



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

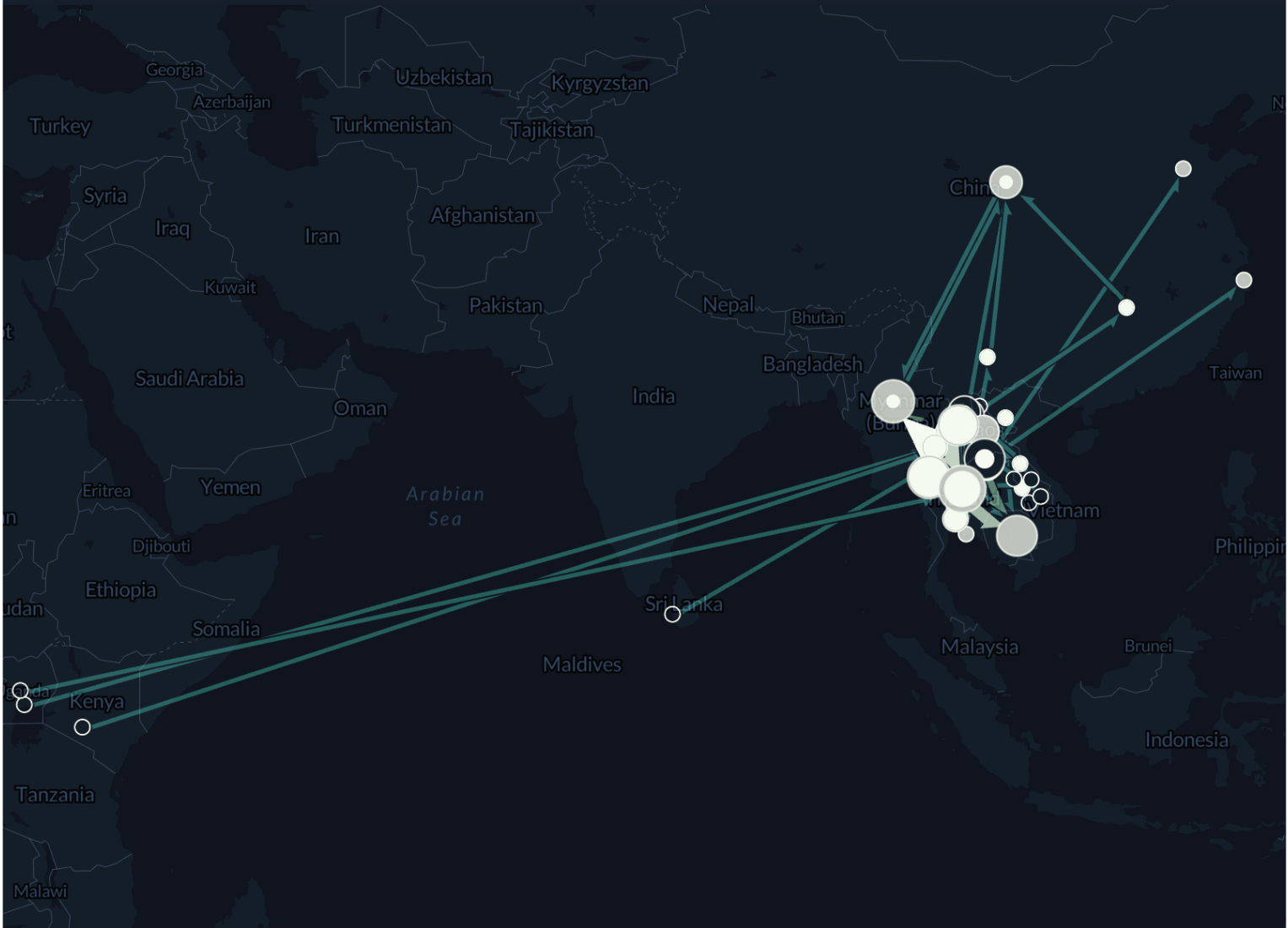
**FREEDOM
COLLABORATIVE**

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES.



**WINROCK
INTERNATIONAL**

EXPANDING THE MIGRATION MAP: CSO DATA FROM LAOS



EXPANDING THE MIGRATION MAP: CSO DATA FROM LAOS

Data contributors

Alliance Anti-Traffic

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Namjai Community Association (NCA)

Sengsavang

The Asia Foundation

Village Focus International

The five-year, USAID-funded Laos Counter Trafficking in Persons (USAID Laos CTIP) project, implemented by Winrock International, supports vocational training and employment opportunities for targeted populations in Laos to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking. In turn, these efforts offer a model of prevention and protection for the Government of Lao PDR to learn from, support and sustain as it builds its response to counter human trafficking through the implementation of related national laws, policies and programs, as well as providing high-quality support services to trafficked persons.

USAID Asia CTIP is a ten-year program funded by USAID and also implemented by Winrock International. The program is a regional activity that focuses on transnational and regional challenges to combat human trafficking. The program aims to reduce the trafficking of persons in Asia through coordinated and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business that will foster cross-border cooperation, develop opportunities for private-sector leadership, and improve the quality of data associated with human trafficking.

Supported by Freedom Collaborative

December 2023

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a significant aspect of life in Laos as individuals travel to seek better opportunities or refuge from challenging circumstances, resulting in notable internal and cross-border movements. However, despite the prevalence of these journeys, comprehensive data on human trafficking and exploitation in the country is limited. Consequently, Laos has received less attention than its Southeast Asian neighbors concerning these critical issues.

As part of ongoing civil society efforts within the country to combat human trafficking and protect vulnerable migrants, a diverse group of non-governmental stakeholders has emerged. These stakeholders possess great expertise and in-depth understanding of human trafficking and exploitation trends and cases on the ground, and their dedication and insights have significantly contributed to advocacy for stronger legislation, improved policies, and enhanced protection measures to prevent exploitation and promote the wellbeing of vulnerable populations.

This report aims to acknowledge and build upon the invaluable expertise of these stakeholders. It is based on a process of knowledge gathering which began with a collaborative workshop held in Vientiane Capital, in partnership with USAID Laos CTIP, USAID Asia CTIP and Freedom Collaborative, to provide groups with a mechanism for sharing essential data on human trafficking and exploitation activities. The ongoing initiative seeks to bridge existing data gaps and provide deeper insights into trafficking and exploitation patterns across Southeast Asia, and represents an exciting expansion of Freedom Collaborative's Victim Journey Tracker mapping project.

The data insights obtained from the workshop provide valuable information on various aspects of migration in Laos, including routes, contextual factors, drivers, vulnerabilities, and the recruitment of victims and migrants at risk.

Notably, the report highlights the emerging trend of forced online scamming in Special Economic Zones, particularly in Bokeo province. This shift in Laos from primarily an origin country to a destination for trafficking activities underscores the evolving nature of its trafficking landscape.

The data collected may not provide a complete picture, but it is a valuable tool for identifying potential trends and patterns. Recognition of its significance for understanding and responding to dynamic trafficking and exploitation trends reinforces the importance of data-driven decision-making. The expertise and information shared by non-governmental stakeholders is crucial for enhancing advocacy efforts and informing policymakers' actions.

The gathering of shared knowledge ultimately strengthens collective efforts to combat human trafficking and improve safety for all individuals in Laos and the broader region. Moving forward, we remain committed to expanding and refining data collection initiatives to capture a comprehensive regional overview of human trafficking patterns. By further engaging non-governmental stakeholders in this endeavour, the report's findings will gain resonance, empowering advocacy efforts and influencing policies to combat trafficking and exploitation in the region.

The dedication of the non-governmental stakeholders is evident throughout the report, and from the specialized knowledge and insights they have generously contributed. We are grateful to them for their expertise and dedication, which have been instrumental in shaping this initiative. Together, we continue to work towards protecting vulnerable migrants and acknowledging Laos' crucial role in addressing human trafficking and exploitation in Southeast Asia.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Data source

The primary data source for the report is the set of 50 submissions from participating organizations based on cases directly handled by them between 2017 and 2023. The majority of submissions is referring to recent cases in which the clients migrated in the years 2022 (29 submissions) and 2023 (3 submissions).

While the data may not cover every aspect exhaustively, the submissions remain the best currently available source of information, offering valuable insights into the experiences of victims and survivors of trafficking and exploitation both in and from Laos.

Data collection

The participating non-governmental stakeholders played a pivotal role in the data collection process by actively providing essential data points for each case. As a result, the dataset includes vital details such as city and country of origin, transit points, city and country of final destination/exploitation, mode of transportation used, type of exploitation, industry of exploitation, and the year the route was taken. Moreover, the participants contributed contextual information on recruitment, enabling a deeper understanding of the circumstances surrounding each case.

The questionnaire was adjusted in collaboration with the USAID Laos CTIP project, ensuring its relevance and appropriateness for the context of Laos, and included the following data points:

- Route: city and country of origin, transit points (if known), city and country of final destination
- Gender
- Age: adult/minor
- Nationality
- Vulnerability factors
- Reasons for migration
- Re-trafficking
- Year the route was taken
- Traveling alone or in a group
- Transportation methods used
- Duration of the journey
- Experience of exploitation
- Payment to smuggler and methods
- Industry of exploitation
- Means of coercion
- Additional information

The following chapters provide an overview of the collected data on movement and contextual factors as they relate to Laos and its neighboring countries in Southeast Asia.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

The analysis in this report is built upon information provided by contributing non-governmental stakeholders, who we would like to thank for participating in this exercise to address the need for more data coverage in Laos and the wider region. However, we want to emphasize that the dataset should not be understood as comprehensive, and wish to clarify the way in which this report should be read and understood.

Most importantly, we want to make clear that the data in this report has been submitted by organizations working with trafficking victims and other vulnerable migrants and communities in Laos, and includes cases they worked on during the period 2017 to 2023. While these organizations are the best source of this kind of detailed on-the-ground data, the information they have submitted cannot be viewed as an accurate representation of the overall trafficking and migration picture in the country and surrounding region. Because the data is based solely on participants' submissions, the following limitations and difficulties need to be considered when interpreting the findings in this report:

- The data is taken from cases submitted by non-governmental stakeholders, which means the dataset includes only information relating to VoTs and vulnerable migrants who were in contact with these organizations during the data-collection period.
- Like almost all data on human trafficking, it includes some biases the reader should be aware of. For example, it is based on the services the organizations provide to their clients and the categories of vulnerable migrants for whom funding is available. This does not render the data less valuable, but it does mean it should be interpreted carefully.
- The data points the participants shared were not always consistent between organizations or even individual cases. Each organization uses different case forms and works in resource-constrained environments, so the type of information they record and document varies.
- The data is a one-time snapshot and not a full trend analysis, as there is no time dimension element. Ideally, the information-gathering exercise would be repeated in two years' time to capture new trends and patterns in the organizations' data.

All these points should be kept in mind when interpreting the data. A good understanding of how this dataset came into existence allows the reader to better understand the data and its potential uses.

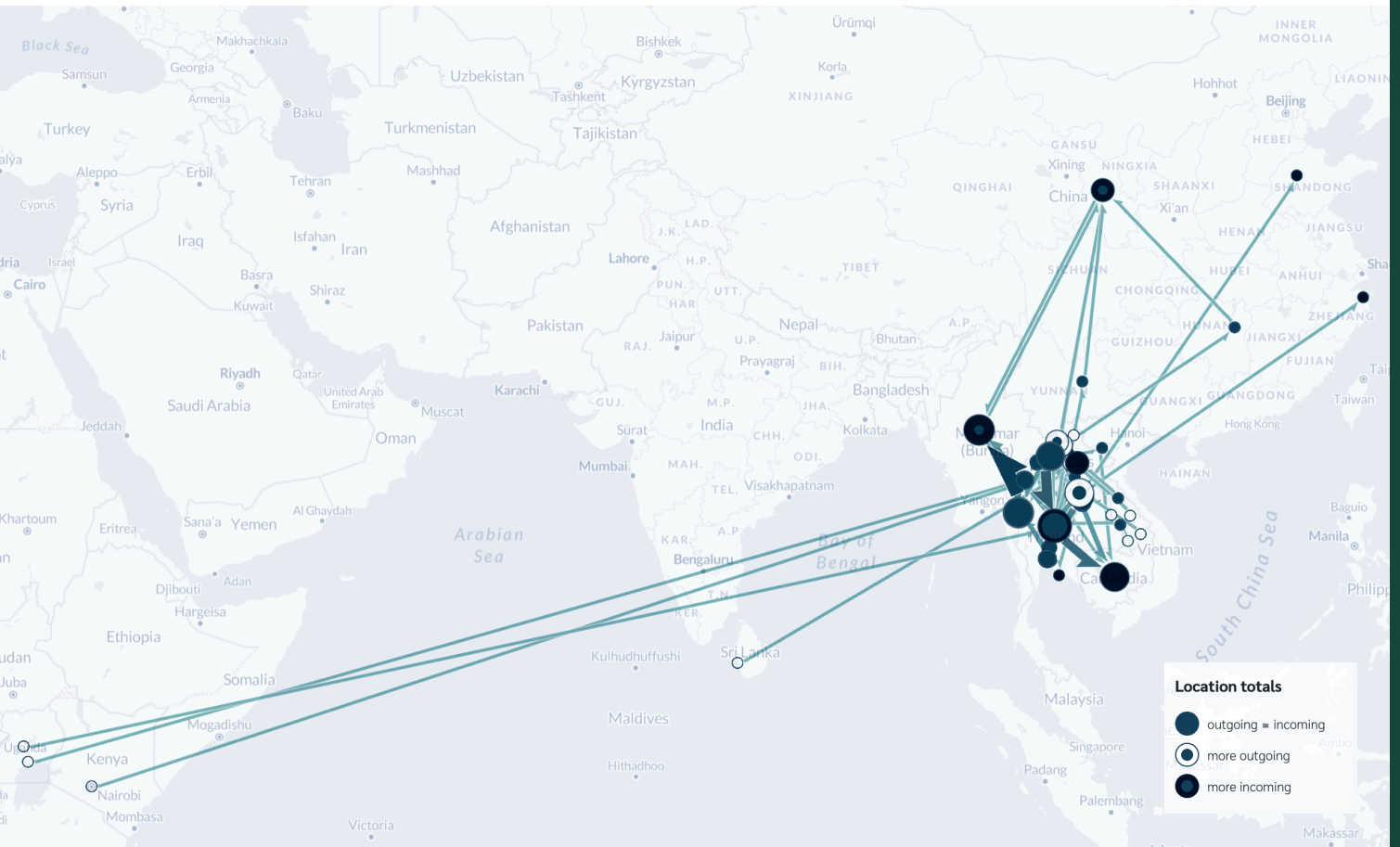
DATA SUMMARY

The participants contributed 50 submissions relating to five countries of origin, five countries of destination, and transit locations in four countries.

The most frequently reported international origin and destination combinations were as follows:

- Laos to Thailand (12 submissions)
- Laos to Thailand to Myanmar (10 submissions)
- Laos to Thailand to Cambodia (3 submissions)
- Laos to Cambodia (3 submissions)
- Laos to Thailand to China (3 submissions)
- Laos to China (2 submissions)
- Uganda to Laos (2 submissions)

The map below illustrates all the routes identified through the submissions provided by the participating CSOs.



COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, TRANSIT AND DESTINATION

The maps below provide an overview of the countries of origin, transit, and destination identified through the data submissions.

The dataset includes submissions relating to five countries of origin: Laos (45 submissions), Uganda (2 submissions), Sri Lanka (1 submission), China (1 submission), and Kenya (1 submission).



In addition, transit points located between countries of origin and migrants' final destinations were identified in four countries: Thailand (24 submissions), Laos (15 submissions), China (2 submissions), and Myanmar (1 submission).

Mentioned transit locations in Thailand include Mae Sot (8 submissions), Nong Khai (5 submissions), Chiang Mai (3 submissions), Bangkok (3 submissions), Udon Thani (3 submissions), Nakhon Luang District (2 submissions), Chiang Rai (2 submissions), and Chom Mok Kaeo (1 submission). In seven cases, the exact transit location in Thailand was unknown.

Please note that not all submissions included transit locations, and some submissions included multiple transits within the same country.



Five destination countries were mentioned in the route submissions by the participating organizations: Myanmar (12 submissions), Thailand (11 submissions), Laos (12 submissions), Cambodia (8 submissions), and China (7 submissions).



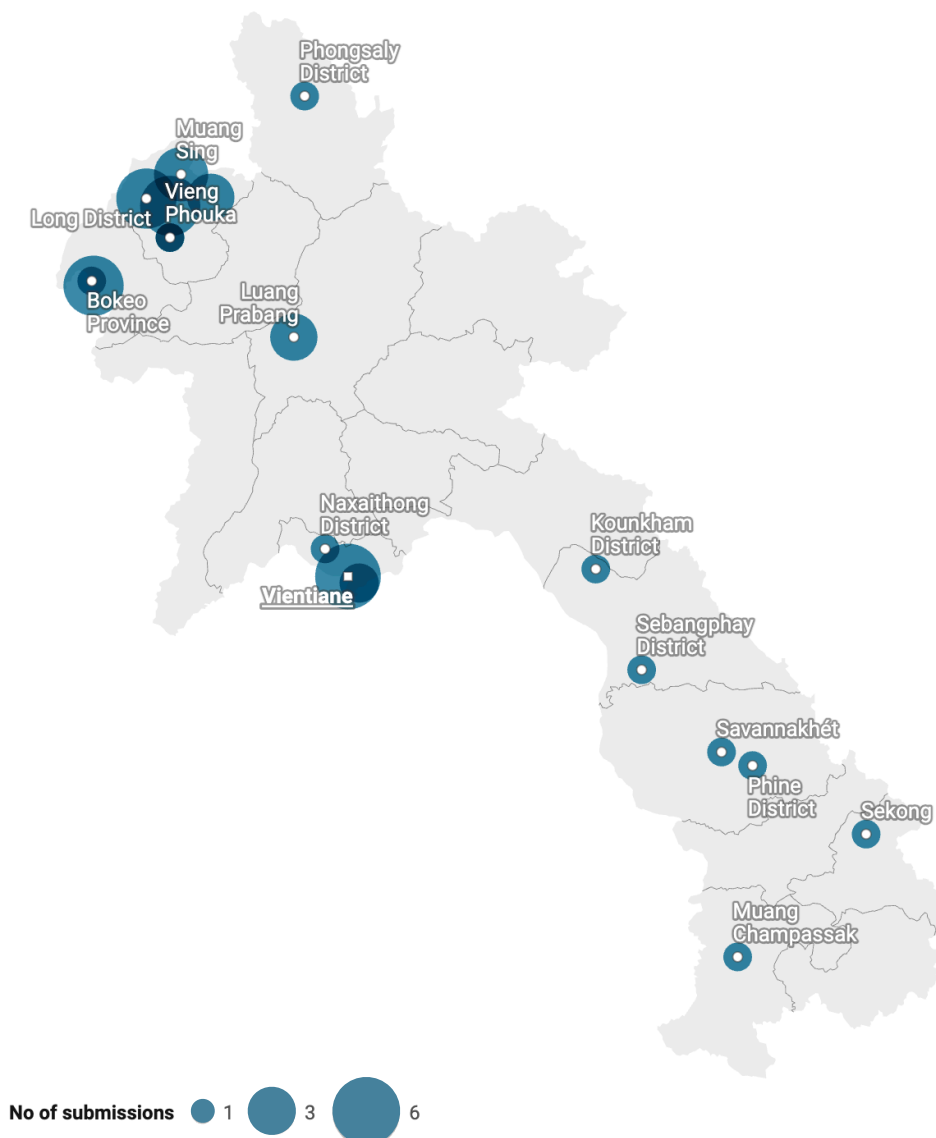
Locations of origin in Laos

Migrants from Laos embark on their journeys from various locations across the country. Within the dataset, 44 submissions include a specific location of origin in Laos relating to 19 different cities/districts within Laos as origin locations for migrants traveling abroad.

They are: Vientiane (6 submissions), Long District (5 submissions) (LNT), Luang Namtha (5 submissions) (LNT), Houayxay District (5 submissions) (BKO), Sing District (4 submissions) (LNT), Luang Namtha District (3 submissions) (LNT), Luang Prabang (3 submissions) (LPB), Hadxayfong District (2 submissions), Vieng Phou Kha (1 submission) (LNT), Phine District (1 submission) (SVK), Bokeo Province (1 submission) (BKO),

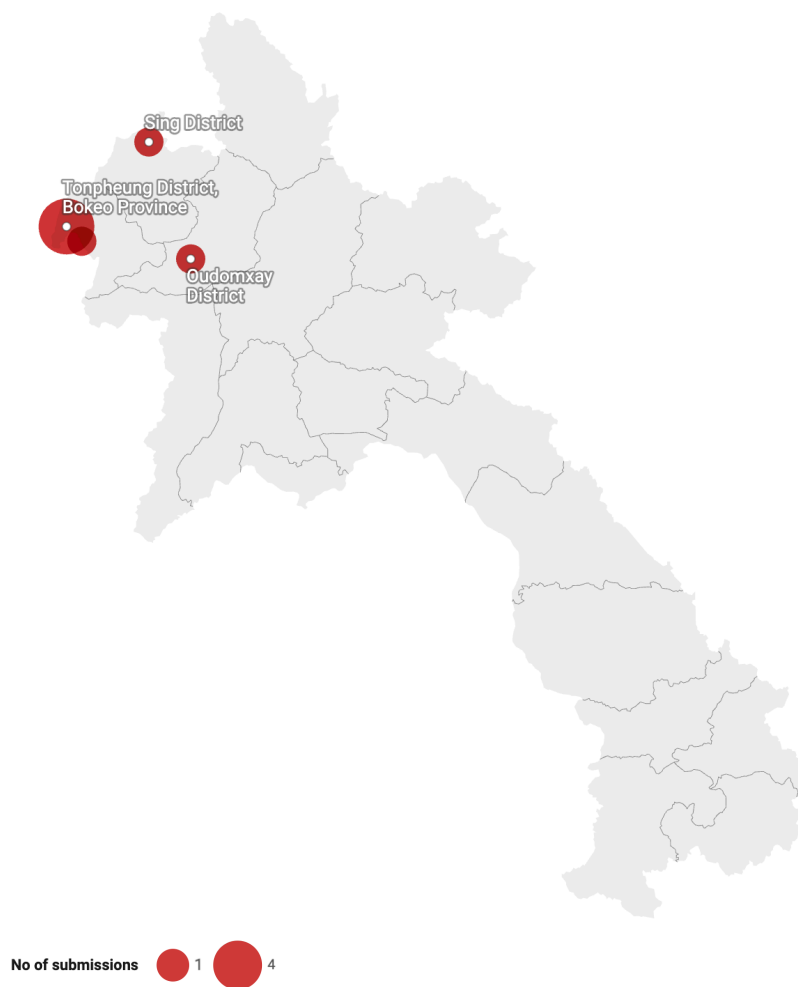
Muang Champassak (1 submission) (CPS), Sekong (1 submission) (XKN), Savannakhet (1 submission) (SVK), Naxaithong District (1 submission) (VTE), Kounkham District (1 submission) (KMA), Sebangphay District (1 submission) (KMA), Phongsaly District (1 submission) (PSL), and Vieng Phoukha District (1 submission) (LNT).

Note: LNT – Luangnamtha Province; BKO – Bokeo Province; VTE – Vientiane Province; VTE Capital – Vientiane Capital; SVK – Savannakhet Province; HPN – Houaphanh; LPB – Luang Prabang; SLV – Salavan Province; PSL – Pongsaly; XKN – Sekong Province; KMA – Khammouane Province; CPS – Champasak Province



Destinations in Laos

In addition, four locations within Laos were identified as final destinations for migrants from within the country (internal) as well as from Uganda and Sri Lanka. These are Ton Pheung District, Bokeo Province (4 submissions), Bokeo Province (1 submission), Oudomxay District (1 submission), and Sing District, Luangnamtha Province (1 submission).



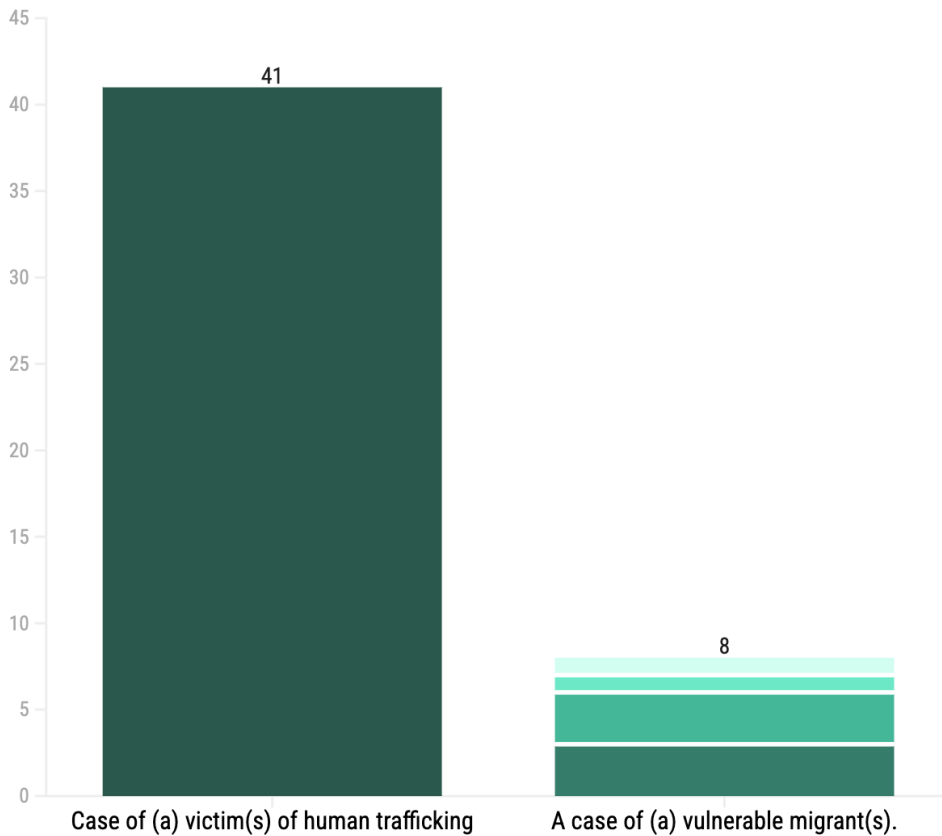
DATA INSIGHTS ON CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Types of cases

Each submission provided by the organizations indicates the source of the information. Out of the total number of submissions, 41 cases are related to human trafficking, while 8 cases are associated with vulnerable migrants who received support from the organizations. One submission was based on information gathered through their work in the field but does not pertain to a specific case the organization worked on.

The vulnerable migrants mentioned in the data consisted of individuals classified as stranded migrants (3), irregular migrants (1), and internally displaced persons (3). One submissions did not include the type of vulnerable migrant.

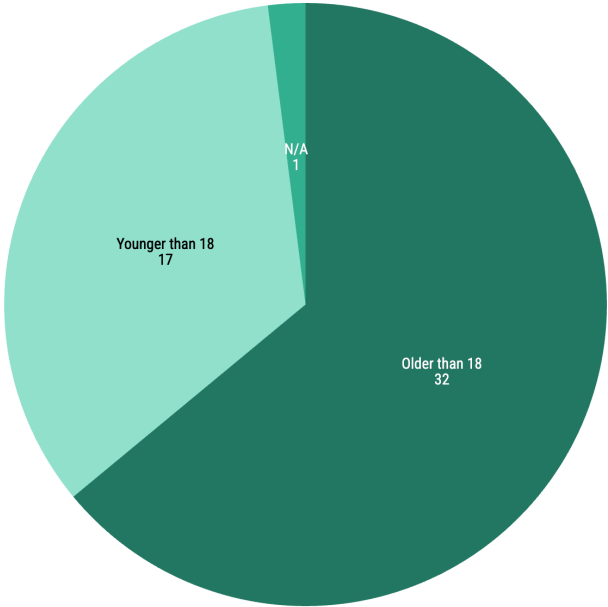
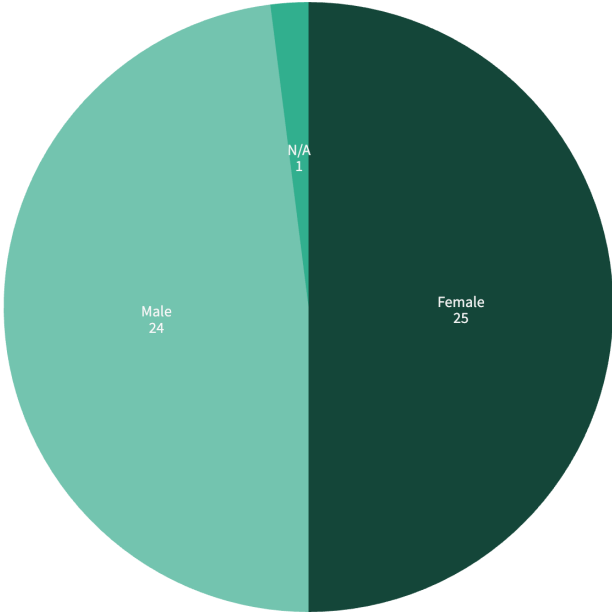
■ VoT ■ Stranded Migrant ■ Internally Displaced Person(s) ■ Irregular Migrant ■ N/A



Demographics

The submissions include data on 25 female and 24 male migrants and VoTs. Of these submissions, 32 refer to cases involving adults (18 years and over), while 17 refer to cases involving children (younger than 18).

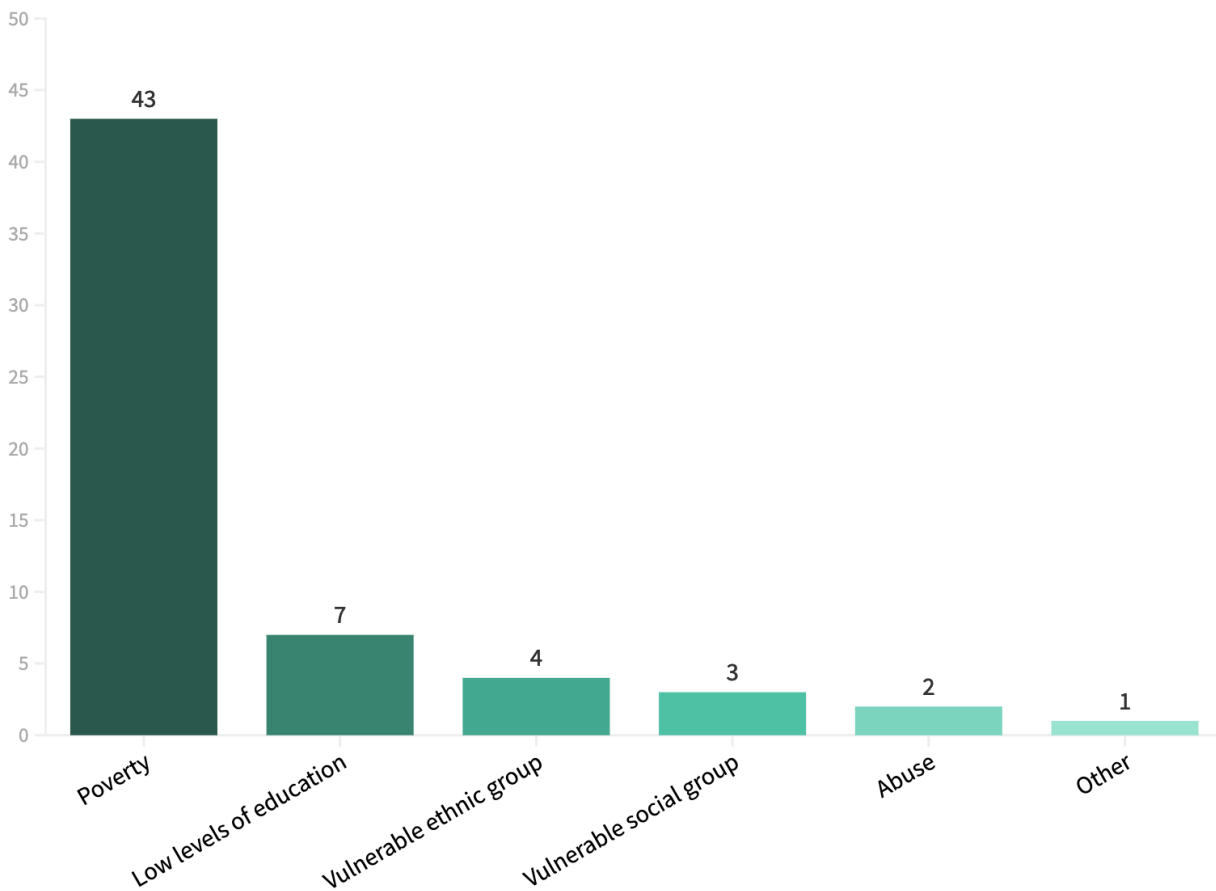
Only one submission did not provide these details.



Vulnerability factors

While human trafficking and exploitation can impact anyone, migrants from the region may face increased vulnerability due to several interconnected risk factors. Based on the data provided by the contributing organizations, the most prevalent vulnerability factor is poverty, which was mentioned in 43 submissions. Financial struggles, including difficulty affording basic necessities such as food, rent, education, or healthcare, can lead people to seek solutions elsewhere.

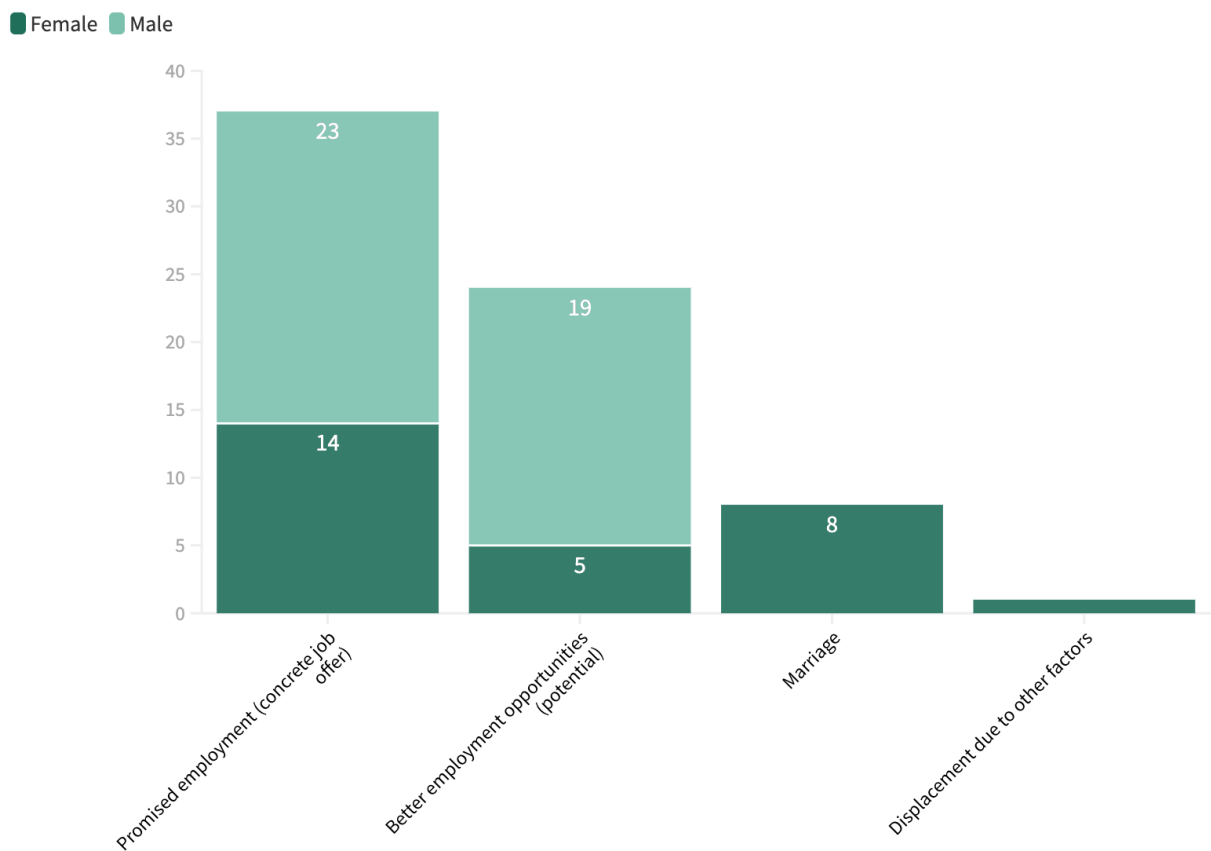
When combined with other structural barriers that limit their earning potential in their home provinces, this desperation can make people susceptible to fraudulent job offers and false promises. Additionally, low levels of education, belonging to vulnerable ethnic or social groups, and experiences of abuse have also been identified as relevant vulnerability factors.



Reasons for the migration decision

The dataset offers valuable insights into the factors influencing migration decisions, particularly the pull factors that attract target populations to their new destinations. Among these factors, employment opportunities emerge as the most common reason behind the decision to migrate.

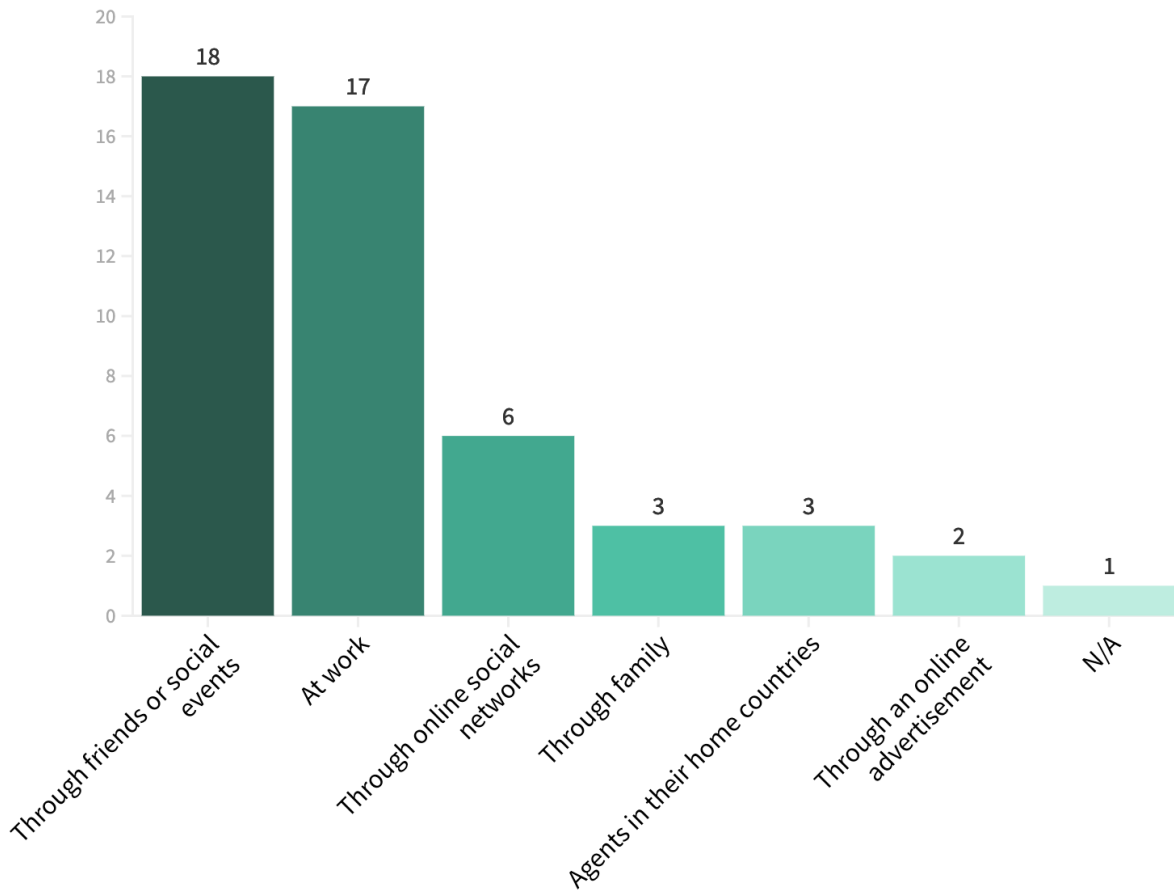
Notably, most migrants traveled in pursuit of concrete job offers although some also sought potential opportunities. Marriage was also identified as a motivation for migration, but predominantly in female cases.



Recruitment

As per the data submitted by the contributing organizations, the most common recruitment locations for victims were at social events or through friends (18 submissions) and at their workplaces (17 submissions). Additionally, 6 submissions reported recruitment through online social networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, and Facebook Messenger), and 2 submissions mentioned recruitment through online advertisements.

Family members were involved in the recruitment process in 3 cases, and victims were also recruited through agents in their home countries in another 3 submissions. One submission did not include any recruitment information.

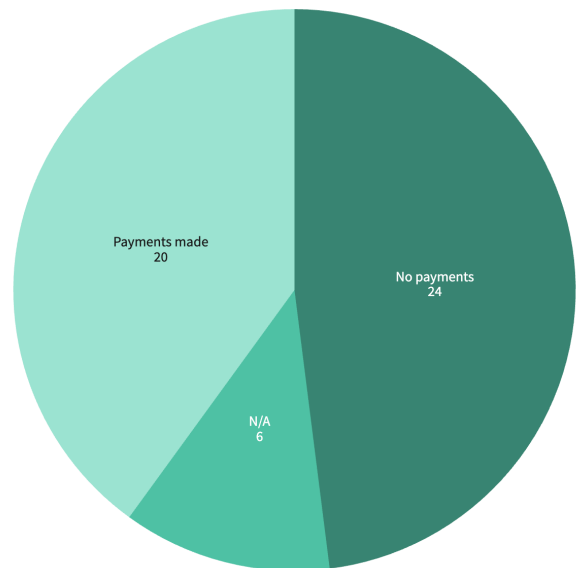
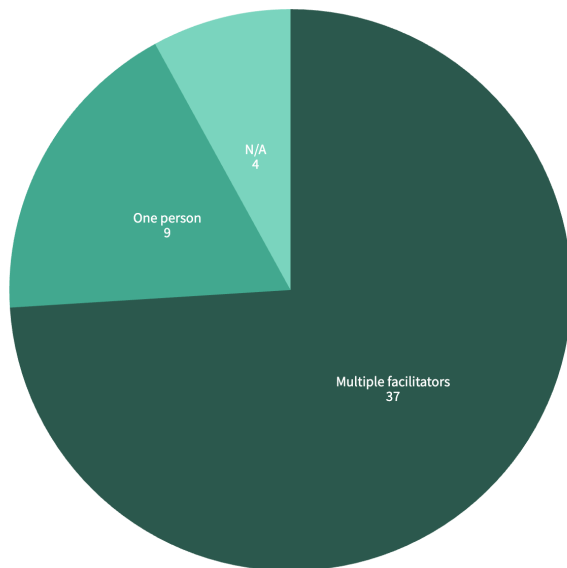


Facilitation of and payment for migration journey

Based on the data submitted by the participating CSOs, the records reveal that in 37 cases, there were multiple facilitators and/or traffickers involved in the migration process, underscoring the intricate network of individuals implicated in such activities. In contrast, in 9 submissions, migrants reported interacting with only one facilitator, suggesting a different modus operandi in those instances.

Additionally, among the submitted cases, approximately 20 instances indicated that payment was part of the migration process. Notably, migrants predominantly used cash or wire transfer as methods of remittance.

For four submissions, the information on facilitators was not known; for six submissions, the payment was also unclear.



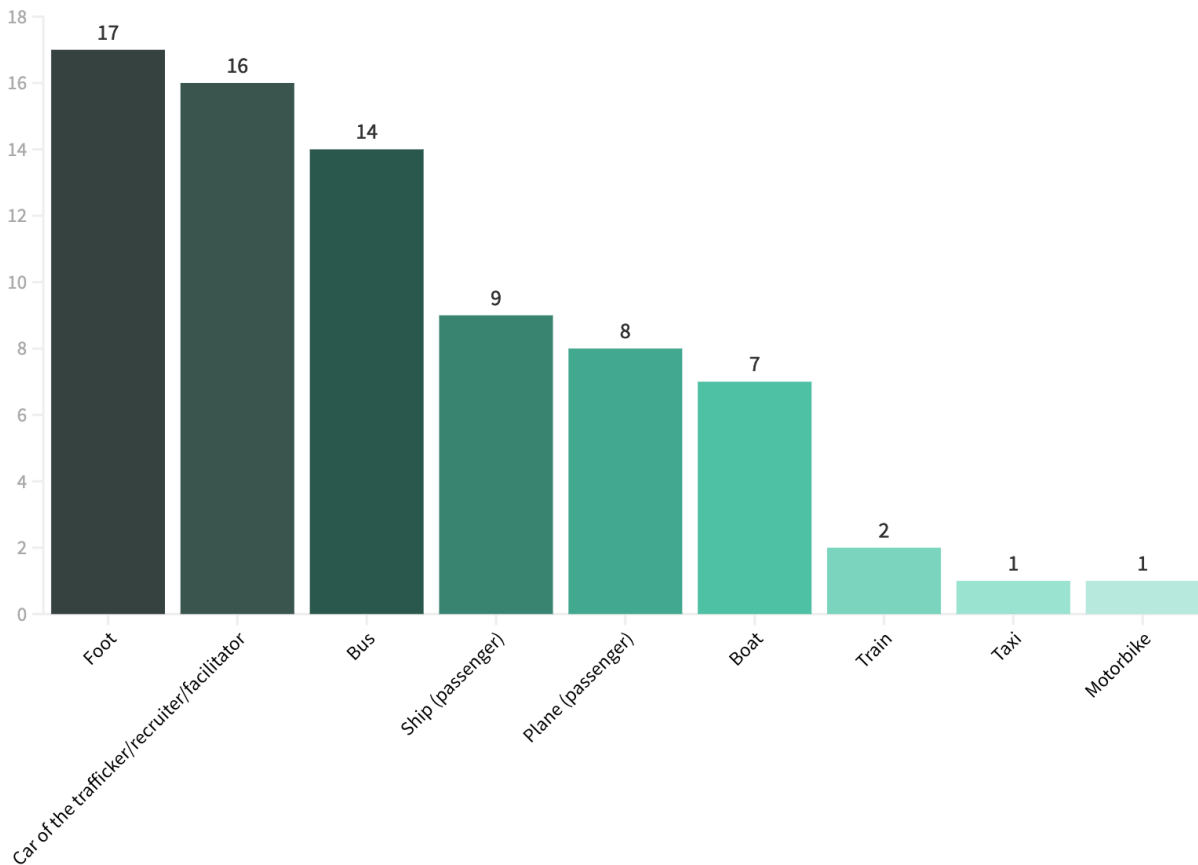
Migration journey

To gain a better understanding of the migration experiences of the CSOs' clients, the data collection process incorporated key information related to their journey. This comprised details on whether the migrants traveled individually or in groups and the specific mode of transport they used.

Within the dataset, 38 submissions indicated that the migrants traveled as a group, while 10 mentioned individual travel. In two submissions, this information was not included.

A diverse range of transportation methods were utilized for traveling. According to the submissions, the modes of transportation used were as follows: 17 traveled on foot, 16 in cars provided by traffickers/recruiters/facilitators, 14 by bus, 9 by passenger ship, 8 via passenger plane, 7 by boat, 2 by train, 1 by taxi and 1 by motorbike.

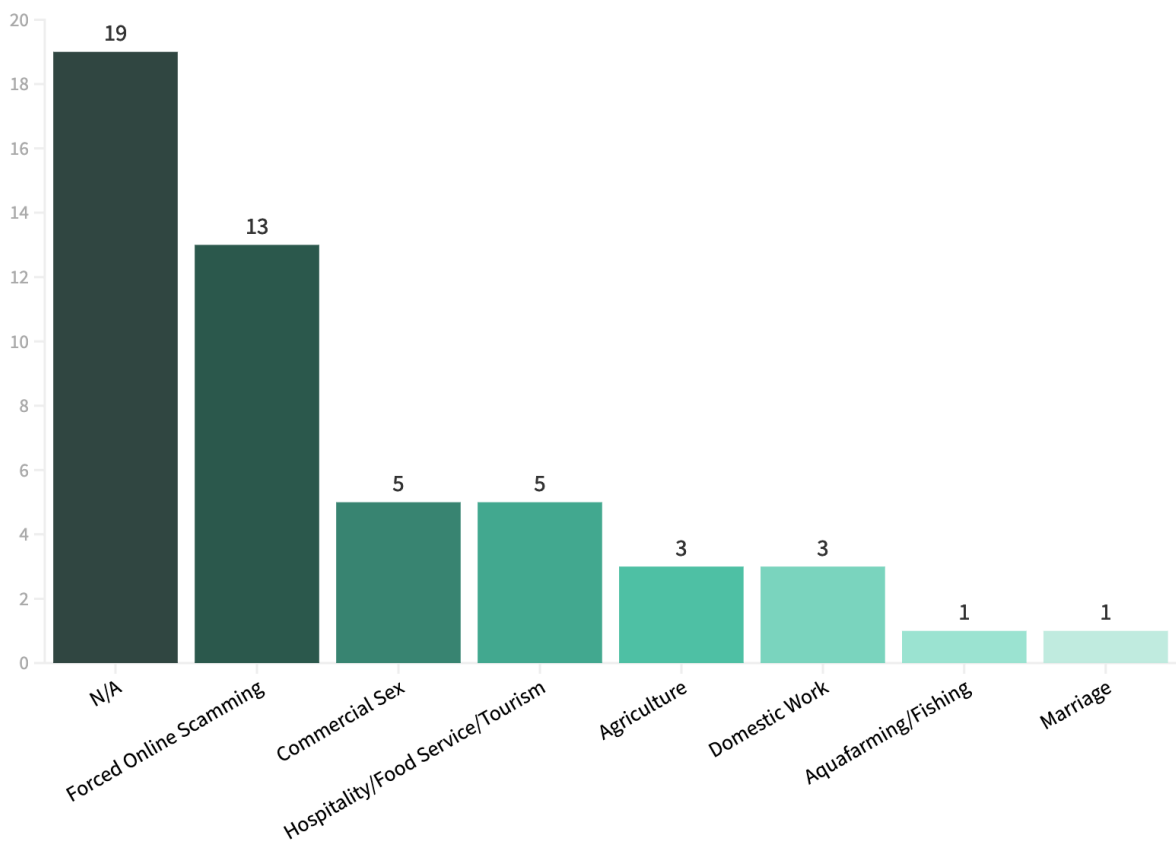
In the cases of the train journeys, the final destinations were Ningbo and Jinan in China, respectively.



Industries of exploitation

Various industries of exploitation were mentioned in the dataset. The highest number of cases related to forced online scamming (13 cases), followed by commercial sex (5 cases), hospitality/food services/tourism (5 cases), agriculture (3 cases), domestic work (3 cases), aquafarming/fishing (1 case), and marriage (1 case). However, it is important to note that in the majority of cases (19 cases) the industry and/or type of work involved in the exploitation was not known or not submitted.

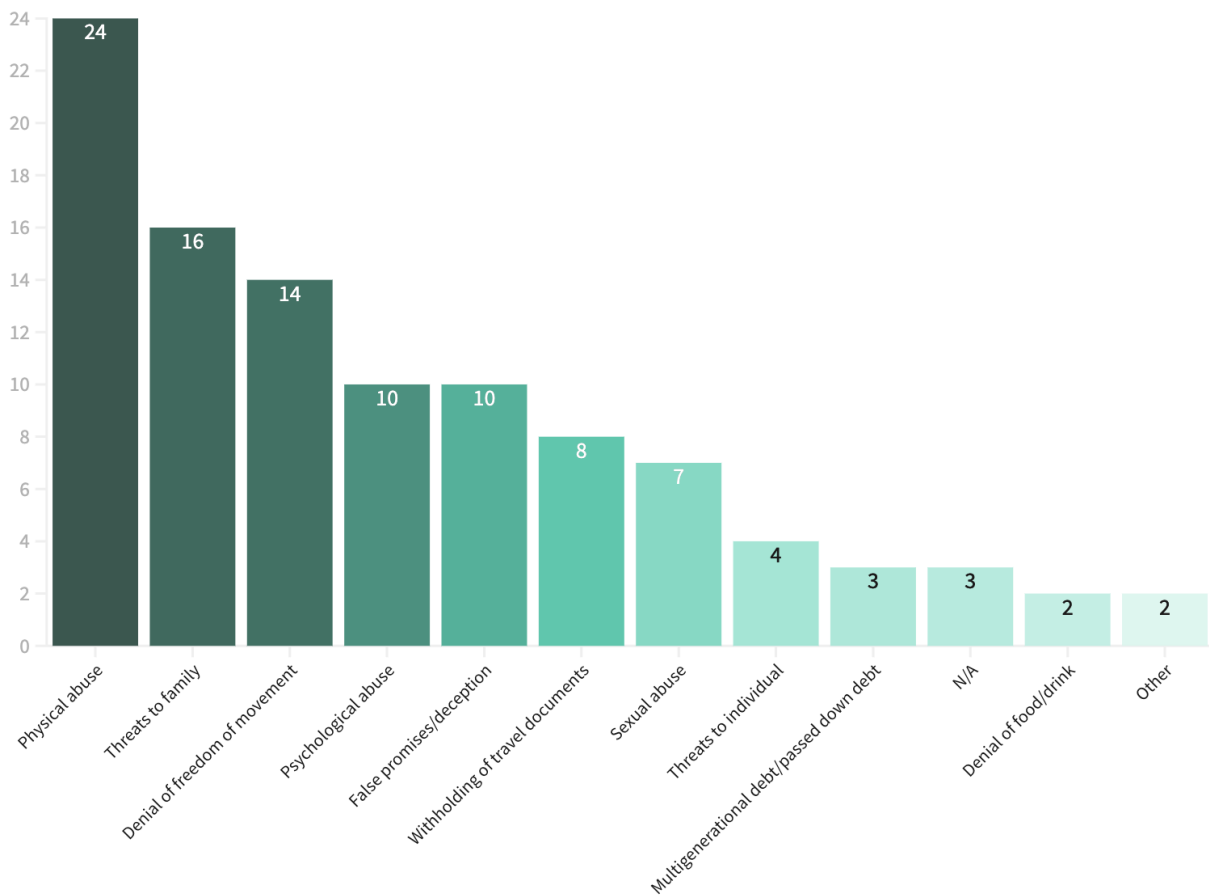
The data collected highlights the alarming emergence of forced online scamming as an industry of exploitation, underscoring the urgency to document these new and increasingly prevalent types of trafficking cases across stakeholder organizations. Proper documentation is important to not only aid in understanding the tactics and modus operandi employed by scammers but also to facilitate knowledge-sharing and collaboration among agencies, CSOs and other stakeholders.



Types of abuse and coercion

The submitted submissions, reflecting multiple-choice responses, show a wide range of exploitative conditions. The most common type of abuse reported was physical abuse (24 submissions), followed by threats to family (16 submissions), denial of freedom of movement (14 submissions), psychological abuse (10 submissions), and false promises/deception (10 submissions).

Other forms of abuse included withholding of travel documents (8 submissions), sexual abuse (7 submissions), threats to individuals (4 submissions), multigenerational/inherited debt (3 submissions), and instances in which the specific type of abuse was not known (3 submissions). Denial of food/drink (2 submissions) was reported in a smaller number of instances, and 'Other' types of abuse and exploitation were also mentioned (2 submissions), but no details were specified.



DATA APPLICATIONS

This report provides valuable insights that can be utilized by the participating organizations and others to inform their responses to human trafficking and the exploitation of vulnerable migrants in the following ways:

- Documented insights: The report presents substantiated evidence and documentation on push and pull factors, recruitment strategies, employment abuse, and trafficking indicators. The documented insights not only strengthen the practitioners' existing knowledge but also provide tangible proof to identify commonalities among cases. This, in turn, empowers practitioners to recognize trends indicative of trafficking and exploitation, facilitating the identification and prioritization of key issues. This strategic understanding enables practitioners to push for assistance and cooperation among relevant stakeholders.
- Gender and Social Inclusion: the CSO response in Laos appears to address both male and female victims of trafficking and migrants equally, unlike other regions. However, incorporating a gender and social inclusion approach in programming could further improve support services for women and children and other groups at risk, leading to more effective assistance.
- Focus on poverty and unemployment: the data underscores the critical role of poverty and unemployment in migrants' decisions to move. This finding emphasizes the need to prioritize prevention and protection strategies that target the root causes of vulnerability.
- Targeted awareness training: as the majority of migrants were through friends and at social events, specifically designed awareness training and education could address the complexity of recruitment through these relationships, considering the inherent trust within friend networks.

- Targeting transit points: outreach and prevention interventions could be strategically aimed at potential victims and vulnerable migrants at transit points. Combining this information with insights on high-risk routes and airlines used could further enhance their effectiveness.
- Comprehensive casework: training caseworkers to inquire more extensively about migrants' journeys and employment experiences could fill knowledge gaps and improve victim identification. Gathering details about industries of risk could be particularly valuable in supporting victims.

The data from the report could assist relevant actors in various ways, including:

- Identifying at-risk communities and recruitment hotspots to target prevention and protection efforts more effectively.
- Identifying civil society and community-based organizations along identified routes that can provide emergency services to those in need.
- Identifying destination hotspots to facilitate bilateral partnerships and collaboration, leading to more robust protection and after-care services.
- Identifying critical transit points to design efficient monitoring, outreach, and intervention programs, as well as inform law enforcement and border protection efforts, including training needs for airport staff.
- Identifying industries at higher risk of exploitative labour, and enabling improved outreach, identification, and engagement strategies with these sectors.
- The collaborative effort of participating CSOs in this initiative is commendable, demonstrating the power of cross-organizational collaboration towards a common goal. It signifies a significant step in making valuable information accessible to inform prevention and protection strategies in Laos and for stakeholders across the region.

