind this argument is that it is not so much poverty, but perceived better life options elsewhere which motivate people to migrate. The issue therefore becomes one of inequalities and aspirations rather than necessarily a need to reduce absolute poverty. Poverty was cited as a cause (of trafficking) but equally the desire for material goods, land, modern conveniences and permanent housing was of equal motivation" (MLSW/UNICEF, 2004). There seems to be a conflation between poverty, consumerism, lack of jobs and desire for material possessions (Molland in JuthPakai: 29-31).

Tan and Bertrand (2007) find similarly that one factor in many women migrated to Thailand was that they had heard that it was a beautiful country and they link this to the way that the “media portrays life in Thailand as affluent, easy, trendy, and modern, thereby promoting notions of consumerism and materialism towards which many Laotians aspire” (pg. 10). These findings are mirrored in this study by the stories that women hear about “beautiful Vientiane” and about Thailand as a modern country where they can make easy money. Although women in this study did

not mention the media as a factor in their choices, it is fair to assume that many women will have seen media portrayals of life in both Vientiane and Thailand and that these portrayals, along with stories told by existing and previous migrants may have been a factor in imagining a new possible life.

4.1 Home context

With very few exceptions, the women who contributed to this study come from families whose primary source of income is farming rice.

However, of these rice farming families, a large majority were not able to make enough money to survive solely by growing rice and had diversified to a range of other income generating activities. These activities were extremely varied and included: growing other crops such as corn, cassava, beans and vegetables, raising animals and fish, selling food, candy and clothes in small stores, weaving silk or rice boxes, working on rubber plantations, selling timber forest products or herbs for Chinese medicine and doing contract work on other land in the village. The inability to generate sufficient income from rice farming and the challenges of managing different income generating activities was frequently given as a reason for migration.

“My parents work as a rice farmer now and I also work as a rice farmer too - I help to take care of their farm. Every year our crop was more than 20 bags and one bag might weight like 25 kg...We also had a little store where we sold candy and food. One day we can earn about 50,000 kip or 60,000 but sometimes we might get up to 100,000 – 150,000 kip from our little store...but the money in the house isn’t enough ...the reason that I want to go work in another country is because I want my family to have a happy life with no need to have money problems in their mind. Now we have to stop our little store because the money we got we need to buy food into the house and we have no money left to buy more things in the big store to sell in our little store. Now my parent have no money coming from the store and that makes the condition in my family harder now. My mind is only thinking about money because I want my father to have a happy life. I don’t want him to work hard, I want to help him, that was the reason why I decide to find a job in other country. (Returnee: aged 22)

In a small number of case studies women stated that their family had careers outside of farming. One woman said that her father is a farmer and her mother a teacher. Another said that her father used to be a doctor in the district hospital and now runs a medical shop.

One woman stated that her parents used to be farmers but now they are dependent upon migrant children for their income.

“Now my parents cannot do any work, just only the children who went to work outside - both of my younger brothers who are working in VTE and only me working in Thailand.” (Returnee: aged 25)

A significant group of women state that rice farming is not an all year round activity and that the time when they are not farming is time when they can look for other income generating options, one

of these options being migrating to look for work elsewhere.

“after finish farming season I did not have work to do for income of family so that I decided to go work in Thailand” (Returnee: aged 24)

4.2 Financial support

Financial difficulties were by far the most common reason cited for women migrating either within Laos or to Thailand. Most commonly these difficulties related to either their family's inability to meet their financial needs or (more specifically) to an inability to finance the education of either the respondent or her siblings.

The most common perceived financial problem is related to an inability to grow enough rice to sustain the family, sometimes linked to a large number of people in the family to support.

“In each year, the family grow 60 sacks of rice but this is not enough to sell. The family get income from doing work in the village such as harvesting. She got 200.000 – 300.000 Kip per month but not enough money to save. Her family has many problems such as many family members, and most of them are young people, also studying.” (Returnee: aged 20)

The financial needs of the family and a desire or sense of responsibility to support the family to have a better life were an important consideration in the decision to migrate for almost all of the women who contributed to this. For some women the decision to migrate is about making more money in a fairly generic sense and the most common expectations were a high salary (often with an amount stated about how much they expected to earn). However, for others there is a concrete idea of what they want to achieve related to their particular circumstances or their family circumstances. The most common specific goal cited by women was to earn enough money to build a house for her family.

The link between the actions of the daughter and the perceived benefits for the household are a clear theme in the majority of the accounts but this is rarely expressed in terms of individual sacrifice. Cecilia Tacoli has published a paper in 1996 which looked at migration in Thailand with the title 'Migrating “for the sake of the family” a theme that is mirrored in Tan et al's (2007) writing about migration in Laos where one migrant's sacrifice –usually a so-styled 'dutiful daughter' – becomes the household's collective gain. However, while the reader might recognize this theme in the stories from this study, the women themselves talk about concern for their family rather than personal sacrifice. While financial benefits for the family were often key in the decision to migrate other factors related to the individual (such as new experiences, individual freedom and financial gain, see below) also played a part.

4.3 Education

Education puts pressure on a family both in terms of the money required to keep children in school and the lower levels of labour available because children are in school. Many women interviewed suggest that they left school for either one or both of the connected reasons that they needed to help with their families farming activities or their families could not afford to keep them in education.

Yet education is widely seen as an important and valuable commodity which the additional income from migration can support and which is seen as having the potential to address some issues related to relative poverty. The financial pressures of education, therefore, feature strongly in the case studies with several women suggesting that a key reason for migrating was that, since they were not able to get an education themselves, they wanted to fund their siblings' education. Tan et al (2007) argue that given the necessity of education for accessing employment in the modern sectors of the economy, this can be viewed as raising the human capital of the non-migrant sibling and, by extension, the household (2007:7).

"The main reason why she made the decision to leave her home town was that she did not have money to study and her parents could not earn enough money to give a good education to all of their children, since they are many....She hoped that she could find a good income by herself and if she could earn more money she wanted to support her brother and sister to study in her home town." (Internal migrant: aged 19)

Although there is no clear evidence that gender played a role in deciding which sibling would support which sibling's education, there does appear to be an element of sacrifice in these stories and one woman talked about moving to Vientiane to work with the sole intention of financially supporting her brother's university education.

"Her family has a financial problem even though their income is quite high because they have to send money to her brother who studies at the National University of Laos, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Architecture. So this was the reason why she made decision to go to Vientiane and find a job because in this way she could help her parents earn some money... So her brother told her to work there and her parents also agreed for her to go and find a job in Vientiane because her brother is there...From this money, she has been able to give half to her brother for his studies." (Internal migrant: aged 20)

4.4 Debt

Several women cited the need to repay family debt as a key factor in their decision to move to Vientiane or Thailand for work. Where the reason for the debt and the amount owed were stated they varied widely from 500,000 kip for a piece of land to 12,000,000 kip for a tractor to 8,000,000 to pay for an operation

"My family met problem of debt of 10,000,000 Kip because my father helped his younger brother... then the Government announced the project expanding rice fields for villagers so that we have to pay a fee for a tractor of 12,000,000 Kip and we have to return money in 5 years. So this made me decide to work abroad." (Returnee: aged 17)

"expenditure of my family is rice and milk for my child, but income and spending do not balance so I have much debt so that I had to go to work in Thailand to get money pay back for debt" (Returnee: aged 24)

4.5 Health

In some cases linked closely to debt (see above), financial concerns related to healthcare were also a factor cited several times in the decision to migrate.

“The goal of going to work in Thailand this time was to get money to treat myself because I had a goiter since I was kid.” (Returnee: aged 22)

“Our family had the problem that my Mom was sick with consumption and had still not had treatment because we did not have enough money...the reason that I went to work in Thailand to get more money.” (Returnee: aged 14)

“My mum has bad tarsal bones and my father needs to operate on his body so I really need money for my parent’s treatment.” (Returnee: aged 19)

4.6 Consumer desires

While the goals above are largely related to family need, a small number of women mentioned expectations that might be considered more individual consumerist desires.

“The reason, she went to Thailand was because of the money. She thought that when she get the money, she will buy a mobile phone, clothes and others... because she saw some friends of her, they had very nice clothes to wear and nice mobile phone to use.” (Returnee: aged 19)

“In the house in my family we got no problem because our business is go well and my problem is I want a job that made a lot of money” (Returnee: aged 21)

4.7 Family networks

Networks of family, friendships and acquaintances featured highly in the reasons why women chose to migrate, both in terms of expectations raised by existing migrants and practical support provided. Women’s expectations were all generated (either directly or indirectly) by friends, family or acquaintances who had previously migrated or who knew of people who had previously migrated. The stories told in this study strongly reflect the importance of other stories told in turn by previous migrants and of support provided by these friends and acquaintances.

“Before I went to Thailand I did not know anything about Thailand, just my friend told me that working abroad is easy to earn much money and you could get what you want if you work in Thailand” (Returnee: aged 17)

“she wanted to help her mother find some money and at that time her friend advised her to work with them, she said that it was a work that could make more money.” (Internal migrant: aged 23)

Many women followed a close family member or friend to Vientiane or Thailand and these existing networks feature strongly in many of the women's stories. Where this connection is related to close family it often appears to act as a "safety net", reassuring the woman's parents and providing practical information about jobs, accommodation and paperwork processes.

"At the beginning, her mom did not let her go to Thailand because she is a child and afraid of trafficking. Anyway, her older sister was there, so her mom let her go." (Returnee: aged 23)

There is the potential, however, that these family networks may also put pressure on young women to migrate. Many of the women's stories talk of parents who 'agreed' for their daughter to move to Vientiane or Thailand but it is difficult to assess whether this agreement was agreeing with their daughter's decision or pressuring her to do something that she does not want to do. Given the responsibility felt towards family and the prominence of familial family difficulties as a key reason for migration, it may be reasonable to suspect a level of pressure in some of the women's stories. Occasionally a sense of this pressure seeps through into the stories:

"The thing that encouraged her to work in Vientiane was that her parents told her to help them make income." (Internal migrant: aged 23)

4.8 Independence and new experiences

While many of the reasons considered above pertain to responsibility to and desire to support family, some women and indeed their parents expressed their reason for migration in terms of freedom and independence from their family and their family's way of life.

"Her parents have agreed with her decision to go and find a job in Vientiane. They wanted her to have her own life and have a job, but not to work on the field." (Internal migrant: aged 19)

(before she went to Vientiane) "she thought if she had a job she would have money to provide for own needs, her life will be better and she will also enjoy learning new things... (Now)her plan for the future is that she wants to live in Vientiane and she does not need any help. She sees that some of her fiends already have a house so it makes her want to improve her life and have a house where she can live together with her family. Also when she has children they could get a good education and learn about new technology."(Internal migrant: aged 23)

"Before came to Vientiane her parents agreed with her because her mom would like to see her have her own life and get away from doing the rice farming." (Internal migrant: aged 21)

Linked to a desire for independence, many of the women interviewed expressed a curiosity about living in Vientiane or Thailand and a desire to learn about a different way of life in either the city or a different country. In several women's accounts this was related to a friend or relative who told stories of "beautiful Vientiane".

"Her friend who used to work in Vientiane said that Vientiane is so beautiful with many

interesting things to see and do there so that made her want to come and live in Vientiane.”
(Internal migrant: aged 19)

5 Experiences of migration

Section four looks at the actual experiences of the process of migration for the women who contributed to this study. It starts with the process (or lack of process) of acquiring documentation, through the working and living conditions that the women experience including some specific themes that emerge from the actual experiences of migration and finishing with (for returnees) their reason for returning home. The themes that are examined are: expectations and tensions, mobility, networks and the women's relationship with their employer.

Whilst there are similarities that emerge to help us to describe women's experiences of migration, the clearest theme that jumps out of the case studies is the range of different stories that they portray. Neither internal nor international migration is a simple decision leading to a clearly determined experience. A complex interplay between home circumstances, a series of choices made for a variety of interconnected reasons, networks of existing and new relationships, personal characteristics and, sometimes, a sprinkling of (either good or bad) luck impact upon the experience that the women interviewed for this study had of migration.

Phouxay (2010) found that among female migrant workers, there was an underlying contradiction between women's own descriptions of their responsibilities, restricted lives and hard work and the negative images projected on them by employers, the surrounding urban society and their villages of origin. This contradiction is reflected in the stories of many of the women here, who work hard and long hours with the aim of supporting their family and yet had to struggle against negative images of female migrant workers being associated with sex work and/or 'bad behaviour'.

There also emerges, however, another contraction. While it is impossible to deny that many of the women's stories describe difficult and sometimes traumatic circumstances there also exist positive moments of kindnesses shown, goals achieved, new experiences enjoyed, strengths discovered, choices made and lives improved.

This links to Molland's (2010) critique of a clear dichotomy between voluntary migration and trafficking. While there are women's stories in this study that clearly represent either side of this distinction, there are many stories that contain an element of ambiguity. Writing specifically about the sex industry, Molland problematises the idea of abusive brokers who are only interested in profitability, recognizing that "demand" is not one-way and that brokers may genuinely consider that they are providing a service or helping women who want to find ways to make money. This idea is equally reflected in employers in different industries represented in this study, who are considered by the women that they employ to be kind and respectful and yet objectively demand long hours of hard work for relatively low pay. Flaherty (2008) discusses how "experiences of being force to work, not being given enough food, or allowed enough rest, and not being allowed to leave the factory that they worked in" were considered normal by migrants who did not understand their

rights (pg 52).

This is complicated further by the evidence from this study that brokers and/or people who help women to find work are rarely people who are completely unknown to the women looking to migrate. Networks of family friends and acquaintances are key to the quality of experience and yet they are complicated by multiple needs, agendas and responsibilities that are rarely explicitly calculated or articulated.

5.1 Documentation

For women migrating to work in Thailand, the issue of arranging documentation was key. The women expressed a desire to have the correct documentation wherever possible and yet there often appeared to be a lack of knowledge and a level of trust placed in other people to make the necessary arrangements.

The following table illustrates that the majority of women who migrated to Thailand for work did obtain documentation. However, it is difficult to understand from the case studies exactly what documentation was obtained in each case. For example, some women obtained a work visa while others were working with a passport and tourist visa that had to be renewed every month. Undocumented indicates that the women stated that they had no documentation at all when they migrated to Thailand.

	Documented	Undocumented	Not specified
Returnee	38	18	4

Table 5.1 Documentation of the migrant workers

While some women went through formal brokers to arrange passports and documentation, more often this was done through informal networks of friends, family and acquaintances. As mentioned, many women entered Thailand using a tourist visa and either returned each month to stamp the passport or paid a fine if they were caught by the police in Thailand (see “Risks” below).

Where women did use brokers, they either had to find money to arrange the documentation or started their employment needing to pay off debts incurred.

*“The broker will prepare all documents including the passport. Therefore, she will get the salary of 4.000 Baht and the broker will take 1000 Baht each month during the first 4 months.”
(Returnee: aged 20)*

Several women were aware that there were Government initiatives to arrange documentation through registered companies but they said that it was too expensive and they would rather make the arrangements through informal networks.

"We got a passport for working in Thailand for 8,000 Bath for two people with money that I borrowed from my Mum first and then repayed to her later. Mostly people do like us if they want to work in Thailand but now it has changed and you can work in Thailand through a company finding work for you, but this way you have to spend too much more money than if you just got passport for tourist then go to work in Thailand." (Returnee: aged 19)

5.2 Living and working conditions

The most common employment choices open to women were factory work, work in the sex industry, restaurant staff, sales staff and work as housekeepers. Since the majority of women live in accommodation provided by their employers (although a significant minority live with family members) it is difficult, and indeed not preferable to separate out living and working conditions. Indeed it is not clear that most women themselves would use this distinction since migrating fundamentally changes their lives in ways that obviously affects far more than just their employment (Phouxay 2010).

It should also be considered that the different categories based on different types of employment are not simple or fixed. As indicated, each category covers a range of experiences and sometimes the categories overlap or important information is missing. Is the woman who sells grilled fish at the side of the road working in sales or in a restaurant? In particular the boundaries around restaurants, karaoke bars and the sex industry are sometimes unclear and a continuum of activities emerges from 'beer girl' to 'commercial sex worker' (see Lyttleton 1999; Molland 2010). In instances where there is ambiguity, the woman's definition of her own work has been prioritised. Bearing these ambiguities in mind, the table below provides an outline of how many women gained each type of job. Note that some women had more than one job and therefore the number of jobs is higher than the number of women.

	Factory Work	Sales	Domestic work	Entertainment and commercial sex trade	Working in restaurants	Other	Not specified
Internal	13	2		14	1	3	
returnee	6	10	18	3	22	11	1
Would be (work expected)			1		1	1	8

Table 5.2 Occupation of interviewed migrant workers

The following qualitative overview below expands upon these figures and offers a flexible structure

for considering the living and working conditions in which women found themselves.

5.2.1 Factory work

The employment in this study with the largest number of women was factory work and almost all of the women who worked in factories during their time living away from home were internal migrants. All of the internal migrants who stated the purpose of the factory said that it was related to fabric or garments. One of the migrants to Thailand did not state what type of factory she worked at and the other worked at a factory making meat balls.

It is important to remember that “factory” potentially covers a wide range of different institutions. One migrant to Thailand talked about working at a factory that had “100 or more Lao people working (there)” (Returnee: aged 20). In contrast, one internal migrant “does a job weaving in her cousin’s house which is a weaving factory. There are 13 workers” (Internal migrant: aged 16).

Many of the factories, however, are big enough to provide dormitories to accommodate their staff and almost half of the women who worked in factories state that they live in such dormitories with many of the remaining half neglecting to explicitly mention their living situation, suggesting that the number living in dormitories may be higher. Among those who discuss their accommodation there are discrepancies about whether food is also provided by the employers, but commonly basic meals of plain rice are provided and women need to supplement this using their wages.

“The factory has a dormitory for her and offers 3 meals of rice per day, but she has to buy soup by herself.” (Internal migrant: aged 20)

Working hours and salary vary widely across the case studies. Where working hours are stated they range from 8am-5pm to 7am-12 midnight and do not appear to be correlated to wages received; the woman who worked from 8am-5pm received 1,200,000 kip per month while the woman who worked from 7am – 12 midnight received 600,000 – 700,000 kip per month. Many women stated that they were paid per completed ‘piece’ and mentioned the possibility to do overtime at a rate of between 1,500 kip per hour and 5,000 kip per hour. One woman stated that she got one day off a week and another explained that she moved to a different factory because that factory gave a day off per week. This anecdote, in combination with the silence regarding time off in the majority of the accounts suggests that regular time-off is not common.

5.2.2 Sales

Several women described their job as primarily working in sales and one states that she used to sell laap before she left to move into a construction job. Sales covers a wide range of experiences from living and working in a shop to selling unidentified goods at the morning market to selling laap or

grilled fish at the side of the road. An element of selling was also included as a side element in other women's jobs, such as one woman who is primarily a vegetable farmer working for an employer but makes a small amount of extra money selling some of the vegetables herself.

Half of the women who worked in a shop were related to the owner of the shop and stated that their relatives took good care of them. Most of these shops sold clothes while one sold construction equipment. All of the women who worked in a shop were provided with accommodation as part of their employment and earned between 3,500 baht and 6,000 baht a month.

Less information was provided by the other women in this category about their employment. One says that her first job in Thailand was selling laap but she only worked for 1 month before she decided to return home because her employer would not give her a wage (she subsequently returned to Thailand to work in construction). Another simply says that she is a "sales person" and another that she is a seller at the morning market. None of these women provided information about salary or living conditions whilst doing these jobs.

5.2.3 Domestic work

Several of the women who migrated to Thailand (although none of the internal migrants) worked as domestic workers. All of these women lived in their place of work and earned between 3,000 and 5,000 baht per month. One woman was a housekeeper for her cousin and others were employed to do both domestic work and help at the family's shop.

Two women who worked as domestic workers migrated with their husbands, who also worked in the same location, one as a construction worker and one as a shrimp farmer. One of these couples worked on a Thai farm with approximately 20 Lao workers and were provided with a vehicle for their own use as well as 50kg of rice per month.

Many of these women employed as domestic workers commented explicitly on the positive working conditions that they encountered in their job. Their accounts portray a sense both that they did not consider that the work was too hard and that their employers treated them well and helped them with any problems. One woman mentioned that her and her husband's employer gave them holidays on traditional festivals and gave them a bonus of 3,000 baht (approximately 25% of their joint monthly wage) at Lao New Year. Another suggested that she received money in addition to her wage when necessary.

"I got a salary of 4,500 Bath per month and sometimes I got an extra 1,000-2,000 Bath a month for buying clothes." (Returnee: aged 18)

5.2.4 Entertainment and the commercial sex trade

The employment with the second highest number of women after factory work represented in this study was work in the commercial sex industry. The number of internal migrants working as sex workers was higher than the number of external migrants. All of these women worked at restaurants or karaoke bars. There were not paid a salary but earned money on the basis of how

much drink (usually beer) they could sell to customers (a common example being that for each 15,000 kip bottle of beer sold the woman would receive 3,000 kip) and for having sex with clients. Earnings were similar across this group of women with each client paying around 1,000 baht or 250,000 kip, a percentage of which (generally around 30,000 kip) would have to be paid to the restaurant/bar owner. Several women stated that a client would pay more for a virgin and one woman stated that “before she went to work (at the restaurant) her sister advised her to... get 2000.000 kip from her first time sex” (Internal migrant: aged 18)

Where stated the working hours were generally from early evening (6 or 7pm) until the early hours of the morning, with several woman saying that they were able to get days off for special occasions. Provision of accommodation and food varied widely, some women stayed in their place of work while others rented a room, sometimes with other women working in the same restaurant.

A strong theme of “choice” runs through these women’s stories. A high proportion of these women say that they can choose which clients they want to have sex with, that they are not forced to have sex with men and several women suggest that they can negotiate the cost with the client. One woman says that sex work is an easy way to make a lot of money and two others suggest that they chose this employment because they were already sexually active and were not scared of sex. However these expressions of choice run parallel to, and are often intertwined with stories of coercion and fear. Women can choose whether or not to have sex with a client, but if they don’t they will not make any money. Two women say that they did not know that they would be working in the sex industry until they arrived in their workplace. One stayed because her friend persuaded her that the damage was already done, people at home would already think that she was a sex worker and she had no choice. The other was forced to stay (although later ‘rescued’ by her parents) because she was in debt to her employer for arranging her passport and paperwork.

“I did not know before that I will work in prostitution in Thailand, the first day I arrived there I was so scared, but my friend told me that we have to endure and if I come back people in village will already blame me as sex worker.... so that I had no choice because we are Lao migrants and could not choose other way, just had to continue the same work daily.” (Returnee: aged 17)

A key theme when discussing working conditions for these women who identified themselves as sex workers was condom use. All the women who expressed an opinion wanted their clients to use condoms. Several women talked about selecting clients on the basis of who they thought would use a condom – for example one woman discussed preferring older clients because they are generally kinder, pay more and are more likely to use a condom. Several women talk about clients forcing them to do things that they don’t want to do and saying that they are paying so if they don’t want to use a condom that is their choice. Only one woman stated that she would refuse to have sex with a man who wouldn’t use a condom, even if they offer her more money, and she said that she felt supported by her employer in that decision.

5.2.5 Working in restaurants

Several women described their job as working in a restaurant. Where indicated, these women earned between 1,000 and 6,000 baht per month. Approximately half of these

women indicate that they receive accommodation as part of their employment.

One woman explains that her cousin runs the restaurant and that it is a comfortable place for her to work. However, the majority of women working in restaurants describe how they moved jobs from the first restaurant that they worked in; one to another restaurant that paid a better wage, one into construction work and one was finally able to return home after a very negative experience (see below). While none of these women give any indication that their employment has any connection to the sex industry, almost half state that they had problems in this employment because clients and/or people from home assumed that they were prostitutes.

“At that time the owner of the restaurant always abused me and clients always looked at me as a prostitute” (returnee: aged 18)

Another woman states that even though the restaurant customers offered her more than 5,000 Baht to have sex with them she refused and was still a virgin when she finally managed to leave this job. She gives a vivid account of how, when working in a western restaurant, the owner started off being friendly but the situation quickly changed:

“My first job was in a western restaurant and the salary was 6,000 Bath per month. I worked there for 1 year but the owner of restaurant paid only the first 5 months salary to me and he said that for the rest he will save for me and will pay later when I go back home. The employer provided me for accommodation, food and cloth and the owner of restaurant told me that if I run away he would inform police and also he is lawyer. The first time he was so good and he told me to find more friends to work with him and I introduced 2 friends from my village. The owner of the restaurant paid the fee for my friend’s passport and he also went to pick up my friend at the friendship bridge. A total of 6 people came, but after that the owner of restaurant did not pay them, so my friend thought that I lied to them to sell labour. During the time we worked in the restaurant the owner didn’t allow us to use mobile and if he found we had a mobile he was broke it and if someone used public telephone and he found who used it he reduced their salary to 1,000 Bath.” (Returnee: aged 19)

5.2.6 Other

A small group of women worked primarily in jobs that do not appear to fit into the above categories. The other types of employment represented in the case studies are; the construction industry (all external migrants working on average from 8am -5pm and earning between 4,000 and 8,000 baht per month), growing vegetables (all external migrants working from 8am – 5pm and earning between 3,000 and 4,000 baht per month, a salary that one woman supplemented by selling some vegetables), working in a furniture company (internal migrant earning 800,000 kip per month, hours 7am-5pm), working in a weaving company (internal migrant earning 700,000 – 800,000 kip per month for working 6am-9pm), working as a babysitter (Returnee, living with sister and earning 3,000 baht per month).

Accounts of construction work reveal particularly physically challenging working conditions for low wages and the majority of the women who originally worked in construction have changed to different types of jobs which they considered easier and more lucrative.

5.3 Expectations, tensions and negotiations

Few of the women's experiences were wholly positive or wholly negative, often exhibiting a degree of tension (or potential tension) between different needs / desires and the necessity to find a way to negotiate these differences in order to find a solution that was, at least temporarily, satisfactory for the individual woman. These potential tensions and negotiations are explored below.

5.3.1 Independence and freedom

As discussed above freedom from financial constraints and personal independence were common expectations and factors in the original decision to migrate.

To a varying extent these expectations were met. A woman who said that her main reason for moving to Vientiane was because "she wanted to have her own money" (Internal migrant: aged 25) made between 900,000 and 1,200,000 kip per month working in a garment factory and sent 200,000 – 300,000 kip home to her parents, leaving her with more than 600,000 kip of her own money per month.

Another woman (Internal migrant: aged 23) thought (before she left her home) that "if she had a job she would have money to provide for own needs, her life would be better and she would also enjoy learning new things". After her uncle found her a job in a family weaving company she is earning her own money and enjoying a social life including having had two boyfriends. She has seen that some of her friends in Vientiane have a house and now she wants to stay in Vientiane "improve her life and have a house where she can live together with her family" and she has a vision of a future for her children where they can get a good education and learn new technologies.

However, for many women this process of achieving independence and moving towards their goals is not straightforward and their aim of achieving financial freedom for themselves and/or their family involves a trade-off related to their day to day life experiences. While some women did have a social life in their new home and talked socialising with their friends, many more suggested that their social life was very limited and that at night after their work they stayed in their dormitory. Reasons given for this included not knowing anyone and feeling scared to go out on their own. As outlined above in the discussion about working conditions, many women worked extremely long hours and most of the women (although not all) were spending as little money as possible in order to send money home to their family, to achieve a particular goal such as to build a house, and/or to pay off debts incurred when organising passports and documents.

This interplay between a future goal of the alleviation of financial difficulties (for self and/or family) and the need to compromise present freedom is complex. In particular the link between freedom and independence is not always straightforward; for some women independence entails the capacity to work hard and provide for their family.

One woman (Returnee: aged 25) discusses how, as a rice farmer there is a long period of the year when she “is free” (she has nothing that she can do). She discusses her goals for going to Vientiane; “I cannot make income of my own. I hope to get more money and I would like to make my family better than this” and describes her job selling goods at the morning market saying; “my job is a freedom, in one year I can send money to my parent about 500,000 – 1,000,000 kip.” However she cannot go anywhere in Vientiane on her own and when her father dies she goes back to her village to get married and says that she would not recommend that other women go to Vientiane, alluding to problems that she does not explain in any detail.

The case studies do not, however, purely present a story of present sacrifice for future gain. Many of the women talk about freedoms and positive experiences in their lives away from home such as: going to see the sea, walking by the Mekong, going to restaurants, having boyfriends, seeing That Luang.

5.3.2 Comparisons between old home and new home

Women were asked to compare their old home and their new home (or the place that they lived while they were working away from home). Most women gave a mixed answer that suggested positives and negatives to both locations.

Unsurprisingly given the predominant reasons for migration, the advantages to their new home (particularly Vientiane or Thailand) almost entirely related to money and job opportunities (with a couple of related exceptions that mentioned more opportunities and things to do). However, the relative ease of earning money was often balanced by an acknowledgement that more money is needed to live in the city.

“Comparing Vientiane and her home town she said that life in Vientiane is easy, it is easy to find a job but you have to buy everything and the cost of living is higher than in her home town. For example, the cost of some items in her home town is 2000 kip, but in Vientiane 5000 kip.” (Internal migrant: aged 23)

Women also mentioned the differences between the type of work that they were able to do in Vientiane, suggesting that work inside (for example in a factory) was preferable to work outside on the farm.

“Another difference in work between Vientiane and her hometown was that in Vientiane she just worked inside the building but in her hometown she always worked outside on the field even when it was very hot.” (Internal migrant: aged 18)

There was some disagreement about whether the work in the countryside or in the city was more difficult. Several women stated that work in the city was more difficult and longer hours than work in the rice fields, but usually qualified this with a suggestion that this effort was worth it because it enabled them to make money. This pay-off was also reflected in some women’s considerations when they talked about whether they would recommend migration to others, and different women

coming down on either side of the equation – some saying it was worth the effort (even “suffering”) others not. However, a small number of women suggested that life in the city was easier than life in the countryside because they were freed from the work related to family obligations. One woman stated:

“At my home town I had to wake up at 5:00 am to do house work until 8:00 am and then I went to do farming in the field, but it is very different in VTE, I can wake up at 7:00 am to prepare myself for work.” (Internal migrant: aged 23)

In contrast to the practical advantages of city life, most of the advantages to their old home related to relationships with people and to a more co-operative way of living that was not purely focused upon money. Interestingly women made similar statements in this regard about Vientiane and about Thailand.

“Society in Vientiane is a competition, people have no solidarity like the villagers in her home town. People in the down town are selfish.... in her home town, she can ask for something to eat for free but she has to buy all things in Vientiane. (Internal migrant: aged 16)

“The life in Laos and Thailand is very different. In my country some food we don’t have to buy but there is no work to do, but in Thailand we have a job to do but have to buy everything” (Returnee: aged 26)

In summary, there is always a trade-off and this trade off seems to be broadly related to a decision to prioritise either money or relationships. One woman summed this up clearly:

“Advantages (to living in the city) are that it is easy to earn the money and the disadvantages are it is too far from home and parents.” (Returnee: aged 20)

5.3.3 Would you recommend migration?

“If you meet the serious problem you will be very poor but if you meet the nice place it would be ok.” (Returnee: aged 23)

Women were asked whether they would recommend migrating to find work to other women, but the answers to this question were rarely straightforward since the experiences of migration varied so widely both between women and within each woman’s experience. As mentioned previously, many of the women were clear about the trade-offs involved in the decision to migrate and these trade-offs came back into play in their recommendations. Interestingly the suggestions that women made for other women did not always match the decisions that they had made for themselves, introducing an element of ‘do as I say, not as I do’.

In terms of the numbers of recommendations, there was a fairly even split of opinions between women who would wholeheartedly recommend (or had recommended) that friends or family

migrate to find work, those would possibly recommend migration but had reservations and those not recommend that their friends or family migrate, with a slightly higher number of women in the last group.

Positive recommendations:

"Now I still work in the same factory, my life is getting better, I got new room that is more clean, have many friends and I also introduced to my friend come to work like me. It is easy working and I had good boss and the work was not hard." (Internal migrant: aged 23)

The women who recommended that friends and family migrate to find work were, unsurprisingly, those who had had the most positive experiences and who stated that their lives and/or their family's lives had improved as a result of these experiences. The most common reason to recommend migration was to get more money, and this was often linked to an ability to help their parents and family to have a better life. Several women stated that after their experience other family members had migrated for work.

"Based on my experience I introduced my young sister and brother to working in Thailand. Now my family is getting better and we have everything necessary in our house" (Returnee: aged 22)

Reservations:

"I would like to suggest to anyone who would like to work abroad that you should be careful and work with someone you trust or with your relative." (Returnee: aged 18)

Reservations about migrating for work were expressed exclusively by women who had lived in Thailand and fell into three related categories; ensuring that you can trust the person that you work with, being fully informed about what you will be doing and being careful to ensure that you have the correct documentation.

"I would like to suggest that whoever would like to work abroad should proceed with all related documents like me because it was more safe. I heard some people had to come back and could not get money at all and also some people had conflicts in the factory and then the factory owner sent them back home." (Returnee: aged 25)

Negative recommendations:

The majority of clear recommendations for other women not to migrate for work came either from women who were working, or had been working as sex workers or from women who had suffered stigma as a result of people's assumptions that they were working as sex workers.

"if it possible she would want to advise other people not to come and work like her because it is not a good job, and besides that other people in society dislike and you will look worthless in society. You will be the vent of people and no one will love you." (Internal migrant: aged 23)

*"I never introduced any people to work with me because I do want other girls feeling like me."
(Internal migrant: aged 25)*

Despite these extremely emotive quotations, many of these woman acknowledge that they feel like they have no choice but to continue in their job and that other women may be in the same position of feeling like they have little choice. Several of these women express a hardness, saying that they do not care what other people think about them, but they would not like others to be in the same situation.

"Most people in society think she is worthless, but she did not care how people think because this work is comfortable and earns more money to her. She does not know how long that she would works this way, but she thinks she will work like this until her children are adults. She never advises anyone to come and work like her because she knows well that this works brings social disdain." (Internal migrant: aged 21)

Other reasons given for not recommending migrating for work were that the work was too hard, young women should be focusing on their study and unfavourable comparisons between Thai people and Lao people.

6 Mobility

The ability and freedom to move was a theme that emerged from the case studies in different ways. We discuss the restriction of liberty when discussing violations of migrant's rights, below, but here we illustrate two forms of mobility; movement between multiple jobs and movement between Laos and Thailand.

6.1 Moving between jobs

Many of the women displayed a level of mobility between different jobs based on decisions that they made about whether the job met their needs. Most often this mobility related to moving to a job that had better earning potential (usually within the same type of work several women moved into the sex industry in order to receive a better salary) or, occasionally, better working conditions such as a regular day off each week.

One woman chose to move from working in a restaurant to becoming a house-keeper, suggesting that the primary reason for this move was abuse and the assumption that she was a sex worker, although she also made more money in her second job (4,500 baht rather than 3,500 baht).

"The restaurant owner always abused me and also clients always looked at me as a prostitute... then I changed to be house keeper and help the house owner selling stuff." (Returnee: aged 18)

Most (although not all) of the women who were international migrants had chosen to leave their job in Thailand, but this was not always a permanent decision and their plans for the future revealed a

high level of fluidity and mobility.

6.2 Moving between Laos and Thailand

It is easy to think of external migration as a permanent or at least semi-permanent situation, but this ignores the close proximity of Laos and Thailand, and many women working and living in Thailand talked about an ease of movement between the two countries.

Sometimes this movement between countries was enforced by visa requirements.

“During my stay in Thailand (2 years) I had to come back to Lao for getting passport stamp every month” (Returnee: aged 24)

More often women chose (or were required) to move between the countries to spend time with relatives, when they were between jobs and for special holidays and other occasions.

“I went to work in Thailand when I was 15 years old. I came back to help with the house work every month when my Mum called me, some months I worked in Thailand about 20 days then came back home and went back Thailand again.” (Returnee: aged 19)

“She came back here for Lao New Year and she will plan to go back there and work at the same place again because they always accept employees.” (Returnee: aged 20)

7 Networks

Networks of support emerge as a key factor that impacts upon the experience of all of the women involved in this study.

These networks vary depending on the closeness of the relationship that the woman has to people in these networks and the different agendas operating within the networks. It is, however, often difficult to understand how close the relationships are because the women use the word ‘friend’ to cover a wide range of relationships from longstanding friendships to acquaintances and people that they have only just met.

Some support networks involve people known before the decision to migrate, some consist of professionals involved in her employment as employers or brokers and some networks are developed with colleagues based on proximity and shared experiences.

7.1 Networks invoked in the decision to migrate

In terms of the decision to migrate, the women interviewed for this study fell into two main groups; those who followed family members and those who were recommended to migrate from a friend. Those who followed a family member (often a sibling) often stayed with the family member, at least initially and had a base from which to look for employment and receive support.

“She came to Vientiane to stay with her brother and sister. At the beginning she would like to

work in a factory but her brother did not let her. She also has many friends work there.” (Internal migrant: aged 16) (subsequently her brother helped her to find a job in a weaving company)

Every woman who migrated to look for employment mentioned a relationship that was instrumental in her decision to move. However, where women migrated on the basis of a recommendation from a friend, the nature of this relationship is often unclear and it is not known whether it is someone with whom the woman has an established relationship or a new acquaintance.

“My female friend told to me about the type of work so this made me sure that I can do this work. My friend asked me about working together. We had the same age which made me trust her and I went to Thailand when I was 21.” (Returnee: aged 22)

“I heard people that live around my house say (about working in Thailand) because they used to go and work before that and before I go my friend let me know about documents that I should take with me and my passport. When I go my family are OK that I go to work in Thailand because I have people to take me there and they find job for me” (Returnee: aged 23)

These networks offer a sense of security and familiarity for the women who are going to an unknown place to do unfamiliar work.

7.2 Networks while working away

While living in the city or in the different country these networks are equally important and provide practical support and emotional solace from the loneliness of leaving immediate family and home. When they are successful these networks seem to become almost surrogate families.

“When I got into trouble I had people to help me, like my friends and family, because everybody knows each other and meets the same problem, like no money, and when we got sick over there I had people to watch me and take care of me and if you were very sick they take you to the hospital.” (Returnee: aged 23)

However, in some cases these networks are less reliable. One woman recounts how she was relying on her friend to meet her when she arrived in Vientiane but the friend never appeared. Thankfully the woman met another woman from her home region who could help. This story demonstrates a high level of reliance on other people, but also a noteworthy flexibility and resilience – despite being let down by her first friend the woman subsequently comments that she is lucky to have such good friends in Vientiane.

“The first time she went to Vientiane she only had 300.000 kip. Her friend said that when she arrived at the bus station they would pick up her, but when she arrived she only had 30.000 kip left, and she tried to call to her friend but could not contact her. At that time she did not know what to do and she did not have enough money for a bus ticket to go back home. Fortunately she

met one woman who came from the same region as her who asked her 'where did you come from and where would you go?' and then she took her to go with in her apartment and stay there for one night and she help her to find a job in a garment factory" (Internal migrant: aged 19)

7.3 Family left behind

"When she came to live in Vientiane she always thought of her parents and worried about them." (Internal migrant: aged 15)

The network of family remaining in the home village was an important one for many women which represented a tension between missing them and wanting to earn money to improve their lives. One woman clearly stated that the advantage of working in Thailand was that she was proud to be able to help her family, but the disadvantage was that she was far away from them.

However, while the link with family networks was expressed as important by almost all the women in this study it was not always simple. Some families did not approve of the work that their daughters were doing, especially where the women were either working in the sex industry or suspected to be working in the sex industry and these disagreements put pressure on several family networks.

Some women returned home frequently to help their family (see 'mobility' above) while many others ultimately chose to return to their home villages in order to support their family in a different way (see 'reasons for returning home').

7.4 Relationship with employer

One factor which had an important impact upon the women's experiences in their employment was their relationship with their employer. These relationships varied along a continuum from supportive (both in terms of practical and emotional support) through to abusive.

The small number of women who were employed by family members tended to have positive and supportive experiences with their employers. There were also a small number of women who perceived their relationship with their employer as almost familial, taking care of them practically but also showing concern for their life outside of their employment even where, as in the quotation below, this could have a negative impact upon the employer/employee relationship.

"I live with my boss my boss pays for the food and everything in the house. Sometime my boss treat me like his own child and sometime my boss takes us out too. My boss wants me to go home because now my dad is getting old and he can't really do the house jobs as I use to." (Returnee: aged 22)

Similarly a different woman talks about how her employer does not want her to work long hours although they do give overtime. The woman implies that this is because her employer is concerned about her welfare, but it is not possible to ascertain if this is true or if there are other, for example

financial, reasons.

Some employers provided significant practical benefits such as transport and financial bonuses or time off on special occasions such as holidays. Others provided support such as problem solving, in particular, several women discuss that their employers helped negotiate with the police when there were problems around paperwork and visas, enabling the women to stay in their employment.

“It was really comfortable to live there because the boss provided a vehicle for them and acted as their consultant when there was a problem.” (Returnee: aged 20)

However, such stories were the exception. As discussed above, many of the women received practical support in the forms of accommodation, some food and sometimes health care as part of the terms of their employment and this provision was generally considered positive. However, there is little information about the quality of the dormitories and many women comment that when food was provided it needed to be supplemented from their income and when healthcare was provided it often incurred a debt which needed to be paid back from wages.

“During the time I worked there I had no trouble with my health but I saw other people around me who, when they got sick, they were able to borrow money from the employer first then pay it back.” (Returnee: aged 22)

A common theme is that many of the women talk about how they feel “respected” by their employer. In several cases however, it seems that this respect may come with conditions attached. For example one woman’s story says that: “her boss gives respect to her and has no rules, but she does not want to disturb her boss so she has to come to work early and work from 6am-11pm” (Internal migrant: aged 23). It seems the perceived respect from her boss necessitates a sense of duty or obligation.

Several women who worked in factories talked about employers who were angry with them when they first started their jobs because they did not know how to operate the machinery necessary to do their jobs.

“Her boss used to be angry with her and looked at her angrily when she could not do her work. This made her sad and homesick, but because of her financial problems and her determination not to go back to work as a farmer, she tried to be patient with the work.” (Internal migrant: aged 19)

None of the women describe in any detail how this anger manifested itself, but in all the cases it was perceived to be a short-term problem connected to the women’s inexperience and lack of skills which was quickly remedied. Although all of the women said that their employer’s anger made them feel sad, one woman said that she understood it because her employer was losing money because she was slow and another described how her employer spent time showing her how to use the equipment.

Several women told stories about employers who were abusive. Approximately half of these women were sex workers, and the other half were in positions where they were considered to be sex workers by either their employer or by customers with one other woman who worked in sales but was forced to remain in Thailand against her will because she had no money to return home.

Two of these women were immigrants to Thailand working in the sex industry and neither of them knew before they started their jobs that they would be sex workers. Neither wanted to do this job. The first was told that she could not leave because she already owed money for her documents and only managed to leave the employment when she managed to contact her parents who threatened to tell the police that their daughter had been trafficked. The second was told that there was no point in her going back to her village because everybody would know that she was a sex worker. Her story paints a sad picture of abuse from clients and an unsupportive employer who forced her and other employees to go with clients that they did not want to go with and who gave no help to an employee who was raped by four men.

7.5 Reasons for returning and future plans

The reasons that women from the “returnee” group gave for returning to their home village fell broadly into five interrelated categories. The frequencies of each group are given below, bearing in mind that some women gave more than one reason for returning and many others were purely descriptive in their narrative and unclear about the reasons underlying their return to Laos.

Reason for returning:

- Temporary visit home, including renewing documentation (23)
- Reasons related to family (14)
- Reasons related to employment (9)
- Reasons related to relationships and pregnancy (8)
- No clear reason for returning specified (27)

7.6 Reasons related to their employment

As discussed elsewhere in the report (see section 6 - “Risks of migration”), a small number of the women in this study were kept in employment against their will until they found a way to escape, often helped by family.

Other women discussed how they returned because the job was too physically difficult (carrying bricks) or because they were not given a salary by their employer (whilst selling laab). Both of these women returned home for a period of time but returned to Thailand at a later date - the first to work in a karaoke bar, the second on a construction site.

7.7 Reasons related to their family

Several of the women stated that they had returned home because their family needed their help.

“Now I do farming and house work I won’t go back to work in Thailand because no one stays

with my parents and no one helps them do farming.” (Returnee: aged 24)

On occasion this need to help their family was related to their parents getting old and not being able to do the work that they used to do.

Several women discussed how they had returned home to help with building the house that they had migrated in order to fund.

“After one year I came back home and I brought money to buy materials and to prepare for house building” (Returnee: aged 22)

7.8 Reasons related to their relationship

Several of the women returned to Laos because they were pregnant. They talked about wanting to give birth in their home country and getting support from family. One woman said that she returned home both to give birth and to help her own mother.

Most of the women who returned to Laos to give birth stated that they were married (none said that they were not married but a small minority did not state their marital situation) and there was an even split between those whose husbands were Lao (where they had migrated together) and those whose husbands were Thai (they had met as a result of their migration). Where stated, all of the baby’s fathers remained in Thailand for employment reasons, and all of these women said that they intended to return to Thailand when their baby was older.

A small group of women talked about difficulties in romantic relationships in the place of migration being a contributory factor in their decision to return home. In contrast one woman discussed how she had felt homesick and wanted to return home and her Thai boyfriend had encouraged her to return to her family. He now supports her financially by sending money every month.

7.9 Achieved goals

Several women stated that they had returned because they had achieved the specific goals that they had when they decided to migrate. As discussed above when discussing reasons for migrating, these goals tended to focus around paying debts or making enough money to build a house.

“The reason that she came back to Laos was that she didn’t want to work in Thailand anymore. She wanted to be a farmer again. She worked in Thailand, and she was back in Laos 6 months later. After she returned the family had a better income and she had success in her goals. She built the house and paid for someone to plough the fields.” (Returnee: aged 20)

Another woman talked about how she had learned skills related to growing vegetables in Thailand that she now wanted to transfer to grow vegetables in her home village.

7.10 Temporary visits home

Many of the interviews took place around the time of the Lao New Year celebrations and Lao PDR national election. Several of the women interviewed stated that they had returned home

temporarily to see and help their families and to participate in these events. Other women had returned temporarily for a combination of reasons, commonly to visit their family and renew documentation. A small number of women suggested that they had returned to their home village to help their family for a short period of time but that they would return to Thailand in the future.

8 Impacts of migration

Section five uses the experiences of the women who contributed to this study to frame a focus upon the impacts of migration for women migrants, their families and communities. In particular it looks at women's perceptions of whether their life was better before or after they migrated, remittances that women were able to send home to their families, the loss of human resources in home villages as a result of migration and the impact of migration for rural communities.

While the women who contributed to this study largely discussed positive impacts for their families, Flaherty (2008) found in a study of two Lao villages that "an overwhelming majority (85%) of respondents who expressed an opinion on this thought that migration had a negative effect on village life". Reasons given for this opinion included concern for those who had migrated, concern about illegality, a loss of labour from the village and the danger that returnees would "bring bad strangers back to the village" with them.

Rigg (2007) draws on international research to suggest that "a key issue is not whether people *leave*, but whether they *return*". Rigg states that at the time of his writing the majority of Lao migrants do return home, although some of the benefits of this return are negated because the skills gained through migration are low level and of limited use in their home environment. Rigg suggests however that over time it is likely that more young people will choose to stay away for longer periods and that "returns home will become consumption performances where the successful migrants parade their new-found wealth and sophistication" (Rigg 2007:173).

The current study supports these findings. Of the internal migrants a small majority say that they will return home but there is a significant majority of women who intend to stay in the city and build a permanent life there. The external migrants who contributed to the study had all returned to their home village at the time of the interviews but, similarly, a significant minority suggest that they intend to return to Thailand at some point in the future. All of the women who intended to remain at home stated that they were farming, helping their family with housework or looking after children.

In this section we discuss the key impacts of migration cited by the women involved in this study.

8.1 Life better or worse than before?

All of the women who expressed an opinion about whether life was better or worse now than before said that it was better. However, it is important to remember that this group of women is mixed between some who continue to work as internal migrant women and some who have returned from work in Thailand and are now back living in Laos.

The most common reason expressed for life being better is that goals have been achieved and expectations met. These goals and expectations are almost exclusively expressed in terms of money. Many women say that life is better because their family's economic situation is better and a minority talk about achieving individual financial independence. Having made enough money, or made significant contribution to the funds necessary, to build a house is another outcome that occurs in multiple case studies. Every woman that cited debt as a reason for migrating stated that she has either paid off her debt or made good progress in paying off the debt and is confident that she will do this in the future.

Several of the women who migrated to Thailand and have now returned to Laos state that their life is better in two different respects – they prefer living in Laos but they achieved the goals that they set out to achieve in Thailand.

"The reason that she came back to Laos was that she didn't want to work in Thailand anymore and she wanted to be a farmer again. At aged 15 she worked in Thailand and she was back in Laos 6 months later. After she returned, the family had a better income and she had success in her goals. She built the house and paid to plough the fields." (Returnee: aged 20)

No women in this study said directly that their life was worse as a result of migrating, but this does not mean that there were no negative impacts for many women in the study and these can be seen in section 6 below, which looks at risks of migration including the stigma related to being a migrant. Several women who had returned to Laos from working in Thailand stated that their life was just the same as it had been before they went to Thailand; there was no real change as a result of their period of migration.

8.2 Intimate relationships

Moving away to work in a different city or country impacted inevitably impacted upon the intimate relationships that women have in their lives, both in terms of existing relationships and new relationships. These relationships often then go on to impact upon their choices and experience of migration.

While most of the women who participated in the study migrated on their own, a small number were already married and migrated with their husbands. One of these couples left their child with its grandparents while they worked in Thailand for 2 years. Several other women were married or widowed, but left their families in order to look for work to support them.

Inevitably new relationships were formed by many of the women when they were living away from home. Many of the women talk about old relationships ending and new relationships beginning. While new relationships are inevitable, the women's circumstances - living in a new environment away from home - sometimes meant that the relationships were not simple. One married woman migrated to Thailand, where she started a new relationship, and then returned to her marriage in Laos but continued to sustain both relationships.

"I just came back to home town and my husband knows about my relationship with my boyfriend and he did not have any problem with me. Now I just work generally in village and don't have any plan to go back but I still contact with boyfriend in Thailand we met each other 2-3 months ago and now still have good relationship." (Returnee: aged 20)

Other women formed relationships in Vientiane and Thailand which informed their decisions about whether or not to return to their home town. These decisions worked both ways, when relationships were successful the woman was more likely to want to stay in their new home, but the breakdown of a relationship could precipitate a return to their home village. These new relationships also potentially caused tensions with family who wanted their daughter to return. One woman explained:

"Every day her mother told her to come back home and get married and live with them, but she did not want to do that, because her boyfriend lives (in Vientiane)." (Internal migrant: aged 21)

For some women, disappointment in relationships impacted upon their choices and experience of migration. One woman stated that the behaviour of her boyfriend after they first had sex was a key factor in her decision to take a job as a sex worker:

"I had a boyfriend who I worked with every day but at that time I was virgin and never had sex before. After he had sex with me everything changed, he didn't call me and refused to marry me. At that time I was nervous and could not eat and I lost my weigh. Me and my friend rented a room together so I heard my friend's older sister talking about work and she asked me if I would like to work with her and I asked her what kind of work? Then she told me details of her work and at that time I was still offended with him so that made me to decide to be a prostitute in a beer shop" (Internal migrant: aged 18)

8.3 Remittances

Remittances can play a key role in improving the living conditions for family members, since it increases household income and allows for new household activities or can be used for the improvement of housing, sibling's education or health care. Remittances can also have a positive impact in terms of economic development in the local communities and in foreign exchange earnings at the national level as well (Phouxay, 2010). However, the impact of remittances depends on migrant worker's access to money transfer channels and on recipient household's capacities and opportunities to use the money for productive investment.

The existing literature suggests that the majority of Lao migrants tend to use an informal money transfer agent as their main remittance channel. For migrants working in Thailand, the agent is often someone in the home community who has a bank account with a Thai bank in a town just across the border. Migrants send money to this account and inform the account holder. The agent crosses the border to collect the money, and the migrant calls and asks the family to collect the

money from the account holder. Money is also often sent home through a friend or relative¹⁶.

With very few exceptions, all of the women who contributed to this study sent money home to their family, although the form of these remittances varied, with some women sending a regular amount of money every month, some women sending money when they were able to save, others when their family requested it and yet others saving towards a particular goal for their family (the most common goal being to build a house).

The amount of these remittances and the proportion of the women's salaries that they represented also varied widely. Where the women sent regular monthly contributions the most common amount was between 300,000 and 600,000 kip with some women sending as much as 1,000,000 kip home each month.

Since this study only includes the accounts of the women who migrated there is no information about the family's perception of the impact of this money. The literature suggests that many recipient households in the rural areas lack the opportunity and the capacity to invest the remitted money productively in the education, business or agriculture. The ILO report (2010) states that while a good share of the remittances received is spent on household necessities, such as housing and means of transport, relatively large amounts of money are spent in ways that do not necessarily improve the economic situation of the household.¹⁷ However, as mentioned above, many of the women state that their family's economic situation has improved as a result of the money that they sent home and that their goals (paying debts, building a house) have been met.

From a gender perspective, it is interesting to note that women tend to send more money than men. Women remit more money or more frequently than men even when they receive lower wage. A possible reason is that women send more money in order to secure their family's economic support once they return home. Another explanation is that remittances are the result of a process of negotiation within the household, where women enjoy less bargaining power than men.

There is a small minority of women who do not send money home to their family either through choice or because of particular limitations. A small number of women said that they did not send money home because they chose to save for themselves and another said that she was not sending money home but she would use money to go home and visit her family. Several women stated that they were currently unable to send money home because they had to pay debts incurred in arranging passports and documentation but that they hoped to do so in the future.

It is, however, important to note that the direction of financial support is not always one-way. A minority of the women talk about how they send money back to their family, but their family send food to them.

"Each month she has to send money to her parents, 500,000-600,000 kip, and her parents send food, vegetable, and rice with the bus to her." (Internal migrant: aged 25)

¹⁶ Migrant worker's remittances from Thailand to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, ILO, 2010

¹⁷ Idem

8.4 Loss of human resources

As mentioned, it is difficult to assess the impact of a daughter's migration upon the family in this study because the accounts are all related to the daughter's experience. However, in the reasons given by the returnee Thai migrants for returning to Laos, there emerges a tension between helping their family by providing financial support and needing to return to the family to give practical help in the family home.

"Now I do farming and house work. I won't go back to work in Thailand because no one stays with my parents and no one helps them do farming." (Returnee: aged 24)

This issue is particularly prevalent as some of the women's parents become older and are not able to look after the farm themselves and several women mention that other siblings no longer live with their parents because they either live with their spouse or they too have moved to find work.

8.5 Community impacts

The women who participated in this study focused primarily upon the impact of their migration to themselves and their family rather than to their community. However, the secondary literature suggests that migration can have an impact upon the wider community.

The impacts of remittances within the household and community are diverse. If remittances can benefit the households and the community by reducing poverty, they also generate income disparities between migrant and non-migrant household in the village. While migrant families invest in a new house, motorbike, handle tractor or other assets, non migrant families still have to cope with low incomes. Consequently, remittances may also influence non migrant's decision to move, especially when young people in the original village see the progress in the migrant's families' living conditions.

The return of migrants also affects the lifestyle and consumption pattern in the villages. Returnees may have a different way of talking, a new modern dress style as well as changed behavior and ideas. In this way, return migration brings "modern life" to the villages. Thus, impacts of migration are not only caused by monetary remittances but also through social remittances (Phouxay, 2010). This is implied in several of the case studies through desires for new clothes mobile phones and mention of friends or women in the village who had migrated and easily made money.

9 Risks of migration

Section six focuses upon the risks associated with migration that were identified by the women who participated in this study. These risks are; stigma, problems associated with illegality, trafficking and health problems, particularly HIV/AIDS.

Bertrand (2007) writes that "the possibility of abuse and exploitation exists in all these places; mandatory overtime without additional pay, deprivation of liberty, forced use of amphetamines and

sexual slavery are not uncommon. All migrants likewise face the risk of being caught by authorities then fined and deported, and of being robbed of all their belongings by authorities on both sides.”

With the exception of the forced use of amphetamine, all of the above risks are featured in the case studies in this study. However, it is important to remember that these risks do not tell the whole story and, in a similar finding to Bertrand, negative stories are outnumbered by stories of women who consider their migration to be “successful”.

9.1 Stigma

Many of the women experience negative stigma from other people as a result of their identity as migrant workers. While this stigma was experienced most strongly by those who worked as sex workers, in several women’s accounts it represented a complete misunderstanding of the life that they were leading:

“she said that many people thought that she worked as a sex worker, but indeed it wasn’t like that because in this dormitory they have rule for employees and they close the door every day at 9:30 pm, after this time they did not let anyone come inside.” (Internal migrant: aged 21)

Women experienced this stigma from people in their home village and from people where they currently lived and this was a particular problem for women who worked in the restaurant trade where customers expected them to provide sexual services.

Women who described that they had experienced stigma fell into two categories. While the women participating in this study generally did not use emotive language to describe their situation, some women used words such as “suffering” and “sorrow” and described feeling very bad when they experienced other people’s attitudes to them as sex workers or as assumed sex workers. Other women adopted an attitude of strength in the face of such stigma, acknowledging it but rejecting it.

“most people in society thought she is worthless, but she did not care how people thought because this work is comfortable and earns more money for her.” (Internal migrant: aged 21)

9.2 Illegality and dealing with the police

For external migrants working in Thailand, their legal status was a source of concern. However the line between legal and illegal is not clear. There is a continuum of experiences from obtaining full documentation, through working with a tourist visa that needs to be renewed every month and does not allow employment, to being in the country illegally. The case studies also reveal ambiguities about documentation; many women mention friends or relatives arranging documentation without any clear indication of how legitimate this documentation really is.

There is a sense of fear in the case studies about being caught working illegally and about the possibility of being sent back to Laos, with several women repeating stories that they have heard about this happening to other women.

“She heard that her friend who was working in Thailand without legal documents was caught by the Thai police and held for 2 months, then the Thai Government sent her back to Lao.” (Returnee: aged 20)

However, the actual experiences repeatedly recount a less dramatic reality where women (and potentially employers) who are caught operating illegally have to pay a regularly monthly fine for the period that they stay in Thailand.

“I stayed in Thailand without a passport for one year but when the Thai police found me with no documents I had to pay a fine of 400 Bath per month. At that time I was 13 years old.” (Returnee: aged 14)

Some employers helped their employees negotiate with the police if there was a problem, but others were less sympathetic since they too may have to pay a fine if they are caught employing illegal workers. In these cases, if the police caught up with a woman who was working illegally she might have to leave her current employment rapidly in order to avoid getting into trouble with her employer.

Women’s illegal status put them in a vulnerable position. On several occasions employers and clients used threats of reporting women to the police to exercise their power over these women. One abusive employer told his employee that, even though he was withholding her salary, she could not leave because if she did he would report her to the police. Other woman discussed how clients would use similar threats to force women to do things that they did not want to do.

9.3 Trafficking

The UN Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children (2000) defines “trafficking in persons” as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” The protocol also states that the consent of the victim is irrelevant if any of the above means are used and that the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth (above).” According to the Lao penal code, human trafficking means “the recruitment, moving transfer, harbouring or receipt of any person within or across national borders by means of deception, threats, use of force, debt bondage or any other means [and using such person in] forced labour, prostitution, pornography, or anything that is against the fine traditions of the nation, or removing various body organs [of such person], or for other unlawful purposes”.

Migrants, especially young girls and women, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, abuses and trafficking. Many trafficked persons began their journey as volunteer migrants supported by others for travel. Risks are more important when migrants use the services of brokers to travel and find a job abroad. To satisfy contract terms, migrants sometimes must repay significant amounts of money

and may face debt bondage. This may lead to exploitative conditions such as forced labour or prostitution. The intent to exploit is also sometimes at the very end of the process: at the time of requesting salary or permission to leave, the person understands that he is victim of trafficking. Migrants leaving without friends or relatives run far more risks of being trafficked. The lack of social network increases the risks of abuses and limits the support migrants may get in case of trouble. Domestic workers are particularly vulnerable and tend to experience some of the most extreme cases of abuse and mistreatment such as physical and sexual assault, food and sleep deprivation and cruelty by their employers. Due to the “hidden” character of domestic work, abuse is indeed less visible and the employee is extremely dependent on the employer.

As migrants are often in irregular situations, they are unable to negotiate or report abuses to the authorities for fear of being arrested or deported. In some workplaces, irregular migrant workers have to pay money to the police officers on regular basis to avoid arrests. In some cases, the earned money of irregular migrants may be confiscated by police and they are deported across the border without money. In the worst cases, in some provinces on the Lao border, these irregular migrant workers also have to pay heavy fines to the Lao immigration police and the village authorities.

If they are apprehended, illegal migrants are usually placed in detention centers. In Thailand, victims of trafficking who are identified by the police are given shelter by the Department of Social Development and Welfare. Unfortunately the length of time that the victims have to spend in these shelters is usually very long (from several months to more than one year). This situation can be explained by different reasons: The victim has to stay in the shelter until the legal process against the employer or trafficker is exhausted. The cross border cooperation between the Thai and Lao government to identify the victims is time consuming. Family tracing in Lao PDR can be delayed because inaccurate or incomplete information is collected from Lao trafficking victims in Thailand. This can be due to language differences, especially relevant with minority ethnic groups (Flaherty, 2008).

The definition and discourse of trafficking is not simple and has been problematised in the literature both in terms of blurring the boundaries between situations of illegal immigration and trafficking in persons (Tan and Bertrand 2007) and challenging the language of victimization and vulnerability (Molland 2010).

Tan and Bertrand (2007) distinguish between “trafficking networks” and “social networks” stating that “social networks give the best protection against trafficking”. However, as seen in this study, they also indicate that the boundaries between these networks are not clear. Across the wide range of experiences of migration for work, the women who participated in this study often talked of a “friend” who introduced them to the possibility of migration and this mirrors the findings of Tan and Bertrand (2007) who found that the majority of women who were trafficked were “recruited by a Lao woman who comes from the neighbouring village or the same village. They usually know the residents’ family and approached them as former migrants who know how to go and find a job in Thailand (or in Vientiane in case of internal trafficking)”.

Neither formal nor informal brokers are necessarily in the business of trafficking and people considered to be friends may, consciously or unconsciously, be involved in promoting trafficking in humans. The ambiguities of these trafficking networks also extend to the intentions and consent of the women involved. Tan and Bertrand found that “to a large extent, the trafficking networks provide a large range of services: assistance with border-crossing, or arranging the whole trip and securing employment for the migrants, providing mobile telephones to keep contact with migrants, sending remittances. They don’t often need to resort to coercion or deceit in order to find victims” (2007). Therefore, from the point of view of women who intend to migrate, these networks may be therefore seen as providing as service. There is an awareness of the discourse of trafficking and an expressed fear of the possibility of trafficking among the women in the study. However, apart from a very small number of exceptions, when talking about their own experience the women do not use language related coercion or victimisation, yet, using the UN definitions, a larger number of the accounts may be considered to fall within the trafficking discourse.

Although the number of case studies in this study that might be considered trafficking is low, there are several stories that are examples of women not knowing that they are going to work as sex workers and/or finding themselves unable to leave the employment despite their wish to return home.

Of the two woman who did not know that the employment that they were going to in Thailand would involve sex work, one was told that she had no choice but to stay in the employment because she owed so much money for the documentation that had been prepared for her, and the other was told that everyone would now consider her a sex worker so she might as well stay and make money. Both of these women discuss feeling very scared when they found out what work they would be doing.

The conditions that both of these women find themselves in are controlled by an abusive female employer. The first woman is not allowed to leave and only escapes when her parents threaten to call the police. The second woman does appear to be free to leave in some physical sense but she considers that she has no choice because of a combination of poverty and a difficult family situation. Her case study reveals a sense of resignation to her situation, even though, by the time the interview was conducted, she had returned to Laos and said that her life was getting better.

“We were Lao migrants and could not choose another way, just had to continue with the same work daily. (Returnee: aged 17)

The challenges of defining trafficking are illustrated by a third woman who describes a situation where she willingly entered employment at a western restaurant in Thailand and initially recommended the employment to friends, but the situation rapidly deteriorated. Her salary was withheld, she was not allowed to use a phone to contact her family and customers at the restaurant began to demand sexual services which she refused to provide. Finally she managed to escape with a group of women, hiring a van to bring them back to Laos.

It is important to note that the accounts from women included in this study who migrated to work in Thailand are those of women who have now returned to Laos. This study does not include any accounts from women who find themselves in similar situations and have been unable to leave.

9.4 HIV/AIDS and health services

While none of the women explicitly mentioned HIV or AIDS, condom use was a strong theme among women working as sex workers. All of the women who identified themselves as sex workers wanted their clients to use condoms and all of them stated that many of their clients did not want to use condoms.

Reactions amongst the women to this tension varied. Several women refused to have sex without a condom, even if they were offered more money, and said that their employer supported them in this and never forced them to have sex with a client. However, a higher number of women talked about how their clients said that they could do what they wanted because they were paying for the service. Of the women who felt unable to demand that their clients wore condoms, several stated that they went for a health check every month, although it was unclear whether this included testing for HIV. These women were not asked explicitly whether they had been tested for HIV. Given the nature of their work and the prevalence of clients who refused to wear a condom they are, as stated by Tan and Bertrand (2007) a high risk group in terms of HIV and AIDS. While several women report getting regular health checkups, none of the case studies mention support or services to raise awareness of or provide support in the area of HIV/AIDS.

It is not only women who work as sex workers who at risk of contracting HIV. New relationships is a theme that emerges from many of the case studies and several women talk about having sex for the first time in these new relationships. Tan and Bertrand (2007) suggest that the new mobility of the Lao population, of which economic migration is one part, and Laos' location in the centre of the region, mean that the country "may experience a serious HIV epidemic in the future unless effective preventative action is taken to minimize its spread" (pg. 18).

Laws of the destination country usually provide registered migrants with rights to basic social services. However, it does not apply to illegal migrants, who therefore do not have access to social services. In addition, the precarious status of migrants often provides them little recourse if they are denied these basic rights. In Thailand for example, registered migrants are eligible for health insurance while unregistered migrants are not entitled to health insurance and must pay the full cost of any health treatment. Moreover, some hospitals maintain policies of reporting migrants to the immigration authorities: migrants are thus reluctant to go to the hospital in case of health troubles. For these reasons migrants tend to treat themselves, visiting the health center or hospital only in dire straits.

10 Discussion

CEDAW situates the issue of migration in relation to larger issues of: gender inequality, traditional female roles, the gendered labour market, global feminization of poverty and the labour market. In

its concluding observations from the combined 6th and 7th periodic reports of Lao PDR, the committee urged the state party to introduce gender-responsive policies, legislation and programmes to protect outgoing, returning and incoming women migrant workers.

This report focuses on the experiences and perceptions of a sample of Lao women who have migrated to find employment away from their home villages. In this section we discuss the explicit and implicit links between these women's experiences and the CEDAW priorities, including the areas of silence which indicate a potential lack of awareness, engagement or perceived importance of particular issues.

10. 1 Addressing the root causes of migration

Root causes are complex and interconnected and difficult to isolate. The scope of this study cannot identify root causes *per se* but it does point to the factors that contribute to why women migrate and to the context that produces migration.

10.1.1 Financial difficulties

Financial difficulties were by far the most common reason cited by women for migrating either within Laos or to Thailand. Most commonly these difficulties related to either their family's inability to meet their financial needs. Since the majority of women who contributed to the study come from families whose primary source of income is rice farming this is often related to an inability to grow enough rice to sustain the family. Since rice farming also involves an annual period of relative inactivity, this becomes a time when some women can look for other income generating options, one of these options being to look for work elsewhere.

10.1.2 Debt

The need to repay family debt was a key factor in the decision of several women to move to Vientiane or Thailand for work.

10.1.3 Funding education

The case studies in this study point to both a lack of parent's financial ability to pay for their own education and a desire to fund their siblings' education as reasons why women migrate to find work. Education is widely viewed as an important and valuable commodity which the additional income from migration can support and which is seen as having the potential to address some issues related to relative poverty.

10.1.4 Funding family healthcare

Sometimes closely linked to debt, financial concerns related to illness and the need for family healthcare were a key factor for several women in their decision to seek work in either Vientiane Capital, Khammouane Province or Thailand.

10.1.5 Networks

Networks of family, friends and acquaintances featured highly in the reasons why women decided to migrate, both in terms of expectations raised by existing migrants and practical support provided by those already living in the new destination. Stories from previous migrants were key in raising women's expectations. Many women 'followed' a family member or friend to their new destination

but, while in some cases these networks provided a supportive ‘safety net’, it is not always clear how strong and trustworthy these networks actually were.

10.1.6 Consumer desires

While the number of women who directly referred to consumer desires as a reason for migration is small there were women who said that their family did not have financial difficulties but that they wanted more money to buy nice things.

10.1.7 Desire for new experiences

Several women expressed a desire for independence and freedom from their family and their family’s present way of live as a reason for looking for work elsewhere. Linked to this some women expressed a curiosity about living in Vientiane or Thailand and a desire to learn about a different way of life either in the city or in a different country.

10.2 Forms of violations of migrant workers’ rights

10.2.1 Labour exploitation

This study focuses upon women’s perceptions of their own experience of migration. There is very little specific mention of labour exploitation related to their own experience although one woman does refer to the potential for exploitation.

“If I find bad employer they will cruel and do work hard” (Returnee aged 26)

However, other women allude to possible exploitation through the decisions that they make to leave jobs because of long working hours or a lack of regular salary. Still more women neutrally and factually describe working hours and levels of salary that may appear potentially exploitative to the observer.

Previous studies suggest that working conditions in the industrial sector are often notoriously bad. Many small factories have poor working conditions including: no ventilation in the buildings, low light level and dusty working space. Migrants tend to work longer hours than “normal workers”. In Thailand for example, the law mandates working hours to 48 hours weekly, with overtime paid for each extra hour of work. However, several studies show that in most sectors migrants, especially illegal ones, work longer hours than the regular hours (Bertrand 2007). Moreover, migrants tend to receive less than the minimum wage and employers often deduct funds for housing or the cost of the worker’s permit from the daily wage. Previous studies suggest the need for particular attention to be given to domestic workers who appear to be poorly paid and more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation linked to the fact that they are typically isolated workers. While this is undoubtedly true, it is worth pointing out that the women in this study who worked as domestic workers generally portray more positive experiences than those who work in factories or in the commercial sex trade.

10.2.2 Restriction of liberty

The number of women who explicitly described having their liberty restricted by their employer

was low, but these extreme case studies include clear information that these women were not the only women in this situation. These cases are discussed in more detail above in section 6.3 *Trafficking*.

Other women, however, indicate a more subtle restriction of liberty. These women suggest that they would rather not migrate but they do not feel that they have a choice in their situation.

“If I had another choice to get a good job I would not want to work like this but because I did not have a good education I could not find a good job so I have to do this job to earn more money.” (Internal migrant: aged 23)

10.3 Awareness of rights and awareness of risks

CEDAW urges the Lao PDR state party to strengthen its information activities to ensure that potential women migrants are fully aware of their rights and fully aware of potential risks of such employment.

Bertrand (2007) found that migrant’s awareness on migration issues tend to be low. As the departure from Laos is often facilitated by a friend, a relative or a broker, migrants did usually not have detailed information about the work they will have to do abroad. Migrants seem to be mostly aware of the positive aspects of migration and the advantages of going abroad: “Stories of successful migration far outnumber stories of exploitation or trafficking”, (AFESIP). The present study mirrors this finding. Several women did indicate fears related to migration, and particularly around the risks of trafficking, but this did not seem to stop many women from placing a high level of trust in often seemingly insubstantial networks and contacts.

Women in this study did not indicate an awareness of their rights, but we would suggest that this may be because the language of ‘rights’ is not a language that is used by Lao women who are not working in the development field.

A small number of women did indicate some limited knowledge of government policy and programmes to support migrants.

“Now the Government has a big campaign (for migrants) to get legal documents for working abroad from the Ministry of Social Welfare or an agency which is recognized by the Government” (Returnee, aged 25)

However several women who indicated any knowledge of Government efforts to support migrants to gain legal documentation suggested that going through this official process was too expensive and that they had therefore chosen to process their documentation through unofficial sources.

With the exception of the small number of women who stated that they used health services, the women who contributed to this study did not mention any professional support services (excluding

the services of brokers) that they had used during their period of migration.

11 Concluding recommendations

- The study upon which this report is based was a small-scale qualitative research project designed to provide insight into the experience of a relatively small number of female migrants. While there have been surveys in the Lao PDR related to trafficking, GDG suggests that a broader large-scale quantitative study looking at internal and external migration would provide a clearer sense of the scale and issues related to migration in the Lao PDR.
- The examination of existing literature for this report revealed a lack of information related to internal migration. However, the case studies included in this report suggest that internal women migrants face similar issues to women who migrate to Thailand for work. GDG suggests that more research needs to be undertaken to understand internal migration. Such research would support the policies and support services that need to be developed to target and support these women.
- The women who participated in this study showed little awareness of their rights in relation to migration or of services that exist to support women migrants. Indeed, in writing this report, GDG has found it challenging to gather information related to existing support services and resources and, therefore, suggests that it would be useful to gather together information about existing procedures and services existing to support women migrants across the Lao PDR.
- Related to the previous recommendation, GDG suggests that existing relevant services need to build into their programmes culturally appropriate ways to increase women's awareness of the procedures for legal migration and of any available support services/resources.
- For the safety of migrating women in the future, GDG suggests that NPAs need to jointly work on awareness raising, especially for would-be migrants. This can be done in the places where travel documents are issued - while waiting for the documents to be finished, migrants would have a chance to learn about safe migration and how to avoid potential dangers.

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- 5 – What is your expectation for working abroad?
- 6 – Would you like to work abroad?
- 7 – Do you know someone working abroad?
- 8 – Who (Age and Sex)? What is your relationship with him/her?
- 9 – Why did she/he migrate?

III – Knowledge about migration process

- 1 – Do you have to inform someone before migrating?
- 2 – Do you know what kind of legal documents are needed to migrate?
- 3 – Do you know someone that can help you if you want to migrate?
- 4 – Do you know how to find a job if you decide to migrate?
- 5 – Do you know where people can get information about migration?

IV – Awareness of the risks related to migration

- 1 – Do you think it is safe to work abroad?
- 2 – Have you heard of people getting troubles abroad?
- 3 – What are according to you the main problems people face while working abroad?

Questionnaires internal migrants

Searching question

- Women
- Below 25 years old
- Who had difficulty working conditions (wellfare, work place and income)
- Move to other work place 3-12 months

I – Background information

1 - Age: Sex: Ethnic group:

2 – Family members (Age and sex):

3 – Who do you live with?

4 – What is your marital status?

5 – Do you have children? How many?

6 – What is your highest level of education?

7 – How old were you when you left school?

8 – What is your main occupation?

9 – What is the main occupation of your mother? Of your father?

10 – What are the sources of income in your family?

11 – What are the current issues faced by your family?

12 – What are the current issues faced in your own life?

8 – Did you have a job before leaving? If yes, what did you think about?

II – Decision to migrate

1 – What were you doing before going to town?

1 – Why did you decide to leave your village?

2 – What did you expect by migrating to town?

3 - Did you know people who had worked in town before taking the decision to migrate?

- 4 – Did your family agree with your decision?
- 5 – Did you get any support in your migration process?

III – First experience in town

- 1 – When did you leave your village? How old were you?
- 2 – Where did you stay while arriving in town?
- 3 – Did you get support from someone?
- 4 – What were the main difficulties you faced?
- 5 – Did you meet people easily? Where?
- 6 – Did you feel well accepted by people?
- 7 – What was the thing the most surprising for you?
- 8 – Is your life in town different? Why?
- 9 – What was your first job in town? How did you find it?
- 10 – How were the work conditions?
- 11 – Did you increase your income compared with the one you had before?
- 12 – What did you do with the money earned?
- 13 – Do you send a part of your income to your family?
- 14 – Do you have access to health services?

IV – Current situation and expectations

- 1 – Where do you work now?
- 2 – Has the situation evolved since your arrival?
- 3 – Would you advice a friend or someone of your family to do the same?
- 4 – What would you do the same way? What would you do differently?
- 5 – Do you plan to stay in town or do you want to come back?
- 6 – According to you, what kind of support do the migrant workers need?
- 6 – Do you have any comments, suggestions based on your experience as migrant?

QUESTIONNAIRES RETURNEES

Searching target group

- Women
- Age below 25
- Return from Thailand, Malay, USA....
- Working for: factory, house keeper, entertainment, selling
- Return visit home every year or came back 12-24 months.

I – Background information

1 - Age:

Sex:

Ethnic group:

2 – Family members (Age and sex):

3 – Who do you live with?

4 – What is your marital status?

5 – Do you have children? How many?

6 – What is your highest level of education?

7 – How old were you when you left school?

8 – What is your main occupation?

9 – What is the main occupation of your mother? Of your father?

10 – What are the sources of income in your family?

11 – What are the current issues faced by your family?

12 – What are the current issues faced in your own life?

II – Situation before going abroad

1 – What were you doing before going abroad?

2 – What are the reasons that made you go abroad?

3 – What were your expectations about working abroad?

4 – Before migrating what did you know about working abroad?

5 – Where did you get this information?

6 – Did you know people who had worked abroad?

- 7 – Who did you inform before leaving?
- 8 – With which documents did you go abroad?
- 9 – Did your family/relatives agree with your decision to leave?

III – Experience and life abroad

- 1 – Which country did you migrate to?
- 2 – How long did you stay there?
- 3 – How old were you when you migrated?
- 4 – How did you go there?
- 5 – What was your first job?
- 6 – How did you find it?
- 7 – How were your work conditions?
- 8 – What did you do with the money earned?
- 9 – What kind of problems did you face while being abroad?
- 10 – How did you solve these problems?
- 11 – Did anybody help you when you were in trouble?
- 12 – Do you know other migrants who were in trouble?
- 13 – How would you rate your access to health services abroad?
- 14 – What are the advantages and disadvantages of working abroad?

IV – Current situation and expectations

- 1 – Why did you decide to come back?
- 2 – What difficulties did you face while being back?
- 3 – What are you doing now?
- 4 – How is your situation compared with your life abroad?
- 5 – Would you advise other people to go working abroad?
- 6 – How would you advice them so they can avoid the mistakes you made and the difficulties you faced?

7 – What kind of help do other migrants need?

8 – Do you have plans to go abroad again?

V – Opinion on migration issues

1 – According to you, what villagers think about people going abroad to work?

2 – What are the alternatives to migration?

3 – Is there a difference between boys and girls when they are abroad?

4 – Why many people decide not to migrate legally?