JOINING FORCES TO FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ASEAN

The United States, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the efforts of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states to implement the ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP).

Human trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar global industry that continues to thrive despite increased awareness and well-articulated policies. According to the 2021 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, six of ten ASEAN member states (AMS) fall under the two lowest rankings - the “Tier 2 Watchlist” or “Tier 3.” Recent estimates suggest that over 60 percent of victims of forced labor are in the Asia-Pacific Region.¹ Despite the adoption and ratification of the ACTIP by all AMS and the adoption of the Bohol Multisectoral Work Plan, minimal harmonization of national-level policies, uneven enforcement, and capacity issues restrict victim identification and protection efforts. Even victims who are identified, assisted, and safely returned to their communities are vulnerable to being re-trafficked, due to limited availability of post-reintegration programs, stifling chances for normal, healthy futures. Moreover, there are well-founded concerns that vulnerability to trafficking and forced labor have worsened due to economic insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis.

ASEAN-USAID PARTNERSHIP FOR REGIONAL OPTIMIZATION WITHIN THE POLITICAL-SECURITY AND SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES (PROSPECT)

The United States, through USAID, supports ASEAN implementation of the ACTIP, which lays the legal foundation for combating human trafficking in the region. USAID’s PROSPECT project builds on a solid foundation of multi-sectoral relationships and efforts from its predecessor project, ASEAN-U.S. PROGRESS, to support ASEAN in ensuring victim-survivors receive the protection and support needed for short- and long-term recovery and reintegration.

¹ Walk Free Foundation Global Slavery Index, 2018.
OPERATIONALIZING RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF TIP VICTIMS

USAID supported the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) to develop *Regional Guidelines and Procedures to Address the Needs of Trafficking in Persons*, which was endorsed in March 2018 and launched in April 2019. To help operationalize these guidelines and procedures, USAID’s PROSPECT project has continued to collaborate with regional and international experts to develop model training resources for practitioners at the national level to support more consistent access and quality of services for victims across ASEAN member states.

STRENGTHENING CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

Working closely with other regional actors, such as regional USAID-supported Countering Trafficking in Persons’ projects, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the NEXUS Institute, and the International Labour Organization (ILO), USAID’s PROSPECT project facilitates strategic consultations and provides support for enhancing cross-border cooperation to strengthen regional counter-trafficking efforts, including the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. Despite many gains in the region on tackling child labor, child rights advocates are deeply concerned about potential backsliding and enhanced vulnerability of children due to pressures emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY

USAID also supports ongoing efforts to counter forced labor in the fishing industry, such as those already underway by ILO and Plan International, adding to the regional body of knowledge with the completion of a comprehensive regional research study on human trafficking in the fishing industry, which provides recommendations to help guide regional policy measures and new program initiatives.

RESULTS TO DATE

- Launched the ACWC *Regional Guidelines and Procedures to Address the Needs of Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (2018) and accompanying *Practitioners’ Model Toolkit* (2019), which provide a common framework for practitioners at the national-level.
- Developed a regional training curriculum on victim identification, protection, and reintegration. Intended as an ASEAN-wide resource that can be customized for national-level trainings, initial modules of the curriculum were piloted by USAID and World Vision Foundation in Thailand. Over 120 practitioners participated in the training to strengthen understanding of human trafficking and practical ability to identify and assist trafficking victims in line with regional and national policies and procedures.
- Conducted a comprehensive study on the dynamics of trafficking in persons and forced labor and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in ASEAN’s lucrative fishing industry. The report provides opportunities to enhance laborer protections in the region.
- In partnership with the ILO, supported a regional, inter-sectoral consultation to renew ASEAN’s *Roadmap on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor 2025*.

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