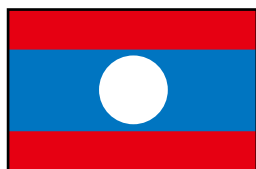


# LAO PDR



AMY Map by Boyet Rivera III

## A. Total Stock (Number) of Migrants, as of 2005

MIGRANTS ABROAD	
<b>ESTIMATED STOCK: MIGRANTS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	-
<b>a. By visa status</b>	Documented migrant workers*
	Emigrants/residents
	Undocumented migrants**
	Refugees***
	24,442
<b>b. By sex</b>	Male
	Female
<b>c. Top destination countries</b>	1. Thailand - 179,887
	2. China
	3. USA
	4. Canada
	5. Australia
	6. Singapore
	7. Cambodia
	8.
	9.
	10.

MIGRANTS IN LAO PDR	
<b>ESTIMATED STOCK: MIGRANTS IN THE COUNTRY</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	-
<b>a. By visa status</b>	Documented migrant workers*
	Emigrants/residents
	Undocumented migrants**
	Refugees***
<b>b. By sex</b>	Male
	Female
<b>c. Top countries of origin</b>	1. China
	2. Vietnam
	3. Thailand
	4. Malaysia
	5.
	6.
	7.
	8.
	9.
	10.

\* Non-resident, temporary, or contract workers.

\*\* Includes illegal entrants, overstayed or "jumped" visas, trafficked/smuggled people

\*\*\* As defined by the government, or in accordance with the UN refugee convention.

## B. Annual Socio-Economic Data and Migration Flow

Annual indicators	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
Population (million)	6.217		5.657	5.78	5.30	5.28
% of population living in rural areas					80.3	76.5
Economic growth: real GDP (%)	7.2				5.7	5.8
Per capita GDP (US\$)			375		326	324
Per capita GDP: purchasing power parity (US\$)	1,900				1,620	
Inflation rate: CPI (%; annual ave.); capital city only	9.4				12.3	20.5
Exchange rate (LAK per US\$; annual ave.); floating rate since 1995	10,751	10,820	10,569	9,467	8,955	7,888
International reserves (US\$ million; yearend)					133.40	139.6
Foreign direct investments: actual (US\$ million; yearend)						72.00
Trade balance (US\$ million; yearend)						
Foreign (total external) debt (US\$ billion; yearend)					2.490	2.499
Foreign (total external) debt as % of GNP						149.6
Budget balance (kip; billion; yearend)		1,585				
Budget deficit as % of GDP						
Labor force (million)			3.0	2.8		
Women as % of labor force			47			
Number unemployed						
Unemployment rate (% of labor force)			4.70			
Underemployment rate (% labor force)						
Women unemployment rate (% of labor force)						
Average income (US\$/month)						
Average income: women (US\$/month)						
Adult literacy rate (% of age 15 & above who can read/write)				66.4	65.6	
Net migration rate (net # of migrants per 1,000 popn)	0.00			0.00		0.00
Annual outflow/deployment of MWs						
% women in the annual outflow						
Annual inflow of MWs						
% women in the annual inflow						
Annual migrants' remittance (US\$ billion/yr)						
Reported # of migrant deaths during the year						
Estimated # deported during the year						
Jailed/detained during the year						
HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate (adult PLHA as % of adult popn)		0.10		< 0.10		
# People living with HIV/AIDS (thousand)			1.7		1.7	
# AIDS deaths during the year (adults+children)						
Cumulative #: HIV/AIDS cases among migrants (living+died)					<200	

Sources: CIA World Factbook, UN/ILLO/UNDP statistical yearbooks/websites.

Also, we should do the same as the last issue of AMY, with \*AMC Information Ban

AMC Information Bank



Courtesy of MMIN

Savannakhet is one of the provinces that sends the most migrants to Thailand.

## LAO PDR

*This report was compiled with the assistance of information provided by the Mekong Migration Network.*

### Political and Economic Update

The year 2005 witnessed some political reshuffling in anticipation of the 8th Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and parliamentary elections to be held in 2006. The 2006 elections are being held one year ahead of schedule, reportedly to bring them in line with the 2006 socio-economic development plan and the 8th Congress. Reshuffled posts include replacements of the ministers of education, labor and internal security.

In March 2005, Lao PDR ratified ILO

Conventions 182 (Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour) and 138 (Minimum Age for Admission to Employment). The government also entered into an MOU with the ILO for advisory and technical assistance in implementing its obligations under the conventions.

From mid-2004 through 2005, Lao PDR continued to strengthen its international relations. Lao PDR successfully hosted the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in Vientiane in November; the Vientiane Action Plan came out of the meeting, which called for the establishment of the ASEAN Development Fund. Lao PDR also worked closely with other countries in the Mekong, hosting the 11th ministerial meetings of the International Mekong River Committee (MRC) in December 2004 and becoming a signatory to the Five-Nation Economic Strategy Accord of the Economic



Courtesy of MMN

Construction in a rural village in Northern Lao PDR; some migrants can save enough money working abroad to build new homes for their families.

Cooperation Strategy Framework of the Mekong Sub-region in November 2004. The Mekong countries have also adopted an action plan to carry out development of the region in areas such as trade, investment, communications, tourism, energy, telecommunications, and the like.

While the country is making development efforts, however, it remains bogged down by a conflict with the Hmong ethnic minority group; the government's handling of the conflict has subjected it to severe criticism by the international community and human rights groups such as Amnesty International. Despite the government's repeated denials of an anti-government insurgency, a number of sources decry the government's actions against the group, including the US State Department's Human Rights report, as well as Amnesty International. A number of reports accuse the Lao government of abusing prisoners suspected of being Hmong insurgents while in detention, as well as launching offensives against

the group.

Thailand and Lao authorities wrangled over the fate of Hmong refugees living in Thailand. Approximately 15,000 Hmong refugees had been living in a refugee camp at Wat Tham Krabok in Saraburi province until the Thai government closed down the camp; the US had agreed to accept the majority of these refugees under a resettlement program that began in 2003. Attention then focused on a group of over 6,000 Hmong living in Phetchabun province; Thai authorities attempted to send them back to Lao PDR, putting pressure on the reluctant Lao government. The Thai government also restrained its own citizens from providing them with assistance, imposing fines on even selling food to the refugees. In December 2005, Thailand forcibly returned 27 of the Hmong to Lao PDR where they may face persecution, ignoring protests by international rights groups such as Human Rights Watch.<sup>1</sup>

## Lao PDR Significant Events July 2004 - December 2005

### 2004

#### June

**(16)** Villagers protest the construction of a dam on Nam Theun river, believing it will uproot riverside villages and impoverish thousands dependent on the tropical river ecosystems for a living.

#### July

**(5)** A new wave of Hmong refugees begin arriving in the United States; over 15,000 Hmong refugees from Lao PDR are being resettled after spending years in Thailand.

**(31)** Approximately 200,000 Lao migrant workers register to work for another year in Thailand.

#### August

**(18)** Vietnam agrees to assist Lao PDR in designing a rail line between Lao PDR and Vietnam as part of a railway network linking ASEAN nations in the Mekong region.

**(19)** Voice of America (VOA) announces that Lao PDR and Thailand will expand their cooperation in combating crimes and drug trafficking along their shared border.

#### September

**(21)** Thai police rescues 18 Lao girls from a garment factory in Bangkok; the girls say they were lured from their homes to work long hours without pay in the factory.

#### October

**(24)** Lao PDR and five other nations along the Mekong River sign an MOU as part of the COMMIT process to fight human trafficking in the region.

**(28)** Lao PDR begins its negotiations for WTO membership, outlining the trade reforms it has already made and the economic benefits for the land-locked country to be integrated into world trade.

**(28)** Lao government ratifies Articles 138 and 182 of the International Workers Rights Protection Convention.

#### November

**(19)** US Congress approves normalizing trade relations with Lao PDR.

**(29)** Lao PDR hosts the 10th ASEAN summit in Vientiane.

#### December

**(26)** Over 2,000 Lao migrant workers are affected by the Boxing Day tsunami that devastated southern Thailand.

**(27)** The Washington Post reports the US decision to increase aid in removing nearly 2 million tons of unexploded bombs that had been dropped three decades ago to cut off supplies to the North Vietnamese.

### 2005

#### January

**(1)** Lao PDR waives visa for all ASEAN members to boost profits from tourism.

With a growing population (increasing at an average rate of 2.4% annually), the government continues to struggle to improve the quality of life of its citizens. The government achieved both progress and setbacks on socio-economic development: Lao PDR rose to 133 out of 177 countries in 2005 (up from 135 in 2004) on the Human Development Index. Per capita income

increased to USD491 in 2005. Its anti-poverty programs continue, with the government setting its target in 2005 to reduce the number of poor families by 27%. Education rates remain low, with a low percentage of those over 15 having completed secondary school, particularly women. Also, access to education is an ongoing problem, as universities in the country can accept/

**(13)** Lao PDR and Vietnam open a bus route between Vientiane and Hanoi.

#### February

**(2)** Representatives from various ethnic minorities in Lao PDR voice their personal experiences concerning the Lao government's human rights violations at the Human Rights Abuses Conference held in Lao PDR.

#### April

**(7)** Media reports that the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are financing the Lao government in a USD1.25 billion project to build a dam on the Nam Theun River, that the Lao government believes will be essential to its strategy for economic growth.

#### June

**(11)** The last of the four American activists are released after detainment in Lao PDR for "liaising illegally" with ethnic Hmong people; the activists claimed they were trying to ensure the safety of Hmong surrendering to the Lao authorities.

**(14)** Migrant workers in Thailand must register for a second time to extend their stay for another two years. Those who do not register by June 30 are considered illegal.

#### July

**(4)** Lao PDR is one of six nations along the Mekong River to sign a joint pact to protect the biodiversity of the river at a meeting in Kunming, China.

**(22)** A section of the second Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge collapsed, killing eight and wounding eleven others.

**(25)** Plans are outlined to develop highways and trading routes linking Thailand, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

**(28)** Lao PDR hosts 38th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting where ten ASEAN foreign ministers conclude the meeting with a joint communique that aims to develop Southeast Asia into a politically, economically, socially, and culturally integrated community by 2020.

#### November

**(5)** Difficulties crossing the border increase, as arrested Lao undocumented migrant workers tell Thai authorities that they had to pay three times as much to smugglers because of the Thai government's heightened security.

**(21)** Lao government announces that next year it will begin registering foreign workers in Lao PDR as well as those who plan to look for work abroad.

#### December

**(29)** Lao authorities announce plans to train at least 9,800 Lao workers in the next five years with the aim of exporting more workers to neighboring countries to meet the demand for labor in the ASEAN Free Trade zone, and in the anticipation of more foreign investment in the country.

*Sources: BBC News, Scalabrini Asian Migration News, Economist, VOA News, Bangkok Post, Bee Washington Bureau, Washington Post*

accommodate only about half of the number of high school students who graduate annually. Lack of educational opportunities in the country continues to be a push factor for the migration of young people to neighboring countries, particularly Thailand.

Economic growth in Lao PDR was predicted by the World Bank to grow 7.3% in

2005. Elemental to this growth are increased commitments for foreign investment in the hydropower and mining sectors. Sectoral growth in these industries, while critical to the economy, is also a source of contention due to sub-regional concerns. The government entered into agreements with Thailand and Vietnam in late 2005 to facilitate foreign investment in Lao





Courtesy of MMN

Rural life in Northern Lao PDR.

PDR in a number of industries; including joint infrastructure projects. Hydropower dams are becoming quite controversial in the region, as the forced relocation of villagers displaced by the dams has brought criticism from human rights groups, while the potential damage to water quality and supply of those downriver has caught the attention of environmental groups demanding further impact studies. Electricity supply in the region, however, is becoming increasingly important as a larger number of Lao villages acquire electrical capacity and demand increases in Thailand.

International donors provided the bulk of the funding for Lao PDR's socio-economic development programs in 2004-2005, as the government announced large deficits. Lao PDR failed to meet its set targets for 2004 of 7% GDP growth and limiting inflation to 9%. Instead, the economy added only 6.4%, while inflation rose to 13%. Keeping in line with trends set in previous years, however, foreign direct investment in the country continued to rise.

Exports to the US also shot up, as the granting of Normal Trade Relations (NTR) status by the US in November 2004 reduced tariffs from 45% to 2.4%. Building on improved relations, the US also sent a trade delegation to Lao PDR, the first ever in the history of the two countries.

### Migration Update

#### *Migrants in Lao PDR*

There is a small population of migrant workers in Lao PDR, as well as modest communities of settled immigrants, primarily from Vietnam and China. (See *AMY2004 and Mekong Resource Book for more detailed information*) Documented migrant workers generally performed skilled jobs such as experts, businessmen, accountants, workers and others. There are also said to be irregular migrants; although there are no official statistics available, Lao PDR does not appear to have unduly large numbers in this category.

**TABLE 1: NUMBER OF LEGAL FOREIGN MIGRANT WORKERS IN LAO PDR**

Countries	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
Chinese	-	685	899	539	855	533	709
Vietnamese	-	319	581	885	1676	740	667
Thai	-	367	520	410	641	667	529
Malaysian	-	42	33	14	16	32	23
French	-	50	37	48	55	53	62
Indian	-	33	24	29	27	90	23
Singaporean	-	4	6	5	6	6	6
Others	-	213	295	325	248	278	445
Total	-	1731	2383	2207	3524	2399	2464

Source: Annual Report 2004, Department of Labor, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare

### *Lao Migrants Overseas*

Migration for employment remains a sensitive topic for the government; authorities appear to be beginning to recognize the potential benefits of migration. The most popular destination for Lao migrants continues to be Thailand, where the similarities in culture, cross-border ties and porous border facilitate ease in migration. Spontaneous migration is seen as a largely negative phenomenon by the authorities, particularly in some villages where returning migrants are perceived by local leaders to be bringing back unwelcome new customs and sometimes blamed for bringing HIV/AIDS into the country.

According to local laws, returning migrants could be subject to fines upon their return. Research done by the Mekong Migration Network (MMN) found that village leaders reported fining migrants based on time spent abroad or the number of irregular trips abroad that had been made in the past. In a report by UNDP, however, these payments were called voluntary contributions, with village leaders in Champasak, for example, reporting that returning migrants contribute between USD2-5 to a village fund used for local development projects. According to the report, one village

fund accumulated over USD250 in five months in this way, which provides some insight into the numbers of returning migrants.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Lao authorities announced plans to train around 10,000 Lao workers in the next five years to develop new skills in anticipation of more foreign investments in the country and with the aim to export Lao workers to neighboring countries, and also to meet the needs of labor of the ASEAN Free Trade zone.<sup>3</sup>

Lao PDR also worked to carry out its obligations under the MOU on Employment Cooperation it signed with Thailand in October 2002. Under the agreement, Lao authorities needed to verify the nationality of Lao migrants already working in Thailand, in order for them to obtain travel documents and a Thai work visa. The government worked throughout 2005 to complete this task; by September 2005 Lao authorities had interviewed over 10,000 of the 179,887 registered Lao migrants; no verification figures were available. The Thai Ministry of Labor estimates that there may be another some 80,000 unregistered Lao migrants living in the country, as well.<sup>4</sup> Despite Thailand's registration system, the number of unregistered migrants may continue to rise due to problems with the system (explained further in Thailand Country Report).

**TABLE 2: THE NUMBER OF DEPORTED MIGRANTS  
IN EACH PROVINCE IN LAO PDR (2001- 6 JULY 2006)**

No	Province	Age<19	Age>18	Number of returnees by province
1	Xayabouly	5	17	22
2	Luangnamtha	0	3	3
3	Luanprabang	1	1	2
4	Borkeo	2	7	9
5	Phongsaly	0	1	1
6	Huaphan	1	0	1
7	Vientiane Capital City	30	39	69
8	Vientiane	5	11	16
9	Borlikhamsay	7	3	10
10	Khammuan	4	22	26
11	Savanakhet	29	302	331
12	Saravan	3	52	55
13	Champasak	18	101	119
14	Attapeua		2	2
	Total	105	559	666

Source: National Police Administration of the Interior

In Thailand, Lao migrants hold jobs in agriculture, fisheries, construction, factories, restaurants and domestic workers. They continue to face multiple vulnerabilities despite Thailand's guarantee in the MOU that migrant workers in the country would have equal protection as Thai citizens under its labor laws. (More details in Thailand Country Report) Prospective migrants also face dangers of trafficking, particularly young girls between 12 and 18 years old. According to a joint study by UNICEF and the Lao government, 60% of Lao trafficking victims are females under the age of 19; 35% of these are forced into prostitution in neighboring countries, particularly Thailand.<sup>5</sup>

## Responses

### *Government and IGOs*

The Lao government is concentrating its efforts on cooperation with Thailand's efforts to

regularize migrants in the country, and is also engaging in anti-trafficking measures as well as responses to assist those classified as trafficking victims with return and reintegration.

Under the MOU between the Thai and Lao governments on labor cooperation, the governments will take action to realize:

- Appropriate procedure in employment of workers;
- Effective measures in the return or deportation of migrant workers who have completed the duration of their employment by the concern authority of the counterpart country to their home of origin;
- Appropriate labor protection for the workers of both countries;
- Prevention and execution measures in illegal border crossing, illicit trading and illegal recruitment/employment of migrant workers.

The scope of the MOU does not include other measures currently in force in national



**TABLE 3: NUMBER OF DEPORTED MIGRANTS  
BY SHELTERS FROM 2001 TO PRESENT (6 JULY 2006)**

No.	Name of shelters	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
1	Krettakrn	65	76	81	51	132	112	517
2	Nalisawat	0	0	0	0	52	9	61
3	Suratthany	0	0	0	6	44	12	62
4	Pakket	0	0	0	0	17		17
5	Udonthany	0	0	0	1	0		1
6	Lampang	0	0	0	6	0		6
7	Mekong regional indigenous child right home	0	0	0	1	0		1
7	Mekong regional indigenous child right home	0	0	0	1	0		1
8	Malaysia	0	0	0	1	0		1
	Total in each year	65	76	81	66	245	133	666
	Percent*	9.8%	11.4%	12.2%	9.9%	36.8%	20%	100%

\* Percentage of the number of workers in Thailand.  
Source: National Police Administration of the Interior

legal frameworks, and can be interpreted as an official instrument to regularize Lao irregular migrant workers currently registered and working in Thailand as well as to set the legal framework for future labor recruitment/employment cooperation and seek solutions to prevent and combat the expansion of irregular migration and the illegal recruitment/employment networks.

The competent authorized bodies to implement the MOU are the Ministry of Labour of Thailand and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of Lao PDR, who agreed to organize regular high-level officials' meetings at least once a year to discuss matters and progress regarding the implementation of this MOU. To date there have been nine meetings both unofficially and officially. Lao and Thailand also signed an agreement on bilateral cooperation in the prevention and suppression of human trafficking.

The cooperation between the department Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (MLSW), Lao Women's Union and the IOM operates a



Many rural women bear multiple burdens of both productive and reproductive labor, working long hours both in the home and in the field.

Courtesy of MMN



Courtesy of MMN

An event to promote the diversity of culture in Laos; there are a number of ethnic nationalities in the country.

joint project to help returnees. The Lao Women's Center organizes training, credit opportunities and other assistance. In addition, the Lao Women's Union has the Consultant Center for the women who have legal or psychological problems. Generally, assistance for the victims include accommodation, health care, economic assistance, counseling, education, and assistance in returning victims to their family and community.

UNICEF has conducted research on trafficking in Lao PDR, entitled "Broken Promises, Shattered Dreams." UNIFEM is working to raise awareness on the use of CEDAW to protect women migrant workers' rights as part of its regional program on Empowering Women Migrant Workers. It is currently cooperating with the MLSW to organize training workshops for government officials, recruitment agencies, NGOs and other related parties.<sup>6</sup>

ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) also continued to carry out awareness raising and alternative income generating activities with an aim to prevent human trafficking and exploitation of young workers.

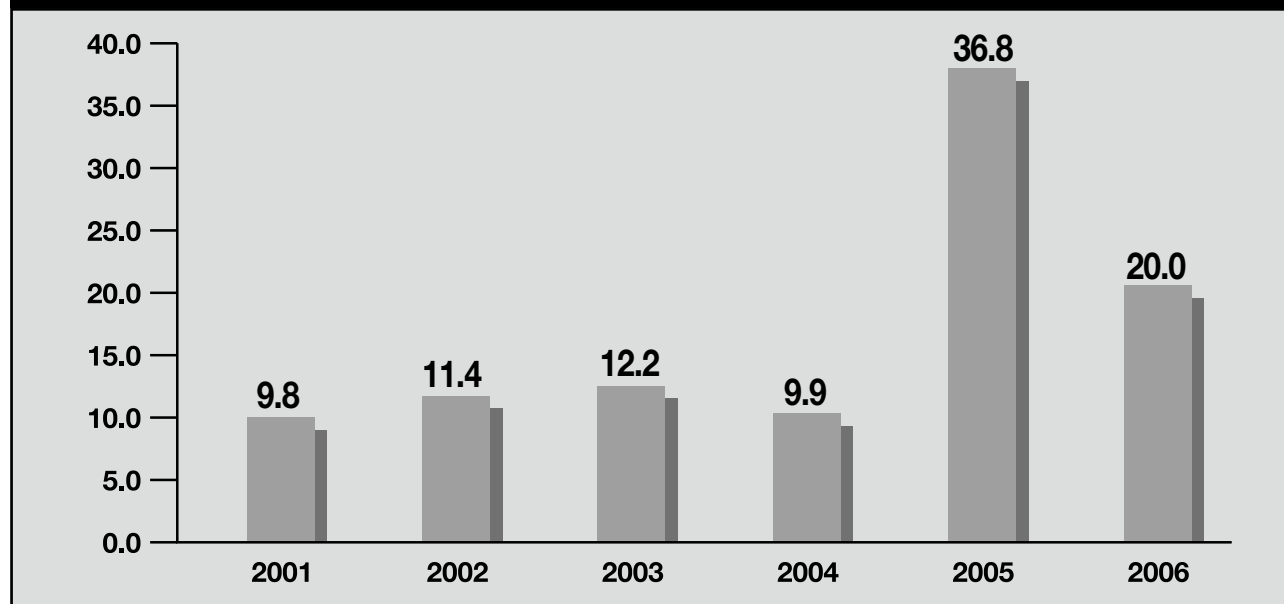
Both ILO & IOM provide technical assistance to the Lao government concerning the implementation of the Lao PDR-Thailand Bilateral MOU on Employment Cooperation.

IOM is planning a migration health program, and has provided ongoing return and reintegration assistance for trafficked and other vulnerable women. Technical cooperation on migration management and capacity building for Lao officials, as well as an information campaign is also planned.<sup>7</sup>

#### *NGOs*

Some NGOs provide support for trafficking victims and migrants. Save the Children-

### PERCENT OF RETURNEES FROM THAILAND IN EACH YEAR



Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and IOM, July 2006

Australia is carrying out its “Cross-Border Project Against Trafficking and Exploitation of Migrant and Vulnerable Children”, while Agir pour les Femmes en Situation Precaire (AFESIP) has a program on Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women Victims of Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. Norwegian Church Aid is also carrying out a trafficking prevention program in Savannakhet, where large numbers of prospective migrants are based.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Thailand: Stop Deportation of Hmong Refugees to Laos” 12 December 2006. Last accessed at: <<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/12/thaila14822.htm>>.
- <sup>2</sup> UNDP, “National Human Development Report, Lao PDR 2006”. Last accessed at: <<http://www.undplao.org/whatwedo/bgresource/humandev/UNDP-NHDR06c.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished report by Lao Country Research Team as part of joint research project by the Mekong Migration Network.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP, (n2 above), p76.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF and MLSW, “Broken Promises, Shattered Dreams: A profile of Child Trafficking in the Lao PDR”, last accessed at: <<http://www.unicef.org/media/files/BrokenPromisesFULLREPORT.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> UNIFEM website, last accessed at: <<http://www.unifem-eseasia.org/>>.

<sup>7</sup> IOM website, last accessed at: <<http://www.iom.int/jahia/page499.html>>.

