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USDOS – US Department of State

Trafficking in Persons Report 2018 - Country Narratives - Thailand

THAILAND: Tier 2

The Government of Thailand does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period; therefore Thailand was upgraded to Tier 2. The government demonstrated increasing efforts by prosecuting and convicting more traffickers, and decreasing prosecution time for trafficking cases through the use of specialized anti-trafficking law enforcement divisions. The government also investigated more cases of suspected official complicity in trafficking crimes and convicted 12 complicit officials in 2017, including 11 officials involved in the trafficking of Rohingya migrants. The government issued regulations to increase oversight of NGO-operated shelters and provide access to governmental financial support. It established an anti-trafficking task force composed of law enforcement, social workers, and NGOs to increase coordination of law enforcement and victim protection efforts; created a victim specialist program; and increased training for labor inspectors on forced labor. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Officials identified fewer victims of forced labor and investigated fewer forced labor cases compared to the previous reporting period. Although the government continued to increase labor inspections in high-risk industries, inspections resulted in disproportionately few identified victims and criminal investigations. Official complicity continued to impede anti-trafficking efforts, and there were anecdotal reports that officials arrested, detained, and deported some potential victims for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to human trafficking. Victims and activists may have been deterred from reporting, and some officials may have been hesitant to pursue investigations of exploitation due to risks of facing criminal defamation charges brought by unscrupulous employers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THAILAND

Improve the capacity of law enforcement, labor inspectors, and first responders to consistently and proactively screen for and identify victims among vulnerable populations, including migrant workers, stateless persons, children, and refugees, and to ensure victims are not subjected to arrest, detention, or deportations for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking; proactively investigate and prosecute officials allegedly complicit in trafficking, and convict and punish those found

guilty with dissuasive sentences; improve the capacity of law enforcement to proactively prosecute and convict sex and labor traffickers; improve law enforcement and first responders’ ability to identify and prosecute cases of forced labor, especially in cases lacking physical coercion or confinement; continue to train multidisciplinary teams and labor inspectors to improve the quality of fishing vessel inspections that could result in the identification of victims and criminal investigations; ensure government and NGO-run shelters provide victims with adequate trauma-informed care, including legal assistance, and increase the provision of financial compensation and restitution to victims, including to those who are unable to work outside shelters; foster an environment conducive to reporting human trafficking crimes without fear of criminal prosecution and provide protections for multidisciplinary teams against interference or retaliation; regulate migrant worker labor recruiters, including by enforcing bans on worker-paid recruitment fees and by prosecuting cases with indicators of trafficking; improve migrant workers’ rights, legal status, and labor migration policies to minimize the risk of trafficking; enforce regular payment of wages and the rights of employees to retain possession of their own identity and financial documents; and proactively inform migrant workers and other vulnerable populations of their rights, including under new migrant worker regulations, and legal protections from human trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts. The 2008 anti-trafficking law, as amended, criminalized sex and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of up to 12 years imprisonment and a maximum fine of 1.2 million baht (\$36,810) for offenses involving an adult victim, and up to 20 years imprisonment and 2 million baht (\$61,350) for those involving a child victim. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The Ministry of Labor (MOL) drafted legislation to more clearly define forced labor in Thai law and create additional protections for victims; in 2018 the government sought input from the public on this draft law. The government reported investigating 302 trafficking cases (333 in 2016), initiating prosecutions against 638 suspected traffickers (493 in 2016), and convicting 466 traffickers (366 in 2016) in 2017. Despite reports of continued forced labor in Thailand, the government reported investigating fewer cases; authorities investigated 47 forced labor cases in 2017 (83 in 2016) and 16 in January through March 2018. The government reported investigating significantly fewer cases of labor trafficking in the fishing industry in 2017; it investigated seven cases in 2017 (43 in 2016). In one case, the government sentenced a boat captain to four years imprisonment and ordered him to pay 450,000 baht (\$13,800) in restitution to the victims. The government investigated and detained several vessels operating in international waters, leading to the identification of 50 exploited workers, including 35 trafficking victims and, in one case, the arrest of a broker and crew supervisor. To increase efficiency in prosecuting trafficking and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing cases, in March 2018 the attorney general issued guidelines to prosecutors with descriptions of relevant charges and sentencing recommendations.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes continued to impede anti-trafficking efforts, and the government sometimes utilized administrative punishments against suspected complicit officials, such as suspensions or transfers to new positions, rather than subjecting them to criminal prosecutions. However, the government increased efforts to address official complicity. In 2017, the government initiated investigations of 26 officials (10 in 2016), initiated prosecution of seven, and convicted 12 officials complicit in trafficking crimes (three convictions in 2016). In addition, from January through March 2018, it initiated criminal investigations of 20 officials, prosecuted eight, and convicted five. Of the 10 officials initially investigated in 2016, four remained under investigation, the office of the public sector anti-corruption commission referred three for prosecution, and the government chose not to pursue charges against three. In one prosecution completed in 2017, the government convicted 62 offenders, including 11 government officials, involved in the trafficking of Rohingya migrants; it sentenced convicted officials to prison terms ranging from 14 to 79 years. In addition, in March 2018, the government convicted four police officers who solicited bribes in exchange for not pressing charges against those involved in the exploitation of the Rohingya migrants; they were each sentenced to five years imprisonment.

Following the adoption of the Beggar Control Act in 2016, the government increased efforts to investigate forced and child begging; it initiated 26 forced begging investigations in 2017, compared to eight in 2016. Police utilized DNA testing to determine the relationship between child victims of forced begging and the adults accompanying them, and the government prosecuted parents from neighboring countries who brought their children to Thailand more than once to engage in begging. Law enforcement officials cooperated with foreign counterparts to investigate Thai traffickers and victims abroad, and foreign nationals involved in trafficking in Thailand. The anti-money laundering office seized assets worth more than 31 million baht (\$950,920) from suspected traffickers in 2017, including in cases involving forced labor on fishing vessels, compared to 784 million baht (\$24 million) seized in 2016. The government amended the Human Trafficking Criminal Procedures Act to allow judges to award compensation or restitution to victims, including in the absence of a victim request for these funds.

In early 2018, the Royal Thai Police (RTP) established the Thailand Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force (TATIP), composed of law enforcement, social workers, and NGOs, to increase coordination of sex and labor trafficking law enforcement efforts. TATIP included teams of first responders dedicated to screening potential victims, gathering evidence, conducting operations, interrogating subjects, and analyzing digital evidence. The RTP increased the number of personnel assigned to the Thai Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (TICAC), which investigated internet-facilitated child sex trafficking. In 2017, TICAC investigated 41 allegations of online child exploitation (24 in 2016), including 18 trafficking cases (four in 2016) which resulted in eight trafficking prosecutions. The government operated specialized anti-trafficking divisions within the Bangkok Criminal Court, office of the attorney general (OAG), and the RTP. The government made efforts to encourage victim and witness participation in trafficking investigations and prosecutions. Some victims continued to report reluctance to participate in prosecutions due to fear of detention, an inadequate understanding of

the Thai legal process, language barriers, and preferring repatriation over lengthy shelter stays and judicial processes. The specialized anti-trafficking law enforcement divisions continued to complete trafficking investigations and prosecutions more quickly than in previous reporting periods; courts completed the majority of cases heard in 2017 within six months. Thai courts increasingly admitted advance and video testimony by victims as evidence in trials, increasing the willingness of victims to act as witnesses. Prosecutors also worked with NGOs to prepare victims to provide testimony. The government provided 4.3 million baht (\$130,670) for witness protection services for 52 witnesses in trafficking cases in 2017, compared to 2.9 million baht (\$88,960) for 254 witnesses in 2016.

The government-funded trainings focused on anti-trafficking laws for more than 2,600 police, prosecutors, and other law enforcement officials. The government completed a manual outlining standard operating procedures (SOPs) for trafficking investigations and initiated a pilot in one region in early 2018 to test the procedures; the pilot was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In addition, the government held training sessions with judges and prosecutors in two local regions to increase their coordination in trafficking cases. In an effort to improve the quality of trafficking prosecutions across the country, the government operated a sub-unit within the OAG trafficking division to provide guidance and mentoring for provincial law enforcement, prosecutors, and other court officials. Coordination between local law enforcement and prosecutors improved, but in some cases weak coordination impeded the success of trafficking prosecutions during the reporting period. The government required all judicial branch officials to report all trafficking-related cases into an integrated case database. The Department of Labor Protection and Welfare (DLPW) organized training for 335 law enforcement officers on forced labor, emphasizing non-physical indicators of trafficking. However, in some cases, first responders, prosecutors, and judges did not sufficiently examine evidence or properly interpret trafficking laws, especially for labor trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government increased efforts to protect victims but identified significantly fewer trafficking victims, particularly of labor trafficking, than in the previous reporting period. The government identified 455 victims in 2017 (824 in 2016), including 336 sex trafficking victims (335 in 2016) and 119 labor trafficking victims (489 in 2016). NGOs and trafficking experts expressed concern that the government inconsistently identified trafficking victims, leaving them vulnerable to penalization and re-trafficking. The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) reported assisting 450 victims in government shelters (561 in 2016), including 360 identified in 2017 and 90 identified in 2016, of which 132 were Thai and 228 were foreign victims. Authorities assisted in repatriating 147 foreign victims exploited in Thailand, including 36 Rohingya, and facilitated the return of 45 Thais exploited abroad by providing funding for travel expenses, legal assistance, job placement, and other reintegration services.

Government agencies participating in multidisciplinary teams who deployed to screen for indications of trafficking among vulnerable populations used a standard questionnaire to guide interviews with potential victims. Some NGOs asserted multidisciplinary teams improved capacity to identify victims using a victim-centered approach and were effective in some regions during the reporting period; however, effective implementation of identification procedures was less consistent outside urban areas. Some officials failed to recognize non-physical indicators of trafficking, such as non-payment of wages and document confiscation. In addition to trainings for law enforcement, the government trained more than 1,400 multidisciplinary team members, labor inspectors, social workers, and interpreters on victim identification and referral systems. The government held a series of workshops in early 2018 to review and update screening questions, procedures, and investigative techniques to improve the success of prosecutions. In addition, the RTP established a working group with the MOL to review and evaluate labor violations such as wage disputes and child labor to identify potential victims of trafficking. The government also created a victim specialist training program in early 2018 with 50 social workers, NGO personnel, TATIP members, and other officials to improve identification and investigative techniques. Participants were appointed to mobile response teams that will advise multidisciplinary teams in complex cases. MSDHS trained and registered 67 additional interpreters in 2017, bringing the total number of available interpreters to 251. In addition, the government employed 60 Burmese and Cambodian language coordinators for port-in-port-out (PIPO) inspection centers, an increase from 30 in 2016, and MOL employed 74 interpreters. MOL held trainings for language coordinators onboard vessels and MSDHS held five training sessions on victim assistance for interpreters to support the Command Center for Combatting Illegal Fishing (CCCIF) and the anti-trafficking units of the OAG, police, and criminal courts.

The government continued to refer victims to the 76 short-stay shelters or the nine long-term regional trafficking shelters operated by MSDHS, where they had access to counseling, legal assistance, medical care, civil compensation, financial aid, witness protection, education or vocational trainings, and employment. The government offered Thai victims who did not request assistance in shelters with legal assistance and compensation from the anti-trafficking fund. Gaps in access to suitable services and treatment during investigations, such as subjecting victims to multiple interviews, threat of detention or deportations, lengthy trials, and a lack of shelters in parts of the country, deterred victims from approaching authorities. NGOs reported concerns over the lack of appropriate options for foreign children whose families were complicit in their trafficking or whose identities could not be established. Authorities were more likely to send boy victims to juvenile detention facilities than to centers offering victim services. In October 2017, the government issued regulations to provide for government oversight of NGO shelters while making available the technical support of MSDHS and the opportunity for NGOs to apply for funds from the MSDHS anti-trafficking fund. Previously, NGOs could operate shelters for trafficking victims without government financial support or oversight. The government continued to operate three child advocacy centers in Chiang Mai, Pattaya, and Phuket which served as child-friendly spaces in which law enforcement, NGOs, and social workers could conduct forensic interviews of child trafficking victims.

The government continued to allow more adult trafficking victims the ability to travel, work, and reside outside shelters as provided by Thailand’s anti-trafficking law. Of the 450 victims in government shelters, 287 were employed either inside or outside shelters during the course of legal proceedings. Others were in the recovery period, chose not to work, were too young to work, or were receiving educational training in shelters. MSDHS approved a daily allowance of 300 baht (\$9.20)—which was the minimum wage in most parts of Thailand—to victims residing in MSDHS shelters who wished to work but were unable to do so due to security concerns or were awaiting an employment opportunity, as well as to some victims not residing in MSDHS shelters who intend to work; however, at the end of 2017, only 24 victims were receiving this financial support. Government efforts to more quickly complete trafficking prosecutions may have resulted in victims spending less time in shelters. NGOs reported a decline in the prevalence of child begging following the passage of the Beggar Control Act during the previous reporting period, which provided for health and social services to beggars, including trafficking victims. The government identified 35 victims of forced begging in 2017, an increase from 20 identified in 2016. However, government agencies inconsistently enforced laws related to forced begging, which may have resulted in authorities sending some potential child victims to homeless shelters rather than MSDHS trafficking shelters.

In 2017, the government provided more than 10.2 million baht (\$314,110) to victims and witnesses through various government funds, compared to 9.2 million baht (\$280,980) in 2016. This included 5.6 million baht (\$171,780) provided to 760 victims from its anti-trafficking fund (5.8 million baht (\$177,910) to 648 victims in 2016). In addition, courts ordered more than 18.4 million baht (\$565,640) in restitution from traffickers to 151 victims in 2017, an increase from 1.7 million baht (\$50,610) to 15 victims in 2016. Nonetheless, legal advocates and NGOs reported compensation and restitution for victims were inconsistently paid and remained too low to incentivize victims to cooperate in prosecutions and funds seized from traffickers’ assets were not awarded to victims. MSDHS established a sub-unit under its anti-trafficking division to provide victims legal assistance and file compensation claims. The government provided legal alternatives to deportation to victims who faced retribution or hardship upon return to their home countries. It permitted foreign trafficking victims and witnesses to stay and work in Thailand for up to two years; however, since the government approved extending the duration of stay from one year to two in early 2017, it granted only one victim this status.

The law protected victims from prosecution for acts committed as a result of being subjected to trafficking; however, flaws in the government’s implementation of victim identification procedures and its efforts to arrest and deport immigration violators increased victims’ risk of being re-victimized and treated as criminals. Victims were prosecuted for crimes committed as a direct result of being subjected to trafficking, including prostitution and immigration violations. The government’s criminal defamation laws allowed companies to pursue criminal charges against potential victims during the reporting period; additionally, labor inspectors could be held personally liable for claims of abuse of power, which could be misused and limit their ability or willingness to perform their work. Such policies may have prevented victims,

advocates, and labor inspectors from feeling empowered to report abuse. The government amended the anti-trafficking law in 2015 to provide protection to whistleblowers but did not report whether this new provision had been applied.

PREVENTION

The government increased efforts to prevent trafficking. It increased funding for migrant labor management and anti-trafficking efforts to 3.6 billion baht (\$110.4 million) in fiscal year 2018 from 3.2 billion baht (\$98.2 million) in fiscal year 2017. In September 2017, the cabinet approved the Second National Policy Strategies and Measures to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking in Persons, 2017-2021. It conducted campaigns through newspapers, television, radio, social media, billboards, and handouts to raise public awareness throughout the country. Given the low literacy rate and diversity of languages among at-risk persons, however, this information remained inaccessible to many vulnerable non-Thai speakers. The government and civil society groups operated a service center for fishermen to provide information on their rights, skills training, health screenings, and other resources.

The government continued efforts to reduce costs for Thais in overseas guest worker programs, but excessive fees incurred by some Thai workers to obtain employment abroad made them vulnerable to debt bondage or exploitative conditions. Through government-to-government formal migration channels, the government facilitated 20,068 Thais to obtain employment abroad in 2017. Provincial employment offices provided training to more than 3,500 of these workers prior to their departure and MOL screened travel documents for departing workers at 25 checkpoints throughout the country; of 64,602 workers departing Thailand in 2017, 729 were prevented from traveling. In 2017, the government inspected 302 labor recruitment agencies that facilitated overseas and domestic employment of Thai workers and found unlawful practices in nine, resulting in license suspensions of eight agencies and the revocation of one agency's license. It initiated prosecutions against 287 illegal brokers (108 in 2016) under the Employment and Job-Seeker Protection Act. The government continued to grant citizenship to stateless persons in 2017 and issued a new regulation to provide legal residency to orphaned and non-Thai children born in Thailand. In an effort to prevent trafficking of children, child advocacy centers provided social service interventions, including acute care needs, to children vulnerable to exploitation, and childcare was offered at a service center for fishermen. MSDHS and MOL operated hotlines with operators fluent in 20 foreign languages; the MSDHS hotline received 172 calls related to possible trafficking cases in 2017 (269 in 2016), leading to the identification of 109 child and 63 adult victims and prosecution of 73 cases. MSDHS increased the number of available hotline interpreters to 68 in 2017.

Critical gaps in Thailand's labor laws preventing migrant workers from forming labor unions may have contributed to exploitation. In addition, NGOs and international organizations widely reported the government did not adequately enforce the application of minimum wages in sectors with a minimum wage and lacked legislation to require minimum wages in other sectors, especially in those sectors with high

employment of migrant workers. Some also reported gaps in Thai policies related to migrant workers that exacerbated exploitation, such as no requirement that employment contracts be written in both Thai and workers' languages, lack of clear guidance to measure work and rest hours for workers aboard fishing vessels, and difficulty for workers to change employers. In June 2017, the government issued a royal ordinance concerning management of foreign worker employment, which required additional registration requirements for migrant workers and their employers, and strengthened penalties for employers of undocumented workers. However, the sudden announcement of the ordinance resulted in mass departures of thousands of undocumented workers who subsequently may have become vulnerable to exploitation. Following criticisms from stakeholders, the government delayed implementation of the decree until June 2018 to seek stakeholder input on amendments of the decree, as well as to allow migrant workers more time to obtain the necessary documents for legal employment under the decree. The government facilitated the establishment of 14 service centers in Thailand, in coordination with the governments of Burma, Cambodia, and Laos, to conduct nationality verification for undocumented migrant workers. The cabinet subsequently approved an amended decree in March 2018, adding protections for workers such as prohibiting the confiscation of identity documents, banning sub-contracted employees, and easing the ability for workers to change employers, which remained widespread concerns during the reporting period. In October 2017, DLPW required employers in the fishing sector to pay workers monthly through bank transfers.

A government decree required migrant worker recruitment agencies to apply for a license and pay a deposit fee applied toward a foreign worker employment fund; unregistered agencies were liable to three years imprisonment and fines up to 60,000 baht (\$1,840). Employers were also mandated to cover costs (excluding personal expenses such as passports, medical checks, and work permits) associated with bringing migrant workers to Thailand and back to their home countries when employment ends, such as recruitment fees and transportation costs. In 2017, 101 migrant worker recruitment agencies were licensed and the government inspected 97 agencies; the government prosecuted one agency in violation of the decree and imposed a fine of 20,000 baht (\$610). While the number of migrant workers entering Thailand through formal government-to-government migration systems increased, greater usage of this mechanism continued to be impeded by lack of information, lengthy processing times, difficulties in changing employers, and high costs tied to corruption on both sides of the border. The government operated three post-arrival centers to assist migrant workers entering Thailand through these formal channels, as well as 10 migrant workers assistance centers; these centers assisted 345,204 workers in 2017 (105,647 in August 2016 to February 2017) by providing resources in multiple languages, including for trafficking awareness, and assisting the migrant workers to register with the government.

The Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Justice inspected 11,268 “high-risk” adult entertainment venues and ordered 268 to cease business activities for five years; these inspections led to the prosecution of eight trafficking cases. DPLW conducted 1,693 labor inspections at high-risk workplaces, including sugarcane farms, garment factories,

shrimp and fish processing facilities, pig farms, and poultry farms in 2017, finding 191 violations resulting in 12 prosecutions. In February 2017 the government called all Thai fishing vessels operating outside Thai waters back to port where they were put under close monitoring; the government had not authorized these vessels to continue fishing by the end of the reporting period. CCCIF, the Department of Fisheries, DLPW, and other relevant agencies developed a manual on SOPs for labor inspections to be conducted after the government reauthorizes Thai vessels to operate outside Thai waters. In addition, the government required fishing vessels operating within Thai waters to return to ports every 30 days for inspections.

The government continued to screen for trafficking indicators among fishermen returning to Thailand and on fishing vessels in Thai waters, as well as among workers in seafood processing facilities. The CCCIF operated 32 PIPO centers plus 19 additional forward inspection points, which performed inspections at port, at sea, and on land to verify whether fishing vessels were operating legally and workers had contracts, work permits, and identity documents. The government increased the number of PIPO inspection teams from 64 to 85. MOL conducted inspections onboard 644 vessels in 2017 and found 34 violations of the law (15 in 2016); three cases were prosecuted as a result. In addition, the Royal Thai Navy conducted 3,927 on board inspections of fishing vessels in 2017 and suspended 110 vessels from operating for legal violations. However, the government did not report whether any of these inspections resulted in the identification of trafficking victims, and NGO observers asserted both at-port and at-sea inspections conducted by multidisciplinary teams of the CCCIF were conducted too quickly, in front of ship captains or in open settings, with inconsistent methods in different ports, or by interpreters without the presence of labor inspectors; and in some cases, inspections consisted only of a review of documents or inspectors did not board vessels or speak to crewmembers. Civil society and government officials expressed concerns that due to varying levels of enforcement at PIPO centers, some boat captains chose ports where inspections and enforcement were weaker. Some NGOs reported workers faced retaliation if they reported abuse to inspection teams, and asserted potential victims did not report abuses to avoid long shelter stays which could result in financial or personal hardships. In 2017 the multidisciplinary teams of the CCCIF inspected 358 on-land seafood processing workplaces and found 142 cases of law and labor violations. The government issued administrative orders to suspend business operations for nine workplaces for 10 to 30 days. The government did not report how many of these violations had direct ties to trafficking.

The government took steps to decrease the demand for commercial sex acts, including by investigating and prosecuting offenders who purchased children for commercial sex acts. To discourage child sex tourism, the government reported it denied entry to 74 known foreign sex offenders. The government developed and launched a video shown on flights entering Thailand discouraging sex tourism. The Ministry of Tourism distributed more than 315,000 brochures discouraging sex tourism to businesses and tourism professionals and organized trainings for 800 local government officials, tourism sector workers, students, youth, and civil society organizations on prevention of child sexual exploitation in the tourism industry.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, Thailand is a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Labor trafficking victims are exploited in commercial fishing and related industries, the poultry industry, manufacturing, agriculture, and domestic work, or forced into street begging. Thailand’s commercial sex industry remains vast, increasing vulnerabilities for sex trafficking. Women, men, boys, and girls from Thailand, other Southeast Asian countries, Sri Lanka, Russia, Uzbekistan, and some African countries are subjected to labor and sex trafficking in Thailand. Thailand is also a transit country for victims from China, North Korea, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, and Burma subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Russia, South Korea, the United States, and countries in Western Europe.

Thai nationals are subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking in Thailand and in countries in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Members of ethnic minorities, highland persons, and stateless persons in Thailand have experienced instances of abuse indicative of trafficking. Children from Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia are victims of sex trafficking in brothels, massage parlors, bars, karaoke lounges, hotels, and private residences. Children in orphanages are vulnerable to exploitation, including trafficking. Some parents or brokers force children from Thailand, Cambodia and Burma to sell flowers, beg, or work in domestic service in urban areas. As recently as 2015, there were reports of separatist groups in southern Thailand recruiting and using children to commit acts of arson or serve as scouts. Instances of trafficking, migrant smuggling, abduction, and extortion of migrants occur as migrants move between Thailand and neighboring countries. Traffickers, including some registered and unregistered labor brokers of Thai and foreign nationalities, bring foreign victims into Thailand through both formal migration and smuggling routes and serve as intermediaries between job-seekers and employers. Some brokers charge substantial fees or collaborate with corrupt law enforcement officials, and some Thai and migrant workers incur significant debts to obtain employment and are subjected to debt bondage. There are reports that some brokers and employers continue to confiscate identity documents. Thai men and women who migrate overseas also rely on registered and unregistered labor brokers to facilitate acquisition of low-skilled contract work or agricultural labor and are sometimes subjected to conditions of forced labor and debt bondage. Trafficking in the fishing industry remains a significant concern. Thai, Burmese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Indonesian men and boys are subject to forced labor on Thai and foreign-owned fishing boats. Some remain at sea for several years, are paid very little or irregularly, work as much as 18 to 20 hours per day for seven days a week, and are reportedly threatened, physically beaten, drugged to work longer, and even killed for becoming ill, attempting to escape, or disobeying orders. Some trafficking victims in the fishing sector had difficulty returning home due to isolated workplaces, unpaid wages, and the lack of legitimate identity documents or safe means to travel.

Corruption continues to undermine anti-trafficking efforts. Some government officials are directly complicit in trafficking crimes, including through accepting bribes or loans from business owners and brothels where victims are exploited. Credible reports indicate some corrupt officials protect brothels and other commercial sex venues from raids and inspections and collude with traffickers. Migrant workers, especially those who are undocumented, are fearful of reporting trafficking crimes and cooperating with authorities due to lack of awareness of their rights and minimal protections both in Thailand and in countries of origin and a general fear of authority that may stem from their country of origin or their experience in Thailand. Some government officials profit from bribes and direct involvement in the extortion and exploitation of migrants. Some of these migrants are kidnapped and held for ransom, which increases their vulnerability to sexual servitude, forced labor, or debt bondage.

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