

Migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

A COUNTRY PROFILE 2023



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Migration is a key feature of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and often regarded as having the potential to reduce poverty and enhance socioeconomic development in the rural and underdeveloped areas. Lao People's Democratic Republic serves as a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants. Over the last two decades, the number of Lao people residing outside the country has significantly increased.

The increasing number of in- and out-migration and mixed-migration flows witnessed by the country calls for an extensive data collection and increase in available data on migrant population for the development of evidence-based migration policies and institutional responses that are migrant-inclusive and comprehensive.

Thus, the DRI, under the MPI, took the lead in drafting *Migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: A Country Profile 2023* with technical and financial support from IOM in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

This *Migration Profile* is the first-ever national-level document that compiles information on patterns, trends, impacts on key development areas, and governance of migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The *Migration Profile* initiates a process that ultimately aims to facilitate evidence-based policymaking in migration and can serve as a capacity-building tool for government and non-government actors in the country. The *Migration Profile* is rooted on a solid foundation to achieve SDG 10.7 ("Facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies") and SDG 17.18 ("By 2020, enhance capacity building support to developing countries, including for LDCs and SIDS, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data, disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts").

The *Migration Profile* is also aligned towards understanding, managing and harnessing the benefit of migration in Lao People's Democratic Republic and support evidence-based migration policymaking, thus contributing to the outcomes of the 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021–2025 (9th NSEDP), related socioeconomic growth, human capital and people's well-being. It is also aligned to the United Nations' contribution towards the 2030 Agenda as outlined in the four strategic priorities under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026 in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Given the recent COVID-19 and its impact on movements of persons, the document serves as a resource base to better understand the future issues and challenges in the wake of such global pandemic and disruptions on mobility.

The development of the Migration Profile is an outcome of extensive consultation meetings and seminars engaging various line ministers, United Nations agencies, development partners, civil society organizations, experts, researchers and others. We express our most sincere appreciation to the Project Secretariate Co-Chair and members of the ITWG for formulating the Migration Profile and for their relentless dedication and commitment to the completion of the report and review of various drafts.

Our sincere thanks to IOM in Lao People's Democratic Republic for providing technical and financial support for the completion of this report. Thanks to Ms H el ene Syed Zwick, PhD, who compiled this report with support from members of the ITWG comprising of relevant line ministries. Last but not least, we would like to thank all line ministries, local authorities, development partners, the private sector, civil society organizations and other stakeholders for their active contribution to the successful development of the *Migration Profile*.

It can be said, therefore the *Migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: A Country Profile 2023* is the result of the collective efforts and joint collaboration of all of us requiring whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to reaping the benefits of migration in Lao People's Democratic Republic's development pathway. We sincerely hope the *Migration Profile* will serve as a useful resource based to enhance policy coherence, evidence-based policymaking in migration and the mainstreaming of migration into development planning of the country.



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DRI	Development Research Institute and Training
EPS	Employment Permit System
FGD	focus group discussion
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
GNI	gross national income
HICS	Health Insurance Card Scheme
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITWG	Interministerial Technical Working Group
KII	key informant interview
LECS	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LSB	Lao Statistics Bureau
LWU	Lao Women's Union
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
MOPS	Ministry of Public Security
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NEM	New Economic Mechanism
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PHC	Population and Housing Census
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

SEZ	special economic zone
TB	tuberculosis
TD&B	Verifier Travel Document and Bearer
TIP	trafficking in persons
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States dollars
WHO	World Health Organization

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GLOSSARY

Term	Definition	Source
Asylum-seeker	An individual who is seeking international protection.	UNHCR, 2013
Environmental migrant	A person or group(s) of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are forced to leave their places of habitual residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within or outside their country of origin or habitual residence.	IOM, 2014
Internal migration	The movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence.	IOM, 2019
Internally displaced persons	Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.	UNHCR, 1998
Migrant in an irregular situation	A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.	IOM, 2019
Migrant worker	A person who is to be engaged, is engaged, or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which one is not a national.	United Nations, 1990
Re-emigration	The movement of a person who, after having returned to one's country of origin, emigrates again.	IOM, 2019

Refugee	A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail of the protection of that country.	United Nations, 1951 and 1967
Remittances	Personal monetary transfers, cross border or within the same country, made by migrants to individuals or communities with whom the migrant has links.	IOM, 2019
Return migration	In the context of international migration, the movement of persons returning to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border.	IOM, 2019
Rural–urban migration	The movement of people from a rural to an urban area for the purpose of establishing new residence.	IOM, 2019
Seasonal migrant worker	A migrant worker whose work, or migration for employment, by its character is dependent on seasonal conditions and performed only during part of the year.	United Nations, 1990
Smuggled migrant	A migrant who is or has been the object of the crime of smuggling, regardless of whether the perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted.	IOM, 2019
Trafficking in persons	The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.	United Nations, 2000a
Visitor	In the migration context, the term is used in some national legislation to designate a non-national authorized to stay temporarily on the territory of a State without participating in a professional activity.	IOM, 2019

COUNTRY MAP AND KEY STATISTICS: THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



Source: United Nations Geospatial Information Section (2004), Map of Lao People's Democratic Republic, Map No. 3959, Rev. 2.

Geography	
Official name	The Lao People's Democratic Republic
Official year of establishment	1975
Total area, in square kilometre	236 800
Capital city	Vientiane
Administrative division	17 provinces and 1 prefecture, subdivided into districts and villages

Currency	Lao kip				
Official language	Lao				
Religious composition of population*	64.7% Buddhist, 31.4% no religion, 1.7% Christian, and 2.1% other religions				
Border countries	Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam				
Human and social development					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Life expectancy at birth, year, annual averages**	67.2	67.6	67.9	68.2	68.1
Adult literacy rate, percentage aged 15 and above**	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
GDP per capita, purchasing power parity in USD thousands**	7 257	7 774	8 219	8 238	8 674
Human Development Index (HDI)**	0.608	0.609	0.613	0.61	0.607
Remittance inflows, millions, USD**	242.7	239.8	296.5	232.1	220.8
Remittance outflows, millions, USD**	103.0	123.7	106.0	96.2	126.8
Remittance net flows, millions, USD**	139.7	116.1	190.5	135.9	94
Foreign direct investment, net inflow, millions, USD**	1 693	1 358	755.5	967.7	1 079
Net official development assistance per capita, current USD**	69	83	86	72	77
Remittance inflows, percentage of GDP**	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.2	1.2
Population and labour market					
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Total, thousands**	5 323	5 751	6 249	6 741	7 275
Female, % of total population**	50.2	50.5	50.4	49.8	49.8
Male, thousands**	49.8	49.5	49.6	50.2	50.2
Urban, thousands**	1 169	1 563	1 878	2 231	2 640
Urban, % of total population**	21.9	27.1	30.0	33.1	36.2
Rural, thousands**	4 153	4 188	4 370	4 509	4 635
Rural, % of total population**	78.1	72.9	70.0	66.9	63.8
Population ages 0–14, % of total population**	43	40	36	33	31
Age dependency ratio, % of working-age population**	86	77	66	59	55
Labour force participation rate, % of total population 15–64**	83	82	81	81	81
Unemployment, % of total labour force**	2.1	1.4	0.7	0.8	1
Youth unemployment, % of labour force 15–24**	4.7	3.1	1.6	1.9	2.6
Share of youth not in education, employment or training, % of youth population**			4.3	23.6 (2017)	
International migration					
	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
International migrant stock***	21 948	20 371	32 955	45 538	48 731
International migrant stock, % of total population***	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.7
	2002	2007	2012	2017	
Net migration, thousands***	-148	-110	-112	-73	

Sources: * 2015 PHC (LSB, 2015); ** World Bank, n.d.a; *** DESA, n.d.

Note: *** Available only for 2015: 84.6%.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *Migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: A Country Profile 2023* was prepared by the members of the ITWG in close collaboration with the DRI, MPI and a wide range of stakeholders and with technical support from IOM. It constitutes the first-ever national-level document that compiles information on patterns, trends, impacts on key development areas, and governance of migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The *Migration Profile* initiates a process that ultimately aims to facilitate evidence-based policymaking in migration and can serve as a capacity-building tool for government and non-governmental actors in the country. The implementation of migration policies cannot be done in isolation from other policies.

Data used in the analysis come from a wide range of sources, including censuses, sample surveys and administrative sources. The *Migration Profile* report follows a migration data assessment conducted in the summer 2022 and a field visit in three Lao provinces (Champasak, Savannakhet and Xayaboury) in October 2022 that aimed to collect additional qualitative data.

Migration patterns and trends

The country is a net emigration country. Given limited employment opportunities, especially in rural areas, migration is considered by the Lao population an opportunity to increase livelihoods and improve living standards. Migration is primarily regional, and the main migration corridor is from the Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand. Lao nationals mostly emigrate for employment reasons and engage in various types of migration: seasonal, temporary or permanent. Often, Lao nationals migrate regularly, using valid travel documents, but work irregularly in the country of destination. As of 2020, approximately 1.296 million Lao people lived abroad (56% were female).

Immigration to the Lao People's Democratic Republic is small in scale and driven by business and investment opportunities. As of 2020, there were 48,731 international migrants in the country. Most migrants originated from neighbouring countries, such as China, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

Internal migration is driven by employment or education opportunities and is mostly rural–urban. The PHC data distinguishes between lifetime migration, current migration and return migration. As of 2015, 16.7 per cent of the total population reported residing in a district other than the place of birth, with notable

differences across provinces. People are less mobile in Saravane (7.7%), Savannakhet (7.9%) and Houaphanh (8.1%) than the national average, while people in Vientiane capital (38.1%) and Vientiane province (27.4%) are the most mobile. Females are generally less mobile than their male counterparts (14.6% compared to 17.3%, respectively). Besides, as of 2015, 7.4 per cent (379,000 persons) reported having moved from one district to another. Of those, 4 per cent (about 206,000 persons) moved from one province to another. People who came from abroad between 2005 and 2015 represent less than 1 per cent of all current migrants. Monitoring internal movements remains a challenge for the local authorities.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, data on return migration were incomplete. PHC data can capture the return of individuals between two censuses but only partially, as there is no distinction between the return of Lao nationals and foreign nationals who came and established residences in the country. In 2015, 42,078 migrants reported coming from abroad between 2005 and 2015. Amidst the pandemic, government actors – with technical support of international organizations – collected data on return migration. In 2020, for instance, 156,167 returns of Lao nationals were numbered (ILO, 2022).

The section on involuntary migration is not developed in this migration profile. Limited data availability and accessibility along with the absence of comprehensive data collection mechanisms posed challenges in accurately assessing the scope, scale and characteristics of involuntary migration in the country, impeding effective understanding of the phenomenon.

Impacts of migration

Demographic impact: The contribution of migration by sex and age to the Lao population structure in 2019 shows that most migrants were working-age male. Given the national migratory system, the country net migration rate has been persistently negative since 1975. As of 2015–2020, it was equal to -1.4 per cent.

Macroeconomic impact: The country is a net recipient of remittances. Remittances have a significant impact on the economy. The country has been experiencing a persistent current account deficit. Remittances constitute a source of foreign currency, contribute to stabilize the balance of payments, and supplement other financial resources such as the official development assistance. The contribution of formal remittances to the GDP has oscillated around 2 per cent and reached 1.2 per cent in 2021 (World Bank, n.d.a). However, a report from ADB suggested that informal remittances potentially account for up

to 50 per cent of remittance transfers in the GMS (ADB, 2013). Hence, national numbers and official numbers might be underestimated. Their impact at the macroeconomic level and on livelihoods is therefore not clear. Furthermore, the highest-cost corridor in the East Asia and Pacific region is from Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. As of the fourth quarter of 2021, the total cost to send USD 200 amounted to USD 22.7.

Labour market and employment: The impact of migration in the Lao labour market is not well documented. There is a major knowledge gap in this area. Given the small scale of immigration in the country (0.2% of the Lao working-age population in 2017), the macrolevel impact of immigration on the Lao labour market and employment is limited. At the sectorial and local levels, this impact is more perceptible. Findings of the field visit conducted in October 2022 showed that Lao nationals perceived migrant workers as the source of unfair competition. Participants in the FGDs often reported that migrant workers, especially from China and Viet Nam, had more capital than the local population to launch small and medium businesses and that new businesses did not generally lead to a significant increase in local employment. Some districts signed a memorandum of cooperation with foreign companies to fix local worker quotas and ensure fair competition in the local labour market.

Emigration exacerbated the tensions on the labour market and shortages in skills and (rural) labour. It also impacted the role of those left behind by the migrants who adopt various strategies to cope with the absence of a family member. The FGDs conducted during the field visit indicated the following strategies: (a) female participants explained that they tended to substitute wage to non-wage work and hire workers in the field during the harvest season using the money sent by the migrants; (b) other participants indicated that they would buy rice with the received remittances and decrease their own annual production of rice; and (c) some other participants explained that the migrants engaged in seasonal migration come back when needed in the field and leave to the country of destination otherwise.

Social development: The impact of migration on living conditions and poverty is mainly indirect, through remittances. Recent evidence showed that as of 2018/19, 15 per cent of Lao households received remittances. These latter significantly contribute to reducing poverty and improving the living conditions of those left behind. For instance, the poverty rate among Lao households receiving remittances declined from 13.9 per cent in 2012/13 to 10.2 per cent in 2018/19.

On another point, migration and remittances contribute to the reconfiguration of the nuclear family, including the social role of the mother and grandmother. Several mothers emigrated and decided to leave their children to the care of the grandparents. Most grandmothers interviewed during the field visit explained that having to take care of grandchildren implied different and more responsibilities often related to school. In addition, living far from the parents – physically, socially and emotionally – makes young children of migrants less subject to social control.

Health: Health in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a regional issue. Due to climate and geographical conditions, the GMS is considered one bioregion. The increase in intraregional and internal movements of population resulted in cross-border movements of disease agents and their vectors. Contrary to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, its neighbouring countries including Thailand and China present high prevalence rates of malaria, TB, HIV or other tropic or communicable diseases. Hence, migrants and mobile population are generally the most vulnerable categories.

Migration governance

National policy and legal frameworks: The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has developed a complex framework of legal norms, laws, regulations and policies that shape the country's approaches about migration in all its forms. It has mainly drawn its attention to labour migration to Japan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, with the objectives of promoting international labour migration, deterring irregular migration and protecting the rights and interests of migrants.

Institutional framework: The institutional framework combines a wide range of government and non-governmental actors, such as the MPI, LSB, MOFA, MOHA, MOLSW, LWU, IOM, ILO and the World Bank.

Regional and international frameworks and cooperation: The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic has ratified most migration-relevant international conventions and promoted international cooperation in various areas, such as labour migration, disaster risk reduction, transnational organized crime, trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. The Government has primarily cooperated with neighbouring countries of destination in building an enabling environment for the development and promotion of a safe, regular and orderly migration.

Main findings

The Migration Profile exercise gave the opportunity to identify strengths, challenges, gaps and opportunities pertaining to the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Here are the main findings:

- Awareness of migration–development linkages is growing among government and non-government actors. However, there is still an overall lack of capacity, expertise and financial resources to understand the linkages between migration and development, beyond labour migration.
- Data collection and analysis have improved over time. For instance, the Lao LFS became a reference in the region. There is still a lack of data, including those that can be disaggregated by migratory status and can serve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is also a lack of diversity and often quality in available data in several areas of migration, such as labour migration, environmental migration, irregular migration and forced displacement.
- Various government actors oversee migration-relevant issues, making the portfolio of migration highly fragmented and collecting siloed migration-related data.

Recommendations

A set of recommendations was formulated and is presented at the end of the report in part D. They address migration data governance, migration governance framework and mainstreaming migration into national development plans. The following are the main recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive and common knowledge on migration.
- Establish a network of core institutions dealing with migration-relevant data.
- Develop a migration-relevant data strategy.
- Establish a systematic review of the national migration data system.
- Develop an online platform for migration data collection and information-sharing such as interactive dashboards and infographics incorporated into the LSB website.
- Foster the implementation of an initiative relating to the integration of migration data.
- Continue to follow international guidelines to collect migration data, especially for administrative data.
- Increase migration data collection, especially in thematic areas, such as labour market, forced displacement, environmental migration, irregular migration, migration impact on health or labour market, and increase availability and disaggregation of SDG data with disaggregation by migratory status.

- Standardize data collection methods and definitions.
- Include metadata with data sets to describe the data in a standardized way.
- Evaluate the opportunities and challenges for using innovative data sources.
- Pursue the Migration Profile exercise.
- Establish a national coordination structure for migration governance.
- Formulate a national action plan on migration.

INTRODUCTION

Demographic and socioeconomic background of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a landlocked country located in South-East Asia. It shares borders with China to the north, Viet Nam to the east, Cambodia to the south, Thailand to the west and Myanmar to the north-west. With a population of approximately 7.2 million people, the country is a multi-ethnic society, with the Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Soung being the most prominent ethnic groups. The country's landscape is characterized by rugged mountains, dense forests and the mighty Mekong River that flows through the country from north to south.

The socioeconomic situation in the country is characterized by a low level of economic development with a predominantly rural economy, with agriculture being the primary activity. The country has made significant progress in recent years, with an average annual growth rate of around 6 per cent, driven by the expansion of the mining, hydropower and tourism sectors (World Bank, 2021). The benefits of this growth have not been evenly distributed, and poverty and inequality remain significant challenges. As of 2018/19, almost 18.3 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line (compared to 24.6% in 2012/13), and there are significant disparities in income and access to basic services between urban and rural areas (LSB and World Bank, 2020).

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has a relatively young population, with a median age of around 23 years. The population is predominantly rural, with over 70 per cent of people living in rural areas. The country has a low population density, with only around 30 people per square kilometre (World Bank, n.d.a). The demographic structure of the country has significant implications for the labour market and job opportunities. With a young population and a high percentage of people living in rural areas, there is a large pool of potential workers. However, the current country's education and training systems are still developing, and there is a shortage of skilled labour in certain sectors, such as information technology, engineering and health care. Additionally, the country's small size and relatively low population density limit the number and types of job opportunities available, particularly in rural areas. This can result in a significant number of young people migrating to urban areas and abroad in search of better opportunities.

Migration profile

The IOM Migration Profile provides a comprehensive analysis of the migration patterns, trends and characteristics of a particular country. For the first time ever, the Lao People's Democratic Republic produced a Migration Profile report. Based on a range of primary and secondary data sources, including censuses, sample surveys and administrative data sources, and qualitative research, the report provides a detailed overview of the migration situation in the country.

The Migration Profile report typically includes information on the scale and scope of migration, the characteristics of migrants, including their sex, age and education level, the reasons for migration, including economic, social and environmental factors, and the impact of migration on key areas of development. The report also includes data on the various stages of the migration process, such as pre-departure, transit and arrival, as well as information on the challenges and opportunities faced by migrants, including issues related to protection and integration.

Overall, the Migration Profile serves as a valuable tool for policymakers, researchers and practitioners to better understand the complexities of migration and develop evidence-based policies and programmes that support the needs of migrants and the communities in which they live.

Methodology and limitations

The methodology used for the Migration Profile involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data were collected through an extensive desk review process that relied mainly on the contribution of international organizations' databases, ITWG members and other relevant stakeholders as sources. Complementing this approach, qualitative data were collected through KIIs and FGDs, with the aim of enriching the findings with the insights of local and national stakeholders.

Collecting quality data on migration can be a daunting task due to several challenges. First, migration is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that involves movements across borders and within countries for various reasons, including work, education, family and health. As a result, collecting data on migration required multiples sources and methods, such as censuses, sample surveys, interviews and administrative records. Besides, migration data in the country are fragmented, with different data sources and methods producing inconsistent or incomplete results and possibly leading to a lack of comparability across different data sets. Furthermore, there was a lack of updated, accurate and high-quality migration

data broken down by key characteristics, such as migratory status, gender and age. Additionally, even when data were available, they often lacked quality, and certain areas such as the impact of migration on the environment and health lacked data. To overcome these challenges, the research team worked closely with the ITWG members and actively sought out data from published research and reports issued by local and international organizations.

PART A. MIGRATION TRENDS AND MIGRANTS' CHARACTERISTICS

Part A aims to present key figures and trends, as well as migrant characteristics of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

A.1. Immigration

A.1.1. Stock of international migrants

The Population Division of DESA compiles data on the number of international migrants (DESA, 2020). The data set presents estimates that are disaggregated by age, sex and origin, and available for the years 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020.¹ The estimates are based on official statistics on the foreign-born population.² In the case of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the data come from the PHC, which collects information on people of other nationalities with residency permits to stay in the country for more than six months (LSB, 2015).

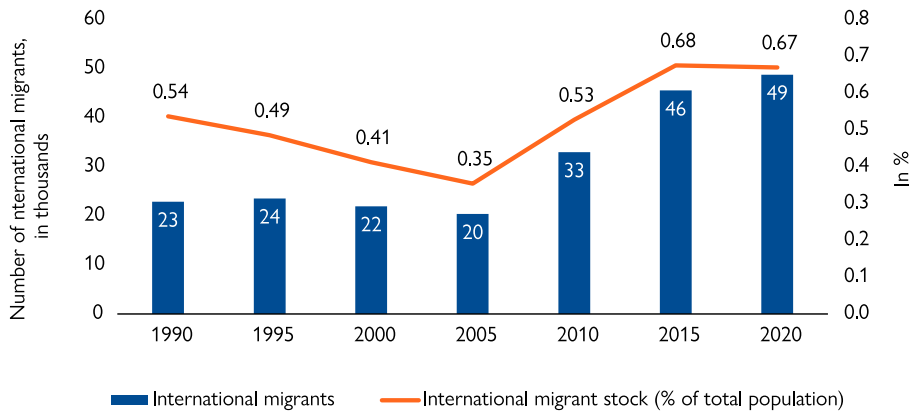
As of mid-2020, there were 48,731 international migrants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Figure 1). The number has significantly increased since 1990 (22,866 international migrants in 1990, +113%). Between 1990 and 2005, it plateaued around 22,000 migrants. International migrants represented 0.7 per cent of the total Lao population in 2020, a proportion that has slightly increased since 1990 (0.5%), and that is comparable to the average in South-Eastern Asia (0.8%).

The proportion of females among migrants residing in the Lao People's Democratic Republic reached 35.6 per cent in 2020 (48.4% in 1990). This pattern contrasts with the regional one as on average 46.8 per cent of international migrants in South-Eastern Asia were female in 2020 (DESA, 2020).

¹ For 2020, figures were estimated with an assumption of zero growth in the stock of migrants between 1 March and 1 July 2020. See the methodology report [here](#).

² See [DESA, 2020](#).

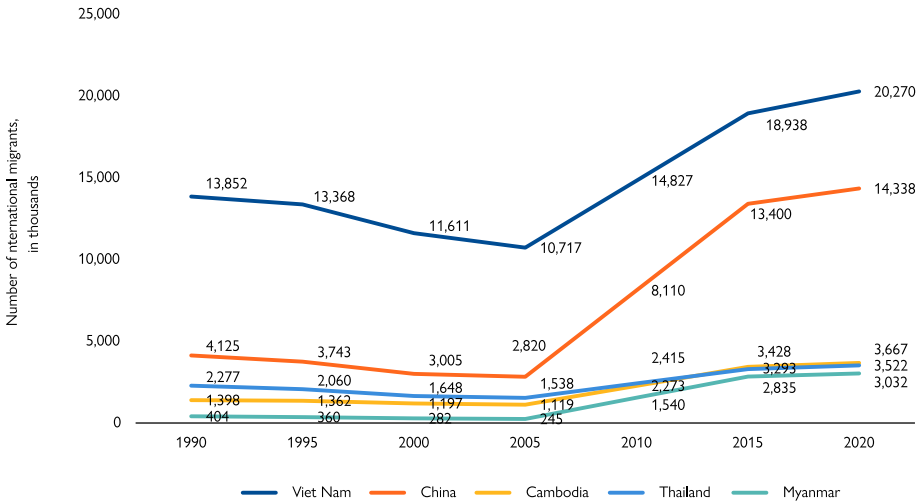
Figure 1. Mid-year international migrants, 1990–2020 (in number and % of total population)



Source: Data based on PHC data (DESA, 2020).

Over time, international migrants in the country got older. Approximately 50 per cent were aged 35.4 years or more in 2020 compared to 23.6 years in 1990. In terms of origin country, 99.5 per cent of international migrants in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic originated from Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. The proportion was nearly 100 per cent in 1990 (99.9%). It started decreasing in 2005, suggesting a wider variety of origin countries of migrants. Yet between 1990 and 2020, the top five origin countries have remained the same: Viet Nam, China, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar. Since 1990, Viet Nam has been the first origin country of international migrants living in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Figure 2).

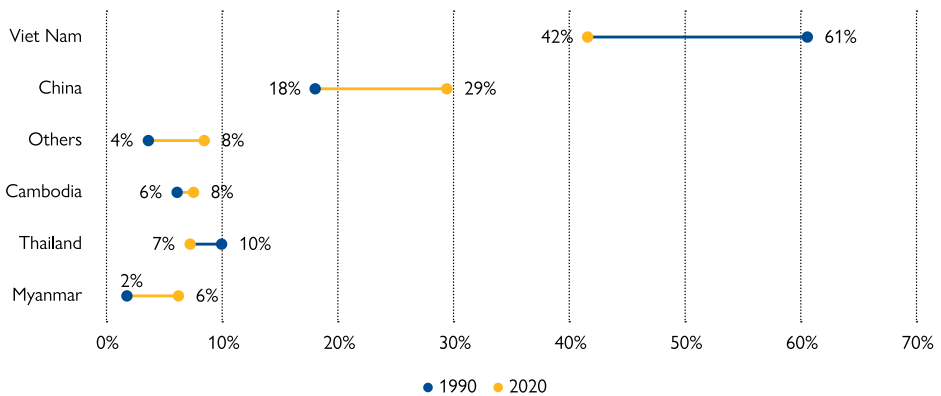
Figure 2. Top five origin countries of international migrants, mid-year 1990–2020



Source: Data based on PHC data (DESA, 2020).

In terms of proportions, the sharp increase in the number of Chinese migrants in the country since 2005 has overshadowed the presence of the Vietnamese (Figure 3). Hence, the proportion of Vietnamese in the total number of migrants dropped from 61 per cent in 1990 to 42 per cent in 2020. By contrast, the proportion of Chinese migrants rose from 18 per cent in 1990 to 29 per cent in 2020. A similar trend was seen for migrants originating from other countries (almost +5 percentage points between 1990 and 2020) suggesting a diversification of the origin countries of migrants living in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

Figure 3. Percentage change of international migrants by country of origin, between mid-1990 and mid-2020 (in %)



Source: Data based on PHC (DESA, 2020).

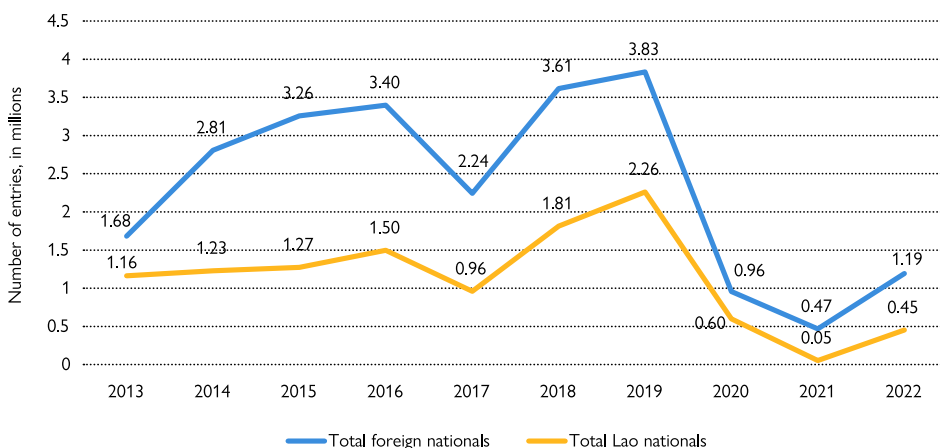
The figures on the number of international migrants living in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic may be underestimated given the coordination and communication challenges faced by the field team of the PHC to reach foreign residents (LSB, 2015). Moreover, PHC data do not provide any other information, such as spatial distribution or duration of stay on foreigners living in the country.

A.1.2. Immigration movements

Immigration movements can be studied through the number and type of entry–exit visas. The Consular Department of MOFA manages the entry and exit of the country. In doing so, it issues entry–exit visas to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic for foreigners and Lao nationals. Data were made available between 2013 and 2022 for migrants and Lao nationals by sex (male, female and children) and by reason (diplomatic, official, visit, business, tourism and transit).

The number of entries of foreigners and Lao nationals between 2013 and 2022 is displayed in Figure 4. As of 2022, 1,192,083 foreigners and 452,036 Lao nationals entered the country. The number of entries dropped significantly in 2020 and 2021 due to mobility restrictions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 4. Number of entries of foreigners and Lao nationals, 2013–2022 (in millions)



Source: Data shared by MOFA for this Migration Profile.

Data disaggregated by sex are provided in Figure 5. Across the years and on average, most foreign nationals entering the country were male (70% on average between 2013 and 2022). On the contrary, Lao nationals entering the country were mostly female (61%). Children accounted for, on average, 2 per cent of entries for both foreign and Lao nationals.

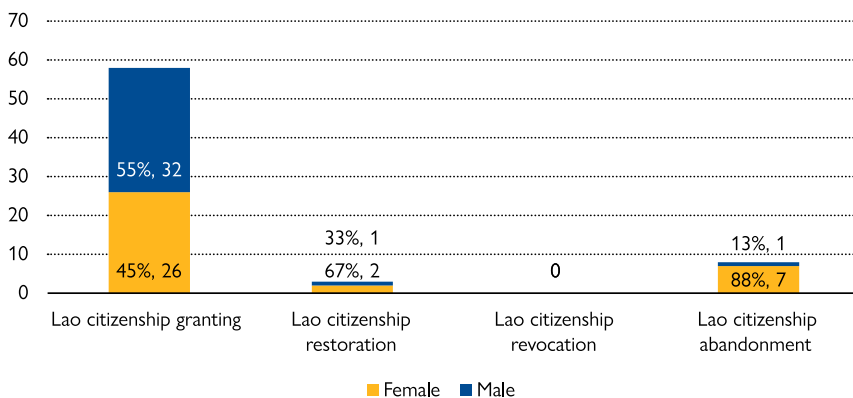
Figure 5. Number of entries of foreigners and Lao nationals by sex, 2013–2022 (in millions)



Source: Data shared by MOFA for this Migration Profile.

The number of citizenship acquisitions is also an indicator of immigration movements. MOHA compiles information at the village level in the family register. Data were accessible for the year 2021 (Figure 6), and the analysis indicates that citizenship granting cases represented 85 per cent of total changes of nationality.

Figure 6. Family register of change of nationality in 2021 (in % and number)

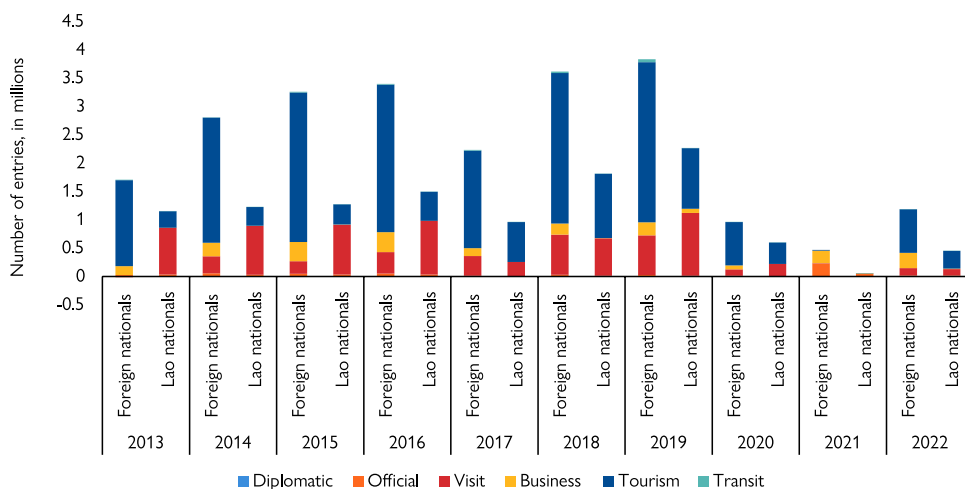


Source: Data shared by MOHA for this Migration Profile.

A.1.3. Immigration for employment

The number of entries of foreigners and Lao nationals by reason between 2013 and 2022 is provided in Figure 7. Immigration for employment is not the main reason of entries. On average, 75 per cent of foreigners entered the country for tourism, followed by visiting reasons (about 12%) and business (about 10%). There were two main reasons explaining entry of Lao nationals over the period: visit (52%) and tourism (45%). Other reasons accounted for less than 1 per cent of entries.

Figure 7. Number of entries of foreigners and Lao nationals by reason, 2013–2020 (in millions)



Source Data shared by MOFA for this Migration Profile.

A.1.4. Immigration for study purposes

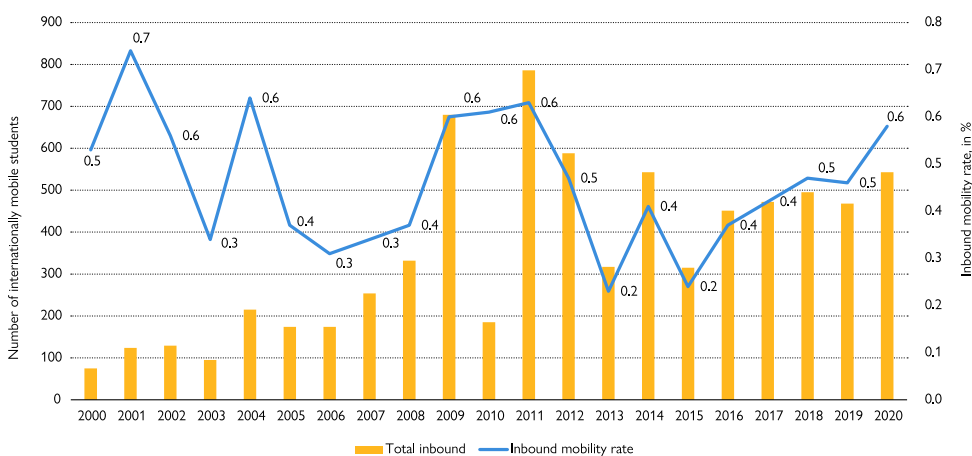
The number of international students who study in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is collected by MOES. Every year, the data are shared to UIS, which provides the most comprehensive data on international tertiary student inbound and outbound movements (UIS, n.d.).

Since 2000, the number of internationally tertiary mobile students³ who came to study in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has been low and greatly

³ Internationally mobile students are individuals who have physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in the country of destination where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin. Internationally mobile students may be attributed to either the country of destination as inbound internationally mobile students, or to the country of origin as outbound mobile students. See <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.

varied from one year to another. They were 75 in 2000. The number peaked to 680 in 2009 and reached 543 in 2020 (Figure 8) (ibid.). The inbound mobility rate gives the number of students from abroad studying in each country, expressed as a percentage of total tertiary enrolment in that country. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the inbound mobility rate has greatly varied in line with the number of international students but has always remained between 0.2 per cent and 0.7 per cent. As of 2020, it was 0.6 per cent.

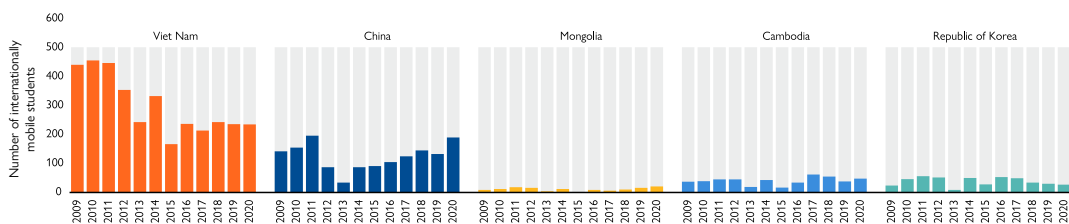
Figure 8. Inbound internationally mobile tertiary students and inbound mobility rate, 2000–2019 (in %)



Source: Based on MOES data (UIS, n.d.).

The main origin countries of internationally mobile tertiary students in the country in descending order are as follows: Viet Nam, China, Cambodia, Republic of Korea and Mongolia (Figure 9). The number of Chinese students has remained stable over time.

Figure 9. Top five origin countries of internationally mobile students, 2009–2020



Source: Based on MOES data (UIS, n.d.).

A.2. Emigration

From the perspective of the country of departure, emigration is defined as the act of moving from one's country of nationality or usual residence to another country, so that the country of destination effectively becomes the new country of usual residence (IOM, 2019). Part A.2 focuses on Lao nationals who moved from the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Emigration of nationals is generally difficult to capture. Official data collected by population censuses do not provide comprehensive data. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the PHC does only register emigrants who have left someone behind to report on them. If the entire household leaves the country or if the household members do not report on emigrants, PHC data does not record them. Besides, when data on emigrants is available, information on the reason for emigrating is not available.

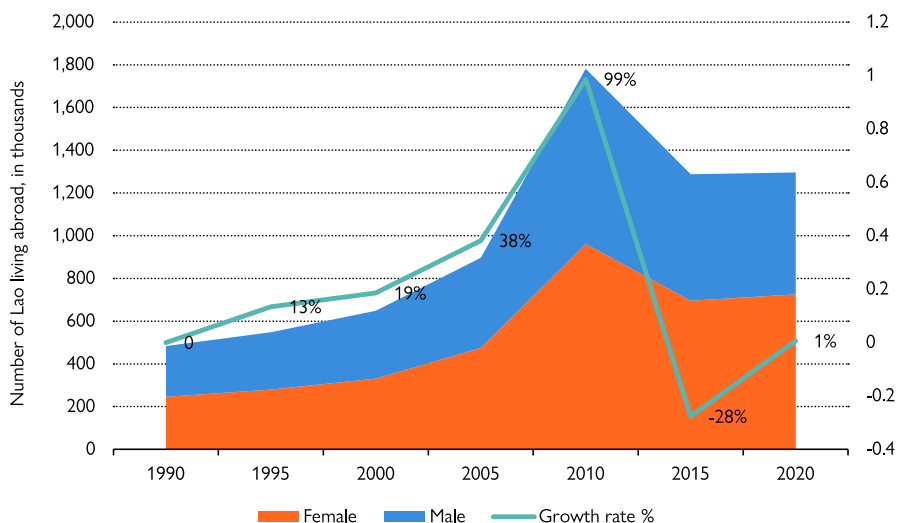
A.2.1. Stock of Lao nationals living abroad

DESA (2020) produces a data set on international migrant stock available for the quinquennial period 1990–2020.⁴ The data set presents estimates of international migrants by age, sex and origin. The estimates are based on official statistics on the foreign-born or foreign population.

As of mid-2020, approximately 1.296 million Lao people lived abroad (56% were female) (Figure 10). Data show a steadily increase in the number between 1990 and 2015. In 1990, 481,859 Lao people were living abroad (51% were female). The growth rate peaked at 38 per cent between 2000 and 2005, mainly driven by female emigration. From 2010 to 2015, the number of Lao people living abroad continued to rise but at a slower pace (13%). Between 2015 and 2019, this number stabilized. While the number of male Lao living abroad dropped (-16%), the number of female Lao grew (+13%).

⁴ For the 2020 DESA data, figures were estimated with an assumption of zero growth in the stock migrants between 1 March and 1 July 2020. See the methodology report [here](#).

Figure 10. Evolution of the number of Lao living abroad, by sex and growth rate of total Lao population living abroad, 1990–2020 (in %)



Source: Author's elaboration based on DESA (2020).

Note: Growth rate calculated between two periods.

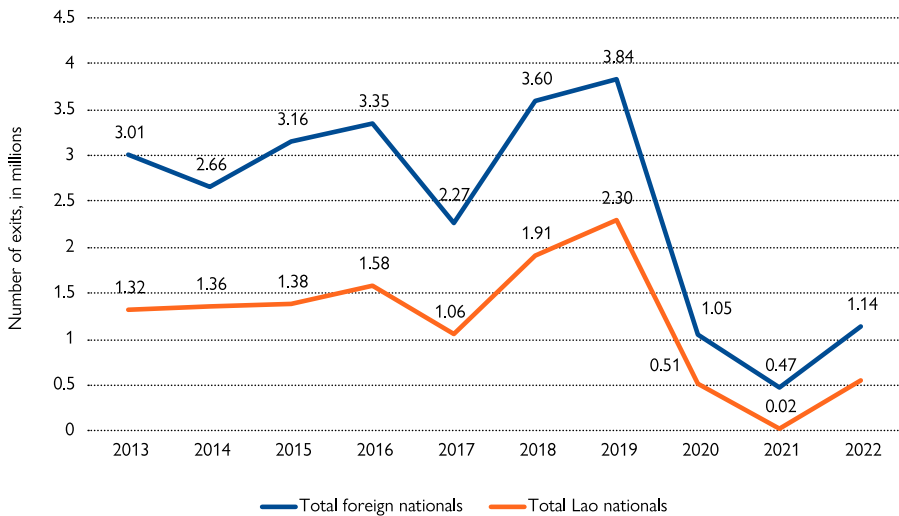
As of 2020, the top five destination countries of Lao nationals living abroad (in descending order) were as follows: Thailand, the United States of America, Bangladesh, France and Canada.

A.2.2. Emigration movements

Emigration movements from exit data

Exit data were made available for the period from 2013 to 2022 (Figure 11). As of 2022, roughly 1.14 million foreign nationals and 0.55 Lao nationals exited the country. The number of exits dropped in 2017 and in 2020 and 2021 due to the mobility restrictions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

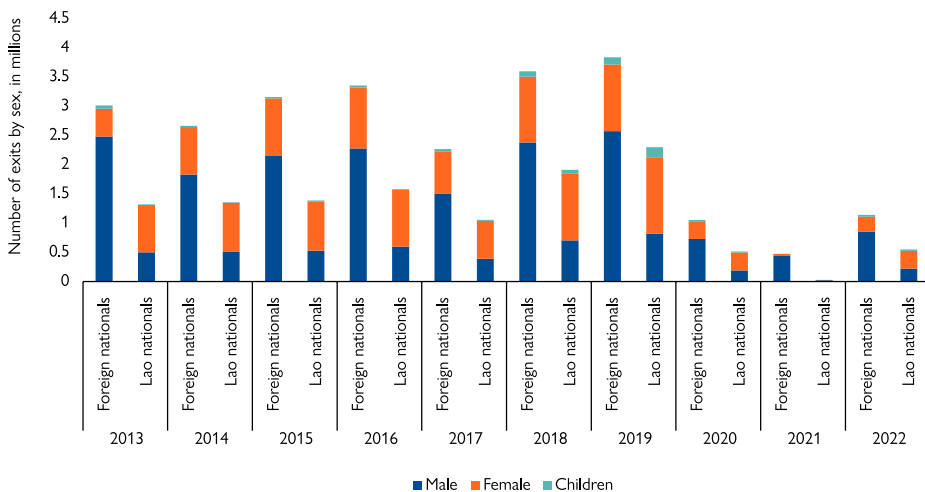
Figure 11. Number of exits of foreigners and Lao nationals, 2013–2022 (in millions)



Source: Data shared by MOFA for this Migration Profile.

The analysis of the number of exits of foreigners and Lao nationals from the country during the period from 2013 to 2022 by sex shows that on average, mostly male foreign nationals and mostly female Lao nationals exited the country (Figure 12). The data set considered children as a category with no breakdown by sex. Children represented less than 2 per cent of the exits over the period.

Figure 12. Number of exits of foreigners and Lao nationals by sex, 2013–2022 (in millions)

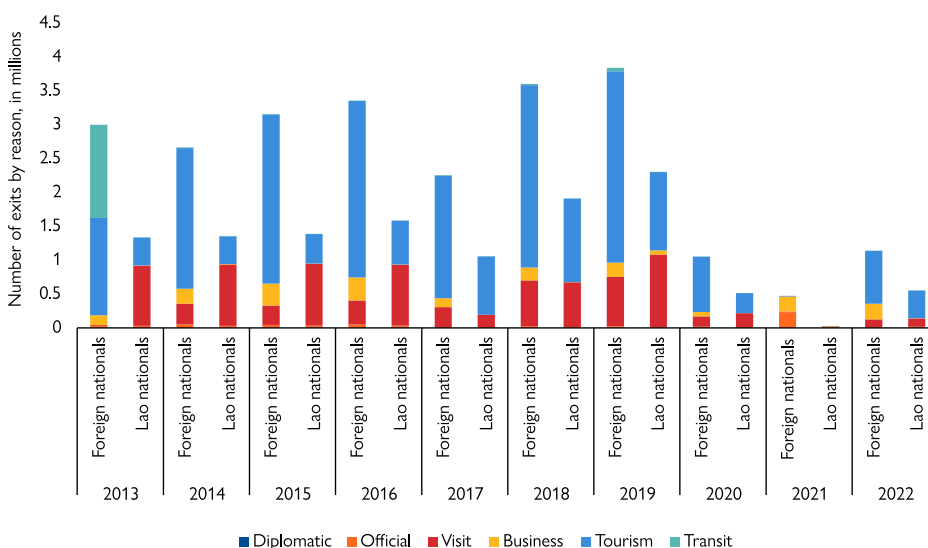


Source: Data shared by MOFA for this Migration Profile.

Exit movements by purpose

The analysis of the number of exits of foreigners and Lao nationals by purpose between 2013 and 2022 indicates that exits are mostly for tourism reasons (Figure 13). Official visits (which refer to exits from administrative and technical staff of embassies, general consulates and consulates, including their family) and business (which refer to exits from businesspeople including their family members who come for investment or economic data collection) are the second and third purposes for exits over the period.

Figure 13. Number of exits of foreigners and Lao nationals by purpose, 2013–2020 (in millions)



Source: Data shared by MOFA for this Migration Profile.

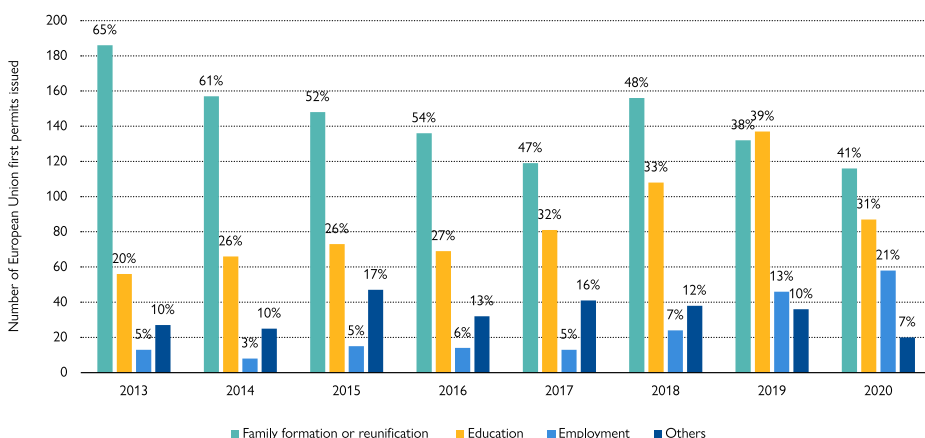
Emigration movements to the European Union

Statistics on residence permits are useful to understand the patterns of emigration movements. Every year, a certain number of Lao nationals migrate to the European Union. Eurostat, the statistics office of the European Union, provides information on the number of first permits issued to a person for the first time. First permits are residence permits issued to a person for the first time. The data can be disaggregated by reason/purpose (such as family formation or reunification, education and study, remunerated activities and others), length of validity (3–5 months, 6–11 months, 1 year or more) and European Union countries of application. Data are entirely based on national administrative sources.

The number of first permits – all reasons/purposes included – issued to Lao citizens in the European Union has never been high. Between 2013 and 2020, 2,285 first permits were issued at the EU-27 level with a peak in 2019 (351 permits). France is the top European Union member of application. Germany and Hungary follow with a different rank depending on the year.

By duration, most first permits (80% on average between 2013 and 2020) were issued to Lao nationals for a period of one year or more. Over the period 2013–2020, the main reason to issue first permits was family formation or reunification (Figure 14), followed by education, other reasons and employment. Over time, the predominance of family formation or reunification-associated reasons has decreased to the profit of education and employment. In 2020, permits issued for family reasons accounted for 41 per cent of total number; 31 per cent relate to education, 21 per cent for employment, and 7 per cent for other reasons.

Figure 14. European Union first permits issued to Lao nationals by reason, 2013–2020 (in number and %)



Source: Author's elaboration based on Eurostat (n.d.a).

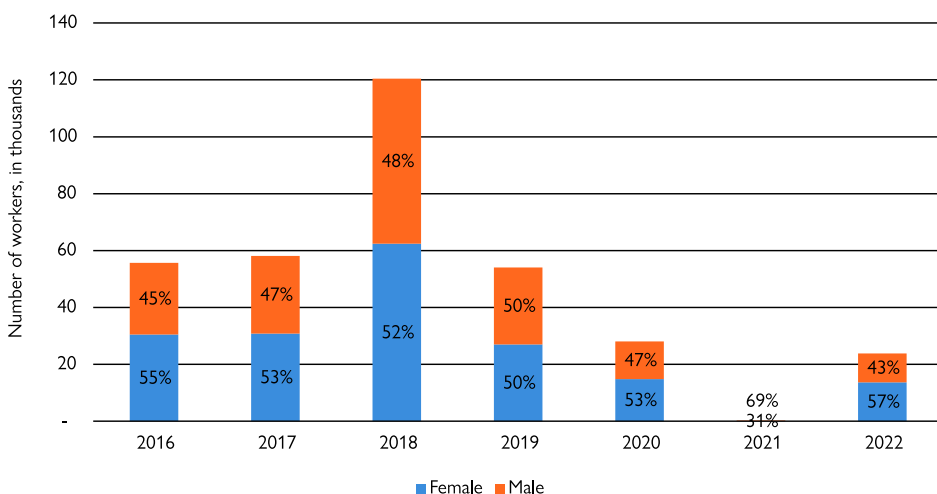
A.2.3. Emigration for employment

Data on the number of Lao nationals leaving the country to work overseas are collected by the Department of Skills Development and Employment of the MOLSW. As of 2022, the data comprised only regular Lao workers whose destinations were Thailand, the Republic of Korea and Japan. Each of the three countries signed a bilateral MOU or have a special agreement with the Lao People's Democratic Republic to dispatch Lao workers. Data collected by the MOLSW can be disaggregated by year, sex, economic sector, type of agreement and country

of destination from the date of the signature of the agreement to 2022. Data on Lao workers' emigration to Thailand are available from 2016 onward, those to the Republic of Korea from 2018 onward, and those to Japan from 2020 onward. Malaysia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic have not signed an agreement yet, but data are available for 2022. Data on the number of Lao nationals who applied and intended to work abroad but finally found a job in the Lao People's Democratic Republic are also available. Finally, the number of Lao migrant workers who were in an irregular situation in Thailand and benefited from the amnesty are recorded.

Figure 15 displays the total number of nationals who emigrated for employment every year from 2015 to 2022. The data are broken down by year and by sex. Overall, 340,355 Lao workers emigrated regularly to Thailand, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Figure 15. Emigration of regular Lao workers, by sex, 2016–2022 (in thousands)



Source: Author, based on data shared for this Migration Profile.

Note: Figures for 2021 are relatively low compared to the other years (76 female migrants and 169 male migrants were registered) due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Figures include registered Lao workers who worked overseas, in Thailand (since 2016), the Republic of Korea (since 2018), Japan and Malaysia (since 2022).

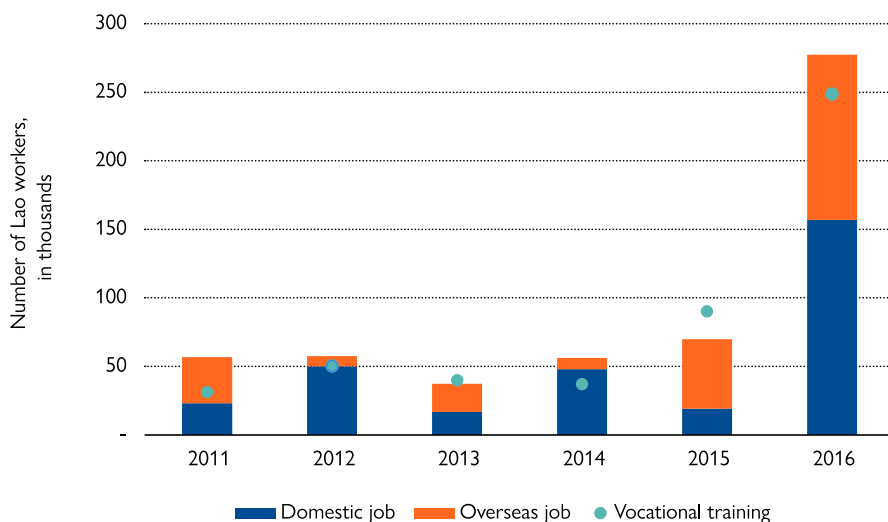
Aspiring Lao migrants

Lao nationals who aspire to work overseas must register in recruitment agencies. Following their registration, the applicants attend a mandatory pre-departure vocational training and can attend a skills development training. The data on the number of applicants and of those who attended the skills development training are compiled by recruitment agencies and shared with the MOLSW using

an integrated platform. Data can be broken down by year, sex and sector of activity.

Not all registered Lao workers are employed overseas. Some find a domestic job in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. These workers are called *aspiring migrants*. Figure 16 shows the number of Lao workers who registered in a recruitment agency, and found either a domestic or overseas job, as well as those who attended the vocational training from 2011 to 2016. The analysis of the data shows that the number of registered Lao nationals remained stable (approximately 50,000 every year) from 2011 to 2015. The signing of the MOU with Thailand in 2016 led to a six-time increase in the number of registered workers (277,439). The proportion of those who found a job overseas varied over time with no clear patterns. It was equal to 59 per cent in 2011, 13 per cent in 2012, 73 per cent in 2015, and 43 per cent in 2016.

Figure 16. Number of Lao workers willing to work abroad, by type of job found and who attended training, 2011–2016 (in thousands)



Source: Author’s elaboration based on data shared for this Migration Profile.

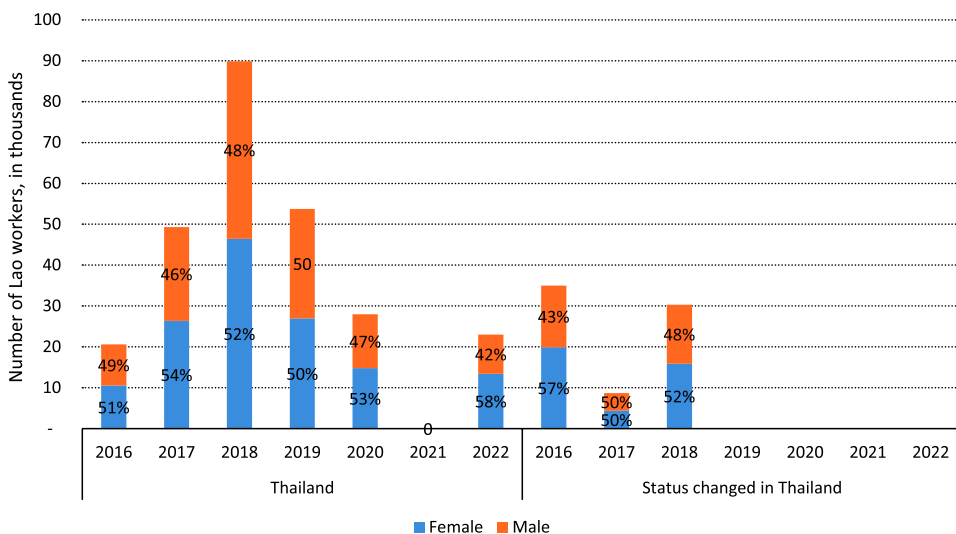
Emigration of Lao workers to Thailand

Labour migration to Thailand is governed under the Royal Ordinance Concerning the Management of Employment of Foreign Workers B.E. 2560 (Government of Thailand, 2017) in parallel with the implementation of the MOU processes (see section C.3.1). Lao nationals have two official channels to regularly migrate to Thailand: the MOU and border pass. Irregular migrant workers can

periodically regularize their status through a nationality verification process, which is provided by the Government of Thailand on an ad hoc basis.

Data compiled by the MOLSW for the period 2016–2022 are displayed in Figure 17. The data include Lao nationals who migrated under the MOU on a regular basis and those whose situation was regularized once in Thailand. MOU workers is only a small part of all Lao migrant workers in Thailand. Official figures reported by the Lao People’s Democratic Republic or Thailand are not able to reflect the full scale of Lao migrants in Thailand, as many are not documented. The number of MOU migrant workers varied over time. From the signing of the MOU in 2016 to 2018, the number increased significantly. In 2016, 20,613 Lao workers migrated to Thailand (51% female). They were 89,857 in 2018 (52% female). Since 2019, the number has continuously decreased (with no movement in 2020 due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions). In 2022, there were 22,998 MOU migrants (58% female). According to the Foreign Workers Administration Office of the Department of Employment of the Government of Thailand, as of February 2022, 192,047 Lao migrant workers were in Thailand under the MOU (United Nations Network on Migration, 2022).

Figure 17. Lao workers migrating to Thailand, by year, type (under the MOU or regularization) and sex, 2016–2022 (in thousands)



Source: Author’s elaboration based on data shared for this Migration Profile.

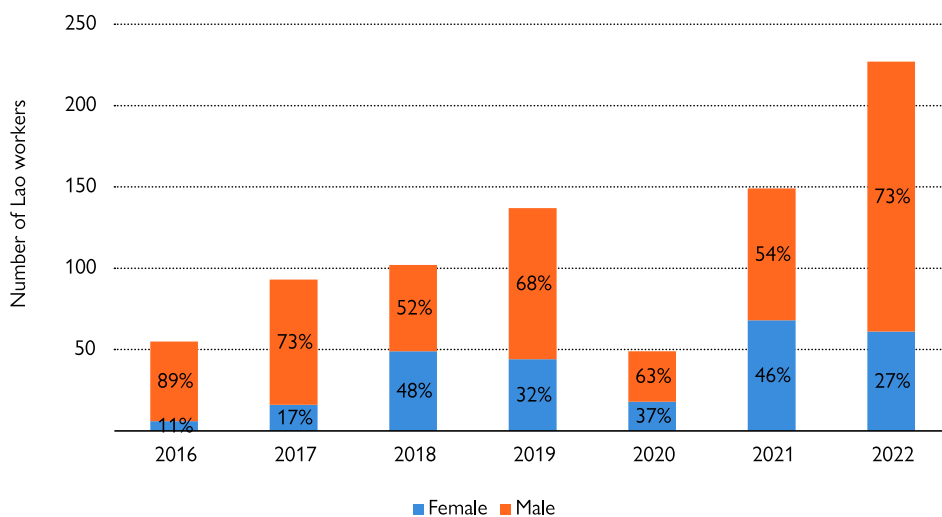
Note: Due to mitigation measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no movements recorded in 2021.

The Government of Thailand progressed to large-scale regularization waves in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Several regularization schemes were implemented between 2020 and 2022 to respond to the exceptional situation amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Most schemes were dedicated to migrant workers from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, as well as Viet Nam and Cambodia, whose work permits have already expired or are about to expire during the specific period, or who do not have legal document or entered Thailand irregularly. Disaggregated numbers by citizenship are not available. The important number of regularized Lao workers indicated that many Lao nationals worked irregularly in Thailand.

Emigration of Lao workers to Japan

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Japan signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2017 (see section C.3.1). The MOLSW compiles data on the number of Lao trainees who are sent to Japan every year since 2015. Figure 18 shows the patterns and trends for the period 2016–2022 by year and sex. The number of trainees has increased since 2016 from 55 (11% were female) to 227 in 2022 (27% were female). Some trainees (37% were female) were sent amidst the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

Figure 18. Lao workers migrating to Japan by year and sex, 2016–2022

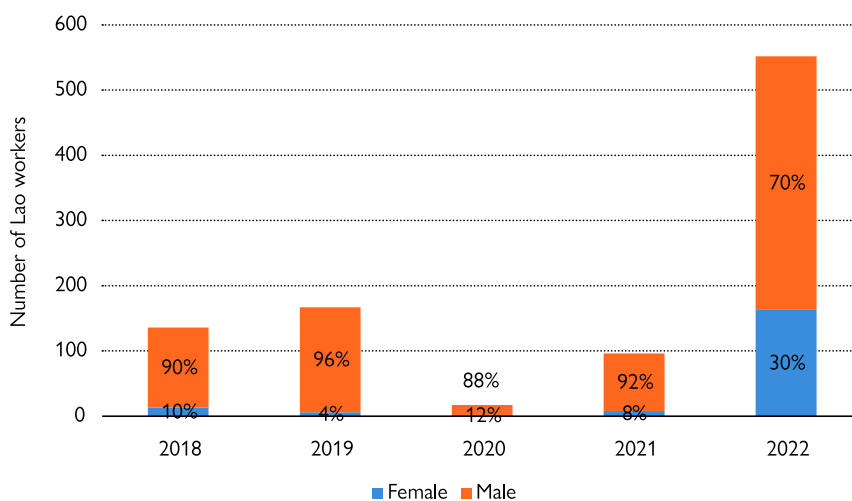


Source: Author’s elaboration based on data shared for this Migration Profile.

Emigration of Lao workers to the Republic of Korea

There are two bilateral agreements between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Republic of Korea (see section C.3.1). The MOLSW compiles data on the number of Lao workers who migrate to the Republic of Korea under the EPS. In total between 2018 and 2022, 968 Lao nationals went to the Republic of Korea under the programme; of those, 20 per cent were female (Figure 19). In 2022, a total of 552 Lao nationals emigrated (29% were female).

Figure 19. Lao workers migrating to the Republic of Korea, by year and sex, 2018–2022

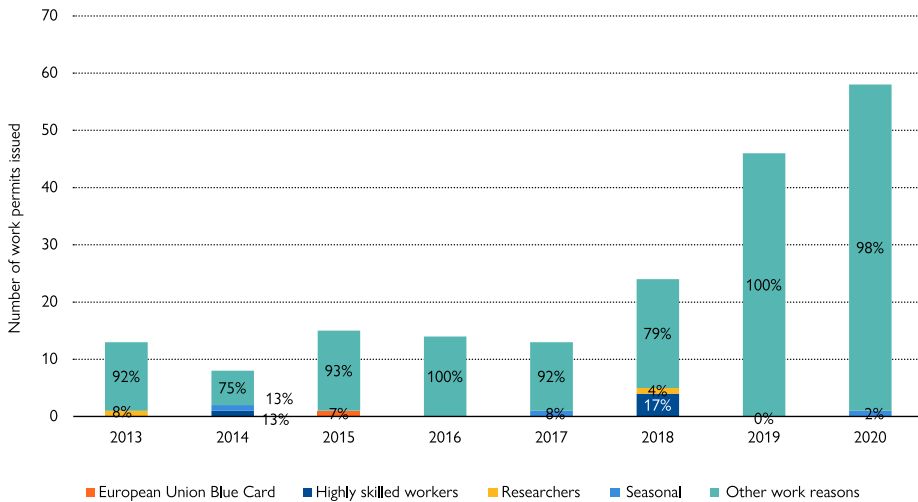


Source: Author's elaboration based on data shared for this Migration Profile.

Emigration of Lao workers to the European Union

The MOLSW does not monitor the number of Lao workers who leave to a European Union member State. However, Eurostat provides statistics on work permits by nationality. Of the permits issued for work reason to Lao nationals between 2013 and 2020 (less than 250), most (95% on average) were granted for other employment reasons than the European Union Blue Card holders, highly skilled workers, researchers or seasonal workers (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Work permits issued to Lao nationals in the European Union, by type of work in proportions, 2013–2020



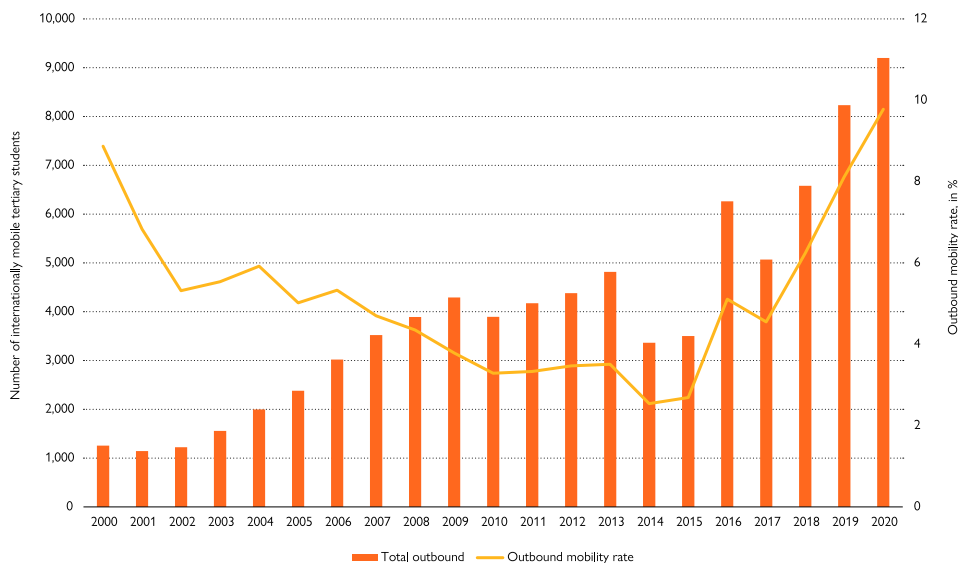
Source: Author's elaboration, based on Eurostat (n.d.b).

Note: The European Union Blue Card refers to the authorization bearing the term European Union Blue Card entitling its holder to reside and work in the territory of a member State under the terms of Council Directive 2009/50/EC (Article 2(c)). Two countries (Denmark and Ireland) do not have the European Union Blue Card and the United Kingdom for 2012–2019.

A.2.4. Emigration for study purposes

According to data collected by UNESCO (UIS, n.d.), there were between 1,256 in 2000 and 9,202 in 2020 internationally mobile Lao students studying abroad at the tertiary level (Figure 21). The outbound mobility rate has continuously decreased between 2000 to 2014 from 9 per cent to 3 per cent. The year 2014 was a turning point, as the rate started to increase and reached 10 per cent in 2020.

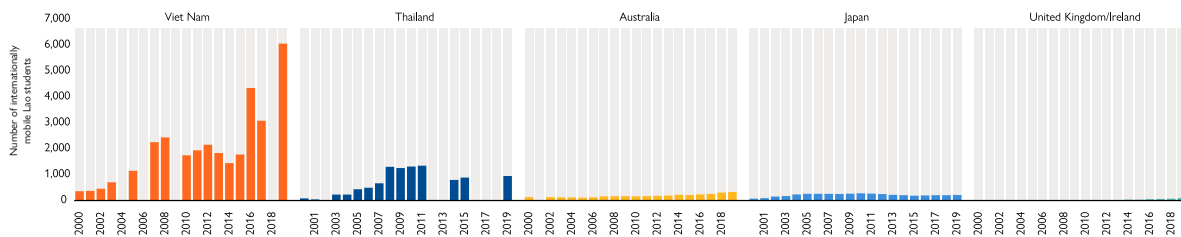
Figure 21. Outbound internationally mobile Lao students and outbound mobility rate, 2000–2020 (in %)



Source: Based on MOES data (UIS, n.d.).

The main destination countries in descending order are as follows: Viet Nam, Thailand, Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Top five destination countries of internationally mobile Lao students, 2000–2019



Source: Based on MOES data (UIS, n.d.).

A.3. Irregular migration

To date, there is no universally accepted definition of irregular migration. IOM (2019) defines *irregular migration* as the movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination. Given the nature of irregular migration, accurate estimates are difficult to obtain.

A.3.1. Irregular migration to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Indicators of irregular migration are diverse and vary from one country to another. In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MOPS collects data on fraudulent document and imposter cases at some specific border crossing points using the TD&B secondary inspection system. The system was developed to collect non-sensitive data on travel document used in fraud and imposter cases and is led by the Document Examination Support Centre in coordination with IOM’s Regional Office for Asia and Pacific. The TD&B system assists immigration and border control officers in the detection of fraudulent travel documents and identities at border control points and has the capacity to generate a detailed technical report of the checks conducted. The objective of the initiative is to assist requesting governments in combating transnational organized crime and curbing irregular migration through capacity-building for supporting law enforcement agencies in travel document and identity examination and verification.

TD&B data have been available quarterly since 2015. In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, three border control points are covered: (a) Luang Prabang International Airport; (b) Thailand–Laos Friendship Bridge 1; and (c) Wattay International Airport. Between 2015 and 2021, 1,057 documents were scanned. Of the 135 fraud cases reported (13% of the total), 46 were fraudulent documents and 89 were imposter cases. Main countries of origin were China, India, Malaysia, Pakistan and Viet Nam. Over time, the patterns have been unclear as the number of scanned documents vary greatly from one year to another and depends on the efforts of international border management authorities in curbing irregular migration.

Some other participating countries in Asia and the Pacific collect data disaggregated by sex and age. However, this was not the case for the Lao People’s Democratic Republic at the time of the development of the Migration Profile.

A.3.2. Irregular migration of Lao nationals

Aggregated data on irregular migration of Lao nationals were not available at the time of writing this Migration Profile, but indicators were available on irregular migration to and undocumented migrants in Thailand.

Irregular migration to Thailand

Figures on irregular migration movements from the Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand and on the number of Lao migrants in an irregular situation in Thailand vary from one source to another. Nonetheless, there is consensus that irregularity is a phenomenon that occurs on a significant scale. Estimates indicate that an important number of Lao workers in Thailand work without an MOU. For instance, a 2017 study (Harkins et al., 2017) found that only 48 per cent of surveyed migrants from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam held legal documents for work during most of their time within the country. Besides, regular waves of registration and nationality verification process in Thailand indicate that the number of undocumented Lao migrants was significant. Finally, the field visit conducted in October 2022 confirmed this pattern as most participants in the FGDs explained that Lao nationals would legally enter Thailand and work irregularly in the country.⁵ However, findings showed that confusion was important among the participants and the heads of villages interviewed. Often, they would not make the distinction between regularity and irregularity and ignore that it was not legal to work in Thailand with only valid travel documents.

Irregular migration to other countries

Estimates on irregular migration and Lao migrants in an irregular situation in other countries are lacking. Observation by some ITWG members has indicated a growing movement of Lao nationals migrating to Malaysia using irregular channels.⁶

A.3.3. Smuggling and trafficking of migrants

In the GMS, human smuggling and trafficking are closely related to labour migration. According to the UNODC (2017), undocumented migrants are particularly at risk of trafficking. Given the complexity of the phenomenon and its sensitive nature, the identification and quantification of victims are difficult. Evidence showed that human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in the country, and also victims from the Lao People's Democratic Republic abroad. According to the United States Department of State (2021), the country is primarily a source country for human trafficking, particularly to China and Thailand, and to a lesser extent to Viet Nam and Malaysia.

⁵ See Annex I.

⁶ An MOU shall be signed between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Malaysia in 2023.

Smuggling and trafficking of Lao nationals abroad

There are mainly two groups of Lao vulnerable population (USAID, 2022):

- Rural communities who mainly comprise agricultural workers and unskilled labourers vulnerable to economic shocks including droughts and displacement such as that resulting from Belt and Road Initiative projects;
- Urban middle-income people looking for opportunity and upward mobility. These people seek employment opportunities in other parts of the country or abroad, but may lack information literacy or safe migration knowledge to avoid falling prey to trafficking.

Both groups live near international borders with Thailand and China and experience high levels of gender inequality. Evidence shows that rural communities generally face forced or child marriage with Chinese men (USAID, 2022; Alliance Anti-Traffic and ECPAT International, 2019), while jobseekers looking for work abroad are generally externally trafficked (United States Department of State, 2021; IOM, 2021a).

Evidence indicates also that some Lao victims migrate with the assistance of legal or illegal brokers charging fees, while others move independently and regularly (United States Department of State, 2020). Most border crossings are managed by provincial or district-level immigration authorities with less formal training and have more limited hours of operation, making them easier transit points for traffickers to facilitate the movement of Lao victims into neighbouring countries. Local Lao middlepersons are increasingly involved in the trafficking as well. They attract acquaintances and relatives with false promises of legitimate work opportunities or promises in neighbouring countries and then subject them to sex or labour trafficking (ibid.).

From a gender perspective, evidence reveals that Lao women and girls are generally exploited in Thailand in commercial sex and forced labour in domestic service, factories or agriculture. Traffickers may also exploit those sold as brides in China in sex trafficking or domestic servitude. Lao men and boys' victims of trafficking are generally forced to work in Thailand's fishing, construction and agricultural industries (United States Department of State, 2021).

Estimates on the number of trafficked persons from the Lao People's Democratic Republic are scarce. Data are collected by the Anti-Trafficking Department within the MOPS. Table 1 displays some data between 2016 and 2021. As of 2021, official government data indicated that the Anti-Trafficking Department investigated 39 potential trafficking cases in 2021. Of those, 25 were

referred to trafficking cases. The Office of the Supreme People’s Prosecutor submitted 21 of the 25 cases for prosecution and 7 culminated in the conviction of 10 traffickers. Unlike previous years, the MOPS did not disaggregate the conviction by type of trafficking. For instance, in 2020, of 21 incidents, 10 were trafficking cases. Convicted cases involved 21 victims of sex trafficking, 39 victims of labour trafficking, 66 victims of fraudulent marriages, and 16 victims of other forms of exploitation. All of them were Lao citizens and most of them were exploited abroad, mainly in China and Thailand.

Table 1. Trafficking in persons cases, 2016–2021

Year	Number of incidents	Number of trafficking cases	Number of prosecutions	Number of conviction cases
2016	N/A	N/A	11	6
2017	69	44	13	8
2018	39	12	12	11
2019	32	14	14	12
2020	21	10	N/A	5
2021	39	25	21	7

Source: United States Department of State 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Note: N/A = not available.

Some NGOs produce unofficial data as well. This is the case of Sengsavang that helps victims and girls at risk of human trafficking and sexual exploitation in the country in cooperation with government authorities. The organization whose main activity is based in Savannakhet publishes yearly reports on the number of beneficiaries.

Smuggling and trafficking of foreign nationals in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Trafficking in foreign nationals takes place in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Data tend to lack and refer to reported cases. Some recruitment companies can be unresponsive to workers’ requests for assistance in situations of exploitation or charge excessive fees that trap workers in debt bondage (United States Department of State, 2021).

Evidence has also shown that SEZs were centres of prostitution and could attract children and youth from nearby villages (Crispin and Thompstone, 2011), as well as migrant workers on large infrastructure, mining and agricultural projects. The 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report (United States Department of State, 2021) defined SEZs as areas with high TIP vulnerability, specifically the Boten Beautiful Land SEZ and the Golden Triangle SEZ in Boten and Bokeo, respectively. For instance, Vietnamese victims of forced labour often worked in construction,

agriculture, mining and manufacturing, while Vietnamese children and women were generally exploited in sex trafficking and sold to brothel operators on the borders of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Moreover, in 2018, there were allegations on illicit transportation of undocumented migrant workers from China and Viet Nam into the Lao People's Democratic Republic for work on large-scale infrastructure, mining and agricultural projects, where some of them may have been subjected to trafficking (United States Department of State, 2019).

The Lao People's Democratic Republic can be a transit country for Vietnamese, Chinese and of Myanmar victims subjected to sex trafficking or forced labour in Thailand.

Government efforts

The country ranking in the United States Department of State's annual TIP Report has moved from Tier 3 in 2018, to Tier 2 Watch List in 2019 and to Tier 2 since 2022. Three neighbouring countries – namely Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam – were on Tier 2 Watch List in 2021 and China and Myanmar in Tier 3. The ranking is based on the extent of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic's efforts towards the elimination of human trafficking, not on the magnitude of the country's trafficking problem.⁷

According to the United States Department of State (2021), the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic demonstrates overall efforts on its anti-trafficking capacity, such as implementing measures to protect the rights of Lao migrant workers abroad, including those seeking employment in domestic work. The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic cooperates with China, Thailand and Viet Nam pursuant to existing bilateral agreements on information-sharing, case investigation and prosecution, and victim repatriation. It also revised the penal code whose Article 215 criminalized sex trafficking and labour trafficking.

A.4. Internal migration

Internal migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is captured in different ways and principally measured by PHC data. There are three categories of internal migrants are as follows:

- Lifetime migrants to their current place of usual residence are persons living in a place other than the one in which they were born.

⁷ Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, Tier 3 countries are subject to potential restrictions on certain types of United States foreign aid and other United States and multilateral funds.

- Current migrants are persons whose usual residence at the time of the census is different from their place of residence five years ago or at the time of the previous census (10 years ago).
- Return migrants are persons whose previous place of residence (5 or 10 years previously) were not their place of birth, but whose current place of usual residence is their place of birth or their place of previous residence.

A.4.1. Lifetime migration

Given the definition of lifetime migration that does not include a time reference, the notion cannot be used to study current migration trends; although, it can provide information about the number and profile of those who left their birthplace. As of 2015, 17 per cent of the total population reported residing in a district other than the place of birth, with notable differences across provinces. People are less mobile in Saravane (8%), Savannakhet (8%) and Houaphanh (8%) than the national average, while people in Vientiane capital (38%) and Vientiane province (27%) are the most mobile.⁸

Gender differences are notable. Females are generally less mobile than their male counterparts (15% compared to 17%, respectively). Regarding age, older people aged between 55 and 59 are more likely to have moved from their district of birth than other age groups.

PHC data do not specify the reasons for lifetime migration.

A.4.2. Current migration

Unlike lifetime migration, the definition of current migration is period based. It considers the last 10 years prior to the 2015 PHC.⁹ The two distinguished types of movements are as follows:

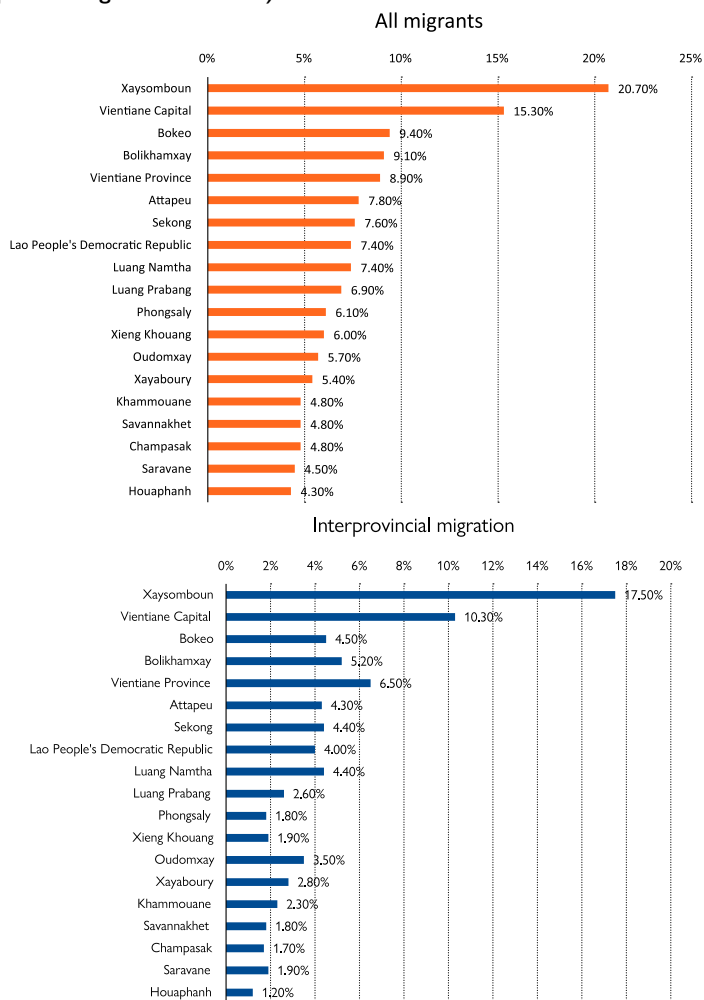
- *Intraprovincial migration* refers to the migration of people who moved residence from a district within the same province;
- *Interprovincial migration* refers to the migration of people who moved residence from a district in another province.

⁸ Xaysomboun province has a specific history. The high proportion (37.3%) of lifetime migrants observed in the province is most likely spurious, as districts that presently comprise this province used to be part of other provinces.

⁹ Consequently, only people aged 10 or more are included.

Patterns relating to current migration are comparable to those noticed for lifetime migration (Figure 23). As of 2015, about 7 per cent representing approximately 379,000 persons reported having moved from one district to another. Of those, 4 per cent (about 206,000 persons) moved from one province to another. People who came from abroad between 2005 and 2015 represent less than 1 per cent of all current migrants.

Figure 23. Current total and interprovincial migration by province between 2005 and 2015 (in % of population aged 10 and over)

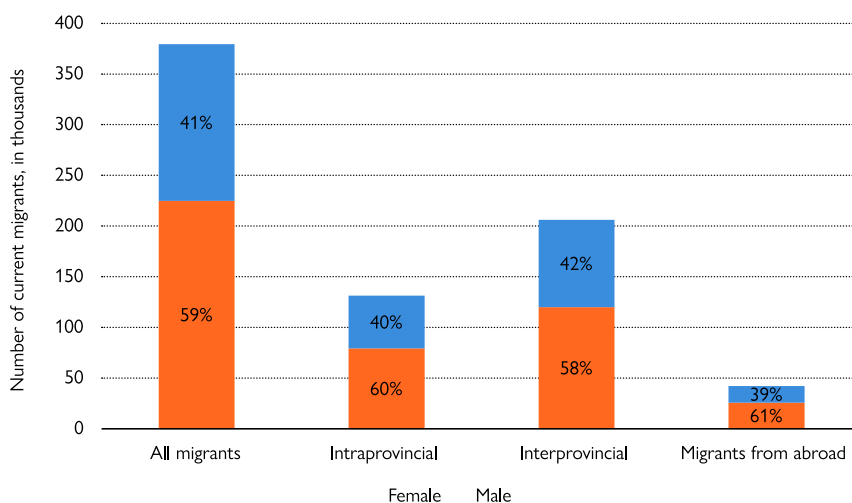


Source: Author's elaboration based on 2015 PHC data.

At the province level, the 2015 data show that 15 per cent of population aged 10 and over in Vientiane capital were current migrants (105,842 people). Those who came from other provinces represented 10 per cent of the city's population (71,418 people). The capital city is followed by Bokeo and Bolikhamxay provinces whose proportions of current migrants reached 9 per cent each. However, in absolute terms, the numbers only represented 12,962 and 19,525 persons respectively. Savannakhet province had a significant number of current migrants (36,810), which represented about 5 per cent of its population. Of those, a few (almost 2%) engaged in interprovincial migration.

Considering the type of current migration, gender differences were notable (Figure 24). Patterns confirm the feminization of migration in the country as female migrants represented 59 per cent of all migrants in 2015. The proportions were comparable across the types of migration. As of 2015, females represented 60 per cent of intraprovincial migrants, 58 per cent of interprovincial migrants, and 61 per cent of migrants coming from abroad.

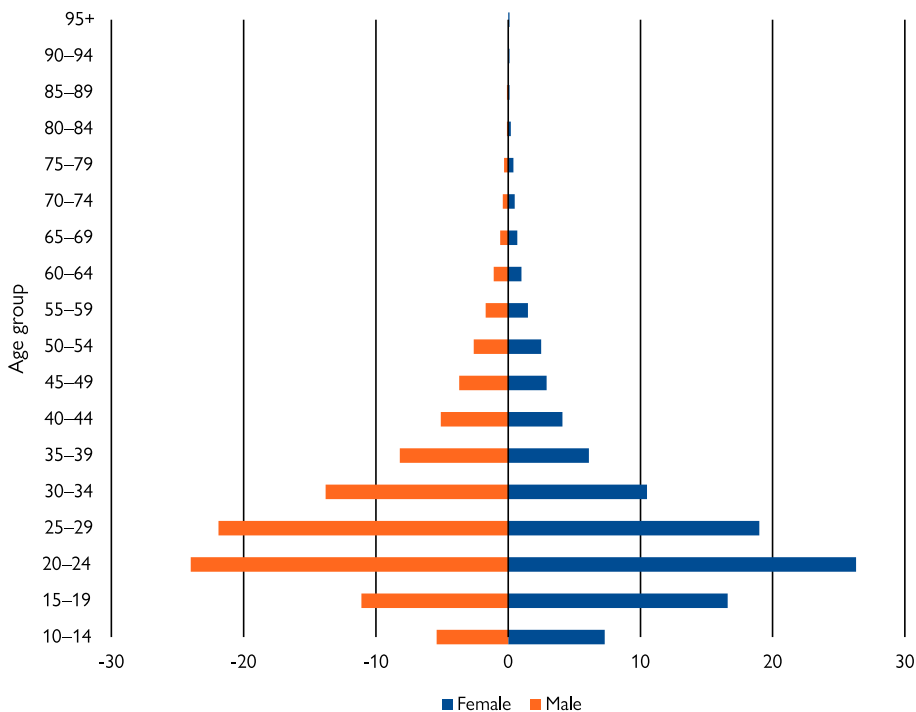
Figure 24. Current migrants by type and sex in 2015 (in number and %)



Source: Author's elaboration based on 2015 PHC data.

Disaggregated by age group (Figure 25), the data indicate that young adults aged between 20 and 35 years were the most mobile group in 2015. They represented more than half of all current migrants for both sexes (56% of female migrants and 60% of male migrants). Those aged between 20 and 24 years represented the largest proportions (26% and 24% of female and male migrants, respectively).

Figure 25. Population pyramids of current migrants by sex in 2015 (in %)



Source: Author's elaboration based on 2015 PHC data.

Overall, some provinces experienced a positive net migration rate between 2005 and 2015, while some others faced a negative one. Vientiane capital had a positive population net gain of 50,648, followed by Attapeu (20,124) and Savannakhet (4,169). Four provinces faced an important decline in their population between 2005 and 2015, namely Houaphanh (-21,338), Luang Prabang (-18,298), Xieng Khouang (-15,049) and Phongsaly (-9,668).

Reasons for migrating from one district to another are not well informed by the PHC data.¹⁰ The analysis of 2015 PHC data reveals that 24 per cent of the respondents did not provide a reason for migration; 28 per cent reported economic livelihood or work-related reasons such as transferring workplaces, searching for employment or pursuing a business (LSB, 2015).

¹⁰ PHC data do not disaggregate the reasons for migration by type of migrants (international/national).

Other sources of information indicate that many migrate to Vientiane capital to pursue higher education or find work (Epprecht et al., 2018). In the capital, female migrants are mostly employed in low-paid work in the informal sector or textile and manufacturing industries (LSB, 2015).

Findings of the field visit conducted in October 2022 indicated that monitoring the movements of villagers was a common challenge across provinces.¹¹ Thus, figures probably underestimate internal movements.

A.4.3. Environmental changes, internal displacement and resettlement

Data on climate migration is lacking and information is scant. At the time of writing this Migration Profile, evidence reveals some trends: first, most migration that is environmentally induced occurs within the country as internal migration; second, international destinations such as neighbouring countries are of increasing significance; third, the scale and pace of environmental change has recently accelerated, which may result in an increase in environmental migration.

Disasters, climate change and global warming

Ranked below fiftieth, the country is not among the top countries for climate-related loss events between 2000 and 2019 (Eckstein et al., 2021), but Thailand and Myanmar are ranked among the top countries. Climate change in the GMS comprises changes in precipitation and increased variability, frequency and intensity of extreme events. Changes in precipitation, together with increasing glacier melt in the upper stretches of the Mekong River are expected to increase annual run-off in the short term and heighten flood risks, especially in downstream regions (Clement et al., 2021). Upstream impoundments can also affect flooding, and as rainfall patterns grow more erratic, non-seasonal precipitation increases, and dam construction continues, floods may become less predictable. In the long run, a combination of stressors from climate change impacts, glacial melt, damming and evaporation could result in declines in the annual flow of the Mekong River (Raitzer et al., 2015).

Projections announce an increase in the number of environmental migrants in the Lower Mekong by 2050 (Clement et al., 2021). Depending on the scenario, the number ranges from 3.3 million migrants (1.4% of total population) to 6.3 million migrants (2.7% of total population).

¹¹ See Annex I.

Large-scale projects

Large infrastructure development projects in the country often lead to involuntary migration, especially dam construction with escalating demands for electricity and water associated with rapid urbanization. The country is also a major participant of the Belt and Road Initiative programme with over 30 completed and ongoing projects in hydroelectric power, agriculture, mining and transportation. Hence with such projects, the displacement is fixed ahead of time by governments or other agencies, and there is a degree of planning of displacement and compensation planned.

Data on displacement are also lacking, but some figures are available. For instance, in 2010, the construction of the Nam Theun 2 Dam resulted in the displacement of approximately 6,200 persons belonging to indigenous groups (United Nations Country Team in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021).

Another example is the China–Lao People's Democratic Republic railroad, the flagship Belt and Road Initiative project, which is a 257-mile high-speed rail line with 32 stations that links the Southern Chinese province of Yunnan to Vientiane capital and ultimately through to Singapore. The project crosses five provinces and includes direct connections to four SEZs (USAID, 2022).

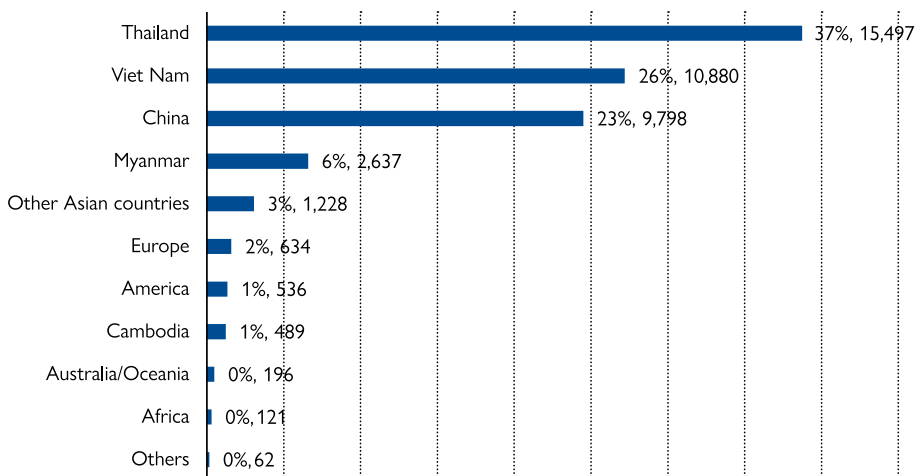
A.5. Return migration

A.5.1. Return migration before the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, data on return migration were incomplete, and return migration was not in the top policy priorities of stakeholders.

PHC data can capture the return of Lao citizens between two censuses, but only partially. A major drawback in the 2015 PHC data is that there is no distinction between the return of Lao citizens and foreigners who came and established residences in the country between 2005 and 2015. However, the data can give some insights about the patterns of return migration. Hence, in 2015, 42,078 migrants reported coming from abroad between 2005 and 2015 (Figure 26). Most migrants came from a neighbouring country. The top origin countries were Thailand (37%; 15,497 people), followed by Viet Nam (26%; 10,880 people) and China (23%; 9,798 people).

Figure 26. Migrants who came from abroad between 2005 and 2015, by country of origin in 2015 (in % and number)



Source: Author's elaboration based on 2015 PHC data.

A.5.2. Return migration amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, government actors with technical support of international organizations continuously collected quantitative and qualitative data on the profile of return migrants and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on individuals and communities through rapid assessments. However, it was difficult to get consistent estimates of return for 2020 and 2021. Several actors were involved in the logistics of return¹² including the Government's National Task Force for COVID-19, a multisector committee led by the MOH in charge of screening all Lao return migrants. The registration of incoming nationals¹³ was especially challenging for those who had an undocumented status in destination countries and land crossing (ILO, 2022).

Given the lack of consistency in the figures collected at the national level, the official statistics of the Immigration Bureau of Thailand were referred to. The statistics indicate that roughly 284,180 Lao migrants were reported to have officially crossed the border from Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic as of May 2021. Female returnees represented an important proportion of returns from Thailand (Asian Development Bank Institute, OECD and ILO, 2022). Overall, as reported in ILO (2022), 156,167 returns were numbered in

¹² MOFA, MOLSW, MOH, MOPS and local governments. Recruitment agencies also played a role (Asian Development Bank Institute, OECD and ILO, 2022).

¹³ Registration took place only at quarantine centres.

2020 (ILO TRIANGLE in ASEAN) and 61,274 in March–April 2021 (Department of Skill Development and Employment, MOLSW).

A.6. Involuntary migration

Due to limited data availability and accessibility, obtaining accurate information on involuntary migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is challenging. The lack of comprehensive data collection systems or reporting mechanisms makes it difficult to assess the scope, scale and characteristics of involuntary migration, hindering the ability to understand and address this complex phenomenon effectively. Hence, future migration profile reports of the Lao People's Democratic Republic shall include this reality.

PART B: IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON KEY DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Part B of the Migration Profile provides an in-depth analysis of the link between migration and various aspects of the socioeconomic development of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, its population and environment.

B.1. Migration and demographic development

Migration is a key driver of population change. It affects demographic development through different channels, such as the population size, structure and density, and urbanization.

B.1.1. Population dynamics

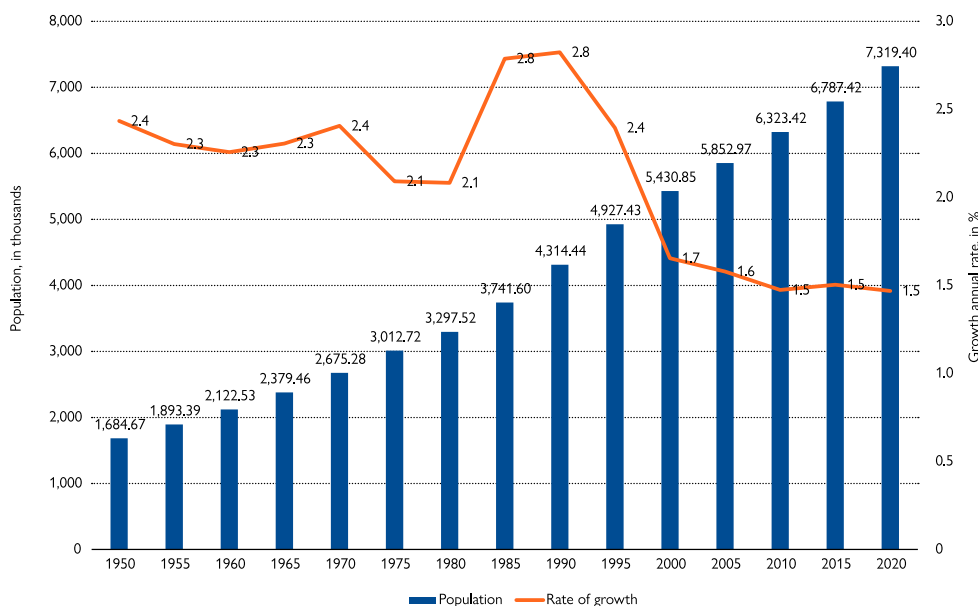
As of 1 July 2022, the total population of the Lao People's Democratic Republic was 7,529,475 (or 7.5 million in rounded figures) based on estimations of DESA (2020). The country has experienced continuous population growth since 1950 (Figure 27).^{14, 15}

According to 2015 PHC data, the average annual growth rate between PHCs declined from 2.1 per cent between 1995 and 2005 to 1.4 per cent between 2005 and 2015. Since then, it has continually declined to reach 1.5 per cent from 2019 and 2020. Such trends are consistent with the demographic transition characterized by the movement of birth and death rates from high to low levels. Besides, given the falling decline in fertility rate in the country since 1980, the contribution of migration to population changes has increased.

¹⁴ The country makes a distinction between household population in reference to persons who regularly live in a particular household, including those temporarily residing abroad, and institutional population which includes residents of dormitories or boarding houses. As of 2015 PHC data, 97 per cent of the total population belonged to the household population category.

¹⁵ The annual population growth rate has fluctuated over time due to historical factors.

Figure 27. Total population and annual average growth rate, 1950–2020



Source: Author’s elaboration based on DESA, 2020.

Note: Total population as of 1 January.

B.1.2. Urbanization

The definition given to the word “urban” is specific to the country. A village is classified as urban if it has at least three of the following features (LSB, 2015):

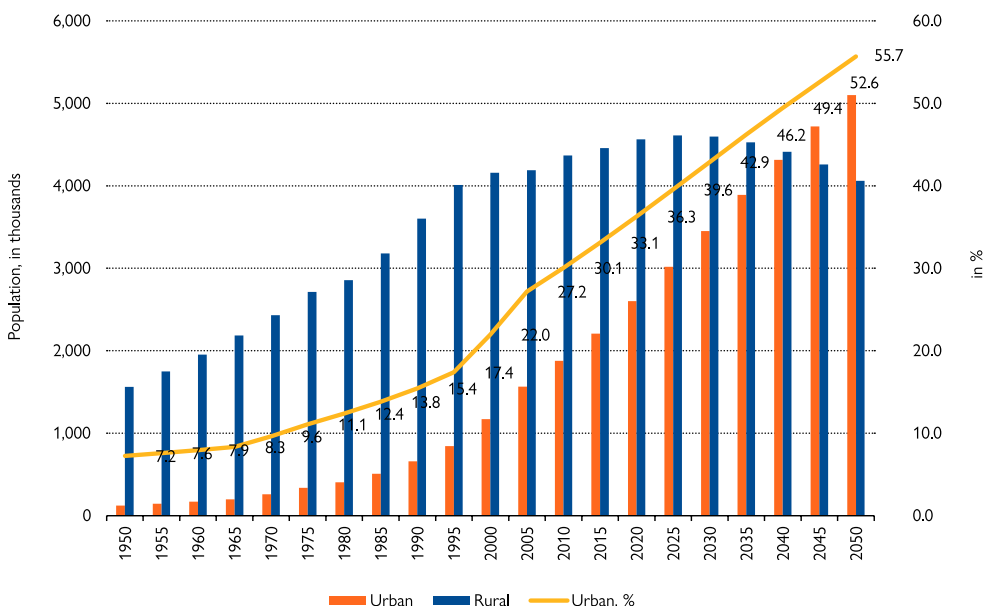
- It is situated in a district or provincial centre.
- More than 70 per cent of total households in the village use electricity.
- More than 70 per cent of total households in the village use piped water.
- Village is accessible by road in two seasons.
- Village has permanent market operating the whole day.

Based on this definition, urbanization has become an important factor of the demographic changes in the country. Available data show that the Lao urban population has continuously grown but at a different pace across time. Figure 28 indicates that 7.2 per cent of the population was urban in 1950. It took four decades from 1950 to 1990 for the urban proportion to double and reach

15.4 per cent, while the next doubling to 33.1 per cent took only 20 years. According to projections, the proportion of urban population in total population might equal 55.7 per cent in 2050. These patterns indicate an acceleration in the pace of urbanization after 1990 followed by a slowdown from 2005 onwards.¹⁶

Based on PHC data, the proportion of urban population increased by approximately 6 percentage points between 2005 and 2015 from 27 per cent to 33 per cent. The rural population accounted for 67 per cent of the nation's overall total in 2015, of which 59 per cent lived in rural areas with road access and 8 per cent without road access. Between the two censuses, the proportion of people living in rural villages with roads increased significantly (+24.4%). Internal and international migration are certainly key drivers of population change. However, it is not known how much of the increase is due to the building of more roads or from people migrating to villages with roads.

Figure 28. Urban and rural populations and annual percentage of urban population, 1950–2050 (in % and thousands)



Source: Author's elaboration based on DESA, 2018.

Note: Annual percentage of population at midyear residing in urban areas. Projection starting from 2022 onward. Data collected from censuses of 1958, 1966, 1973, 1985, 1995, 2005 and 2015.

¹⁶ The process whereby a defined territory experiences a gradual increase in proportion of population that live in urban areas (LSB, 2015).

B.1.3. Net migration rate

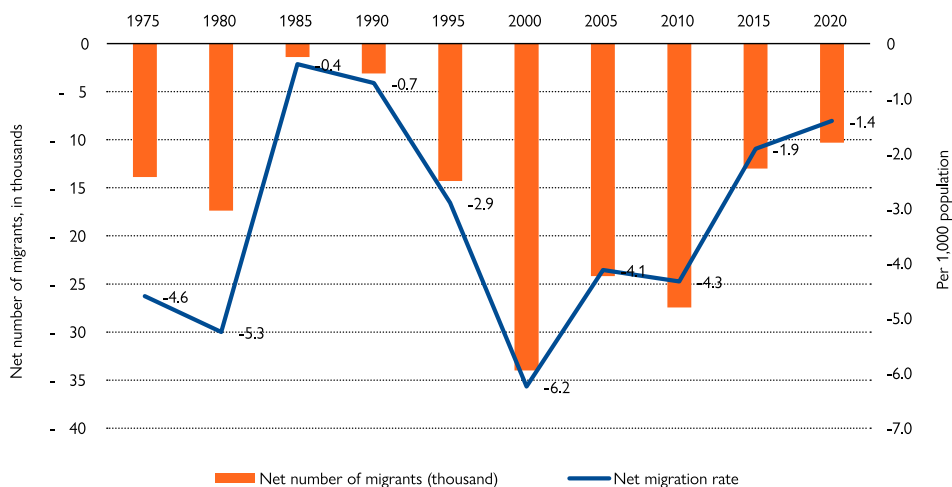
The net migration rate is the percentage change in the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants, including citizens and non-citizens. It indicates the contribution of migration to the overall level of population change. Figure 29 displays the net migration rate per 1,000 population and the net migration rate in percentage in the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the five-year period between 1975 and 2020.

The net migration rate has been persistently negative over the period, driven by many Lao people leaving the country. Yet, the rate varied greatly over time. In 1975, it was equal to -4.6%. Between 1980 and 1985, Lao refugees who fled during the civil war returned to the country to resettle or establish trade links. From 1980 to 1985, the net migration rate rapidly increased in absolute values from -0.4% to -6.2% in 1995–2000. Since then, the difference between inward and outward movements decreased to reach -1.4% in 2015–2020.

For several years, the country had the largest negative net migration rate of Asian countries (DESA, 2022).¹⁷ As explained earlier, the main reason for such a high rate of outmigrants is to seek job opportunities with higher wage and skills development. Besides, the role of (social) network and job information contributed to attracting Lao workers to work overseas, especially in Thailand.

¹⁷ The net migration rate in Cambodia has been negative since 2000–2005 at -0.6%. It was -4.3% in 2005–2010, -2.0% in 2010–2015, and -1.9% in 2015–2020. The net migration rate in Viet Nam has been constantly negative, with a through equal to -1.9% in 2005–2010. The situation was comparable in Myanmar with a structural negative net migration rate. It reached -5.4% in 2005–2010.

Figure 29. Net number of migrants and net migration rate, 1975–2020

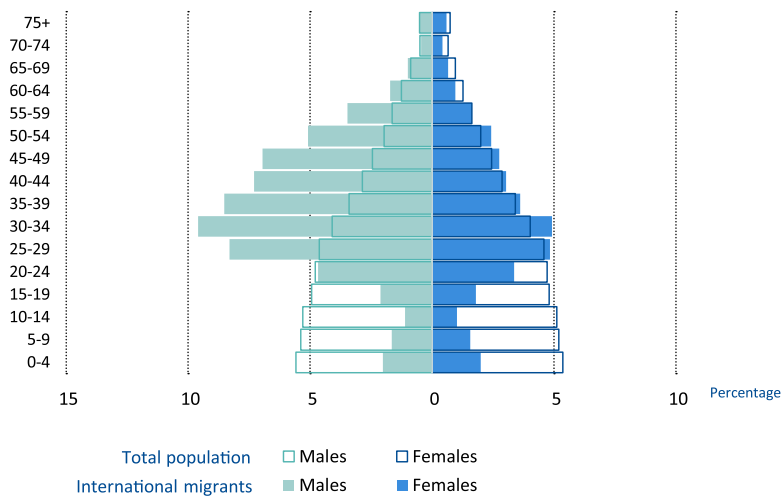


Source: Author's elaboration based on DESA, 2020.

Note: Data not available before 1975.

The contribution of migration by age and sex on the Lao population structure in 2019 is represented in Figure 30. Most foreign-born migrants were working-age individuals (see section B.3). The proportion of male migrants aged between 25 and 59 was approximately twice larger than for the total male population, while the proportion of migrants below 20 was significantly lower than for the total population. About 25.5 per cent of male migrants were aged between 25 and 39 years compared to 13 per cent of the male population. Above 25 years of age, female migrants followed similar patterns as the female population.

Figure 30. Age and sex distribution of international migrants and total population, 2019



Source: DESA, 2019.

Furthermore, as explained in the 2015 PHC report (LSB, 2015), the national authorities developed a scenario anticipating an increase in outward migration of females in the medium run; this is due to the liberalization of families in terms of allowing female members to seek employment in other countries or marrying foreigners, and subsequently following their husbands. The impact on the sex ratio in the country would change in favour of males.

B.2. Migration and economic development

Economic development is also known as economic growth. It refers to the generation of wealth that is found in the benefit and advancement of society. Part B.2 presents the economic outlook of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic until 2027 and evaluates the role of migration through remittance movements in the national macroeconomic situation.

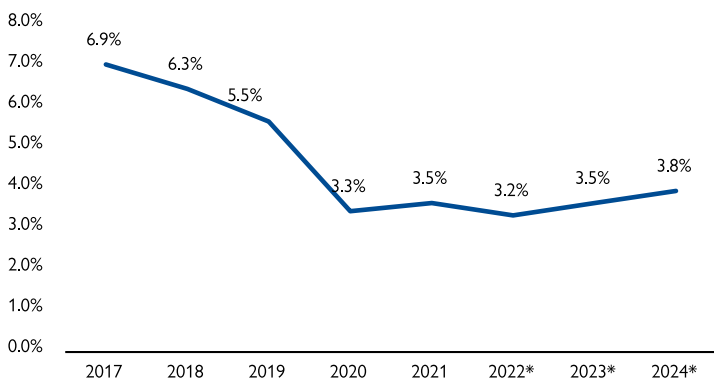
B.2.1. Macroeconomic outlook

The economic outlook details the forecast over the next few years for the Lao People’s Democratic Republic’s main macroeconomic indicators. These latter include GDP growth rate, GDP per capita growth rate, and current account in per cent of GDP for the period 2017–2027.

Figure 31 displays the Lao People’s Democratic Republic’s GDP growth rate for the period 2017–2024 (actual values and projections). Findings show that after a rapid expansion of the economy between 2017 and 2019 and a brief slowdown

in 2020 (3.3%) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lao economy continued to grow in 2021 (3.5%). The IMF forecasts for 2022, 2023 and 2024 are 3.2 per cent, 3.5 per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively.

Figure 31. GDP growth, 2017–2024 (in %)

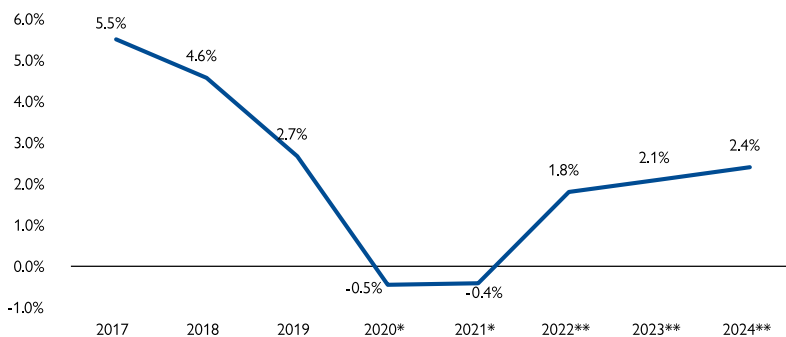


Source: Official data for 2017–2021 provided by IMF (n.d.) and the ITWG for 2022–2024.

Note: Year* = Forecasting for years 2022–2024 based on IMF regional economic outlook: Asia and Pacific.

The second macroeconomic indicator is the GDP per capita growth rate. The GDP per capita measures the economic output of a nation per person and the percentage change in the real GDP per capita between two consecutive years. Between 2017 and 2019, the GDP per capita has increased, while it decreased amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 and 2021) according to official forecasting (Figure 32). Starting from 2022, the GDP per capita is expected to continue to grow slowly according to IMF forecasting.

Figure 32. GDP growth per capita of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Asia, 2017–2024 (in %)

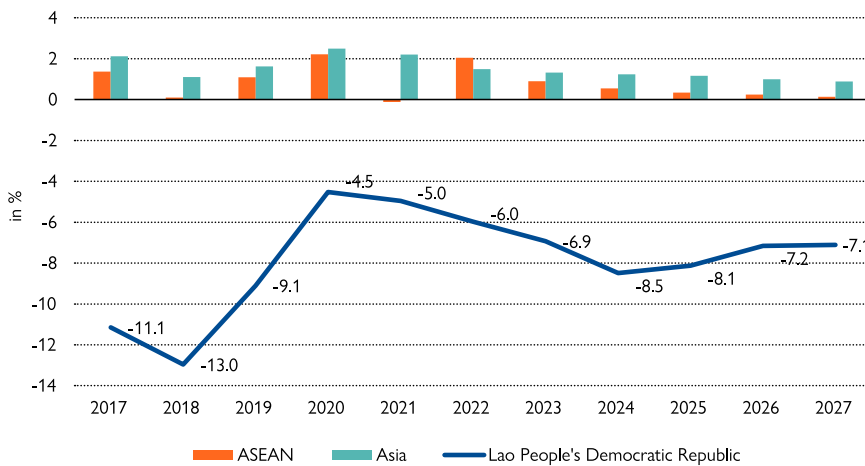


Source: Official data for 2017–2021 provided by IMF (n.d.) and the ITWG for 2022–2024.

Note: Year* = Forecasting for years 2020 and 2021 based on official statistics. Year** = Forecasting for 2022–2024 based on IMF regional economic outlook: Asia and Pacific.

The third macroeconomic indicator is the current account. The current account represents a country's imports and exports of goods and services, payments made to foreign investors, and transfers such as foreign aid. The Lao situation for the period from 2017 to 2027 contrasts with the trend in ASEAN and Asia (Figure 33). The country has a persistent current account deficit over the period with a through in 2018 (-13% of GDP). The situation is explained by concomitant factors, including a high demand for foreign-sourced consumer goods such as automobiles, a slower external demand from main trade partners (China, Thailand and Viet Nam) and adverse weather conditions.

Figure 33. Current account of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Asia, 2017–2027 (in % of GDP)



Source: Author's elaboration based on IMF regional economic outlook: Asia and Pacific (IMF, n.d.).

Note: Forecasting for years 2022–2027.

A current account deficit can be a problem when it is not sustainable, in reference to a lack of financing capabilities. Remittances are one of the various capital inflow sources, such as foreign direct investment (FDI), official development assistance (ODA) and portfolio investment that can support the national current account.

B.2.2. Remittances

A net recipient of remittances

As acknowledged in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (United Nations, 2018) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015a), remittances can support inclusive growth

and sustainable development. It can be the source of foreign currency exchange, can stabilize the balance of payments, supplement official development assistance, and reallocate capital resources to more productive investments and other financial services (IOM, 2021b).

The Bank of the Lao People's Democratic Republic collects data on remittances. At the time of the development of the Migration Profile, two sources were available: compensations of employees and personal transfers. However, data on the transfers of households overseas were not available yet.¹⁸ The World Bank staff produces estimates of personal remittances based on IMF balance of payments data.

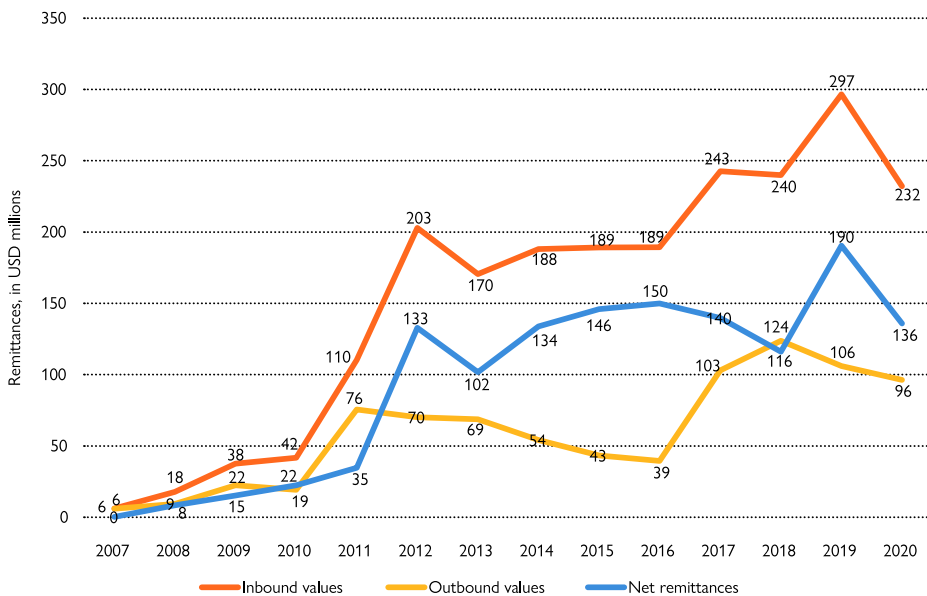
Given its migratory system, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a net recipient of remittances. Figure 34 shows the evolution of remittance inflows, remittance outflows and net remittances from 2007 to 2020. Since 2007, the net positive difference between remittance outflows and inflows has continuously been positive confirming the position of the migrant-sending country. The difference was the largest in 2019, with approximately USD 190 million before declining to approximately USD 135 million in 2020 (World Bank, n.d.c).

Remittance inflows have significantly increased since 2007. After a slight increase between 2007 and 2010, the acceleration between 2010 and 2012 (from USD 48 to nearly USD 200 million) is explained by the increase in migration movements to Thailand following the signature of the MOU between the two countries. Remittance inflows peaked to approximately USD 300 million in 2019 before dropping to about USD 232.2 million amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remittance outflows have slowly increased from 2007 to 2010 and rapidly expanded between 2010 and 2011. A long period of descending plateau characterizes the situation between 2011 and 2016. Two years of increase (2017 and 2018) were followed by a slow decline from 2018 onward. As of 2020, USD 96.2 million were sent from the Lao People's Democratic Republic to foreign countries.

¹⁸ For the Migration Profile, data compiled by the World Bank (n.d.b) were used.

Figure 34. Evolution of inflows, outflows and net remittances, 2007–2020



Source: Author's elaboration based on World Development Indicators (World Bank, n.d.b).

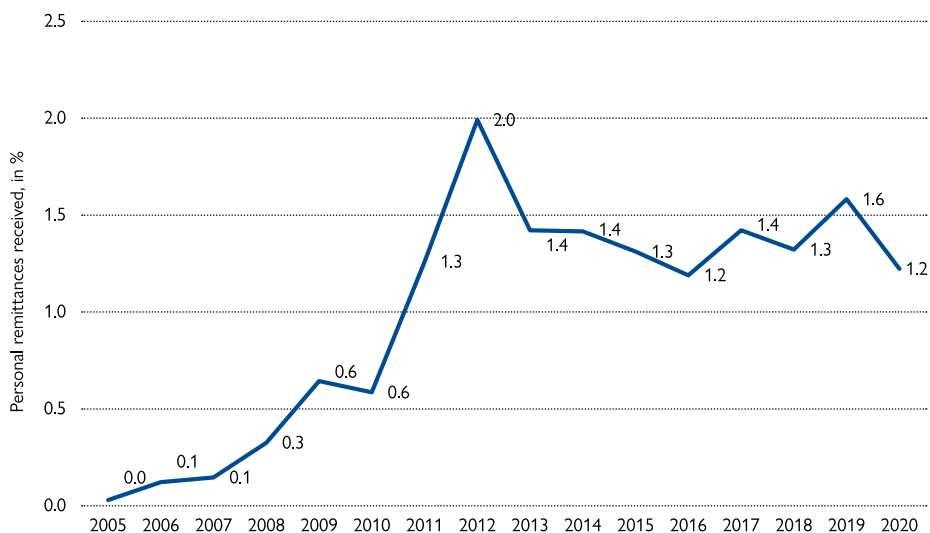
Inbound remittances

Financial remittances from Lao migrant workers are a significant source of income within the country. However, remittances represent a small fraction of the national GDP compared to other migrant-sending countries.¹⁹ Figure 35 displays the evolution over time (2005–2020) of the contribution of remittances to the GDP. As of 2005, remittances represented 0.03 per cent of the GDP. With time, the proportion slightly increased to peak at 2 per cent in 2012. Since then, the contribution to the GDP has oscillated between 1.2 per cent in 2016 to 1.6 per cent in 2019. Due to the return of Lao migrant workers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was characterized by a drop in the contribution of remittances to GDP (1.2%).

Despite the number of Lao workers working abroad, the country does not structurally benefit from inbound remittances.

¹⁹ As of 2020, Viet Nam (5%); Cambodia (4.9%); Myanmar (2.9%); and Thailand (1.7%). Data available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=true.

Figure 35. Personal remittances received, 2005–2020 (in % of GDP)

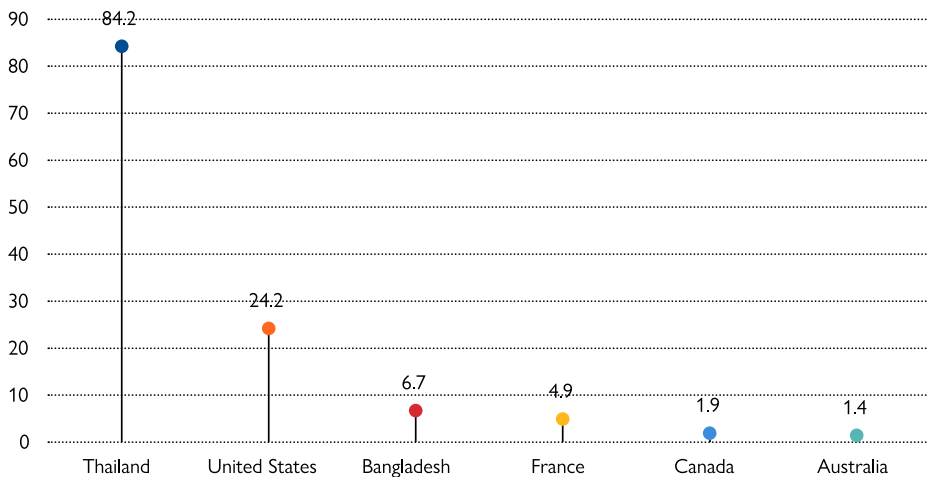


Source: Author's elaboration based on World Development Indicators (World Bank, n.d.b).

According to the World Bank bilateral remittance matrix,²⁰ Thailand is the first source country of remittances received by the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2017 (with USD 84.2 million) (World Bank, 2017). Thailand was followed by the United States (USD 24.2 million), Bangladesh (USD 6.7 million), France (USD 4.9 million), Canada (USD 1.9 million), and Australia (USD 1.4 million) as shown in Figure 36.

²⁰ Estimating bilateral remittances is more problematic than estimating the total volume of remittances received by a single country.

Figure 36. Top remittance source countries, 2017 (current USD million)



Source: Author's elaboration based on World Bank, 2017.

The hegemony of Thailand as the main origin country of inbound remittances is structural. This figure is most probably an underestimation as it omits money transfer operators such as Western Union and MoneyGram and informal personal channels (DRI and IOM, 2022; IOM, 2016).^{21, 22} A recent IOM study (2021c) estimated that the overall remittance figure from Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic was approximately USD 332.5 million for 2019 (official figure was USD 199.5 million).

Sending money in remittances is not free. When doing so, remitters must pay for the services used. The costs of a remittance transaction include a fee charged by the sending agent and typically paid by the sender, and a currency conversion fee for delivery of local currency to the beneficiary in another country. Some smaller operators charge the beneficiary a fee to collect remittances.

One of the highest-cost corridors among countries with available data in the East Asia and Pacific region is Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. On average, it costed 11.35 per cent of the amount sent (World Bank, n.d.c). Said differently, to send USD 200 remittances, the total cost amounted USD 22.71 (fourth quarter of 2021).²³

²¹ The World Bank relies on credits to the balance of payments data file of the IMF as reported by central banks. Most central banks use remittance data reported by commercial banks and leave outflows through money transfer operators and informal personal channels.

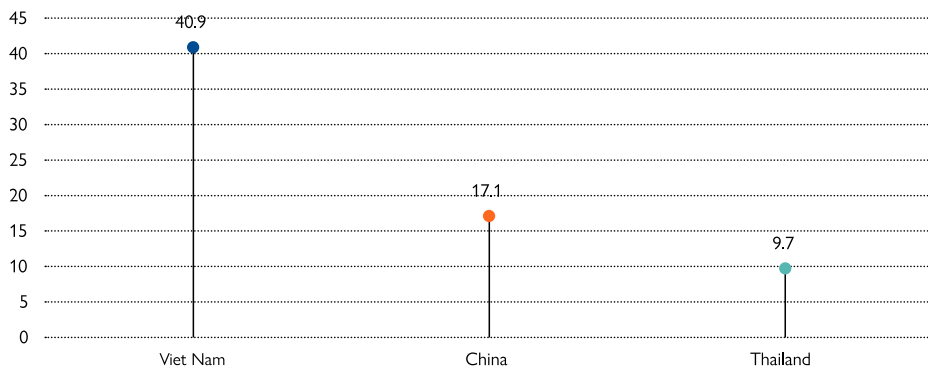
²² The field visit conducted in October 2022 confirmed the use of informal channels to remit. See Annex I.

²³ The SDG Goal 10.C aims to reduce to less than 3 per cent the cost of remittance transfers and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent (United Nations, 2015a).

Outbound remittances

Given the relatively low number of migrants in the country compared to Lao migrants abroad, outbound remittances remain modest, not exceeding 0.86 per cent of the Lao GDP. In 2017, most remittances from the Lao People's Democratic Republic went to Viet Nam (USD 40.9 million), China (USD 17.1 million), and Thailand (USD 9.7 million) (Figure 37).

Figure 37. Top three remittance-receiving countries, 2017 (current USD million)



Source: Author's elaboration based on World Bank, 2017.

B.2.3. Return migration and diaspora engagement

At the time of this research, there was no diaspora investment scheme sponsored or incentivized by policymakers and encouraging Lao citizens living abroad to invest in their origin country. The country does not recognize dual nationality, but diasporic Lao with foreign citizenship may invest and live in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

B.3. Migration, employment and the labour market

The impact of immigration/emigration on the labour market and employment is complex and depends on a series of factors, such as the definition given to migrants, whether foreign nationals or foreign born, the profile and skills of migrants, the scale of immigration, and the characteristics of the economy.

The empirical literature²⁴ drawing attention to the impact of outward and inward migration on the Lao labour market is scarce. This was confirmed by one key informant who explained that there were important knowledge and research gaps in this area.

B.3.1. Impact of immigration on the Lao labour market

Labour supply and employment in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Given the small-scale international immigration to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, it is expected that the macrolevel impact of immigration on the Lao labour market and employment is limited. However, sectoral and local impacts are potentially important.

The main sources of information on the labour market and employment are the 2015 PHC (LSB, 2015) and the LFS conducted in 2010 and 2017 (LSB, 2018). Data can be broken down by sex, age, level of education and location, but not systematically by migratory status. Hence, labour migration data is incomprehensive, and disaggregation of existing data collected by migratory status appears necessary.

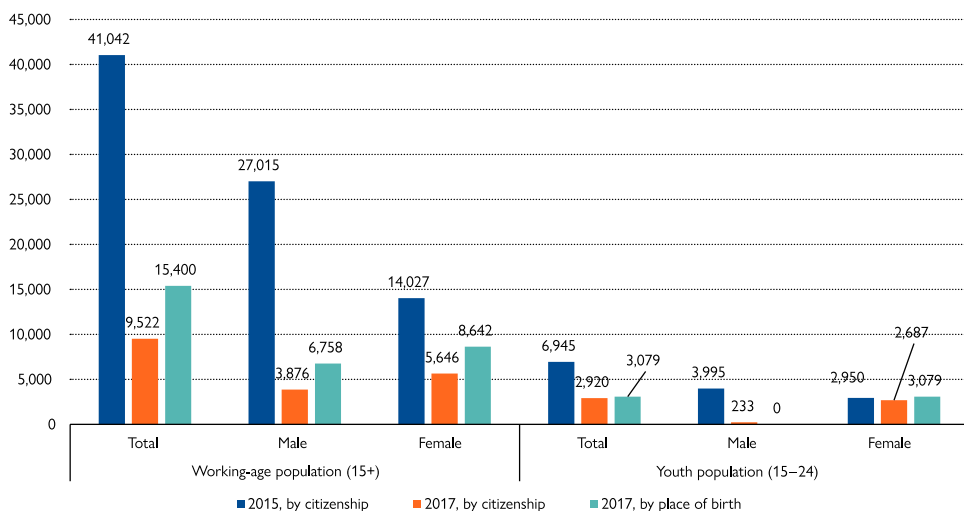
Working-age population

According to the 2017 LFS data, of the total population in 2017 (6.9 million), 4.8 million persons were aged 15 and above, which represents 69 per cent of the total Lao population. The dependency ratio was 56 per cent with a notable difference between urban and rural areas (62% versus 43%, respectively). The working-age population accounted for 75 per cent of total urban population and 66 per cent of rural population. Females constituted approximately 50 per cent of the working-age population.

Data broken down by migratory status are available from the 2015 PHC and 2017 LFS. The 2015 PHC data are based on citizenship, while the 2017 LFS data provide information by citizenship and country of birth. As of 2015, the working-age population of migrants represented 0.9 per cent of the total Lao working-age population (Figure 38). This proportion fell to 0.2 per cent in 2017 based on the citizenship criteria and to 0.3 per cent based on the country of birth.

²⁴ Empirical evidence is difficult to obtain due to methodological challenges, especially the difficulty in establishing the causality between migration and wages, and migration and unemployment.

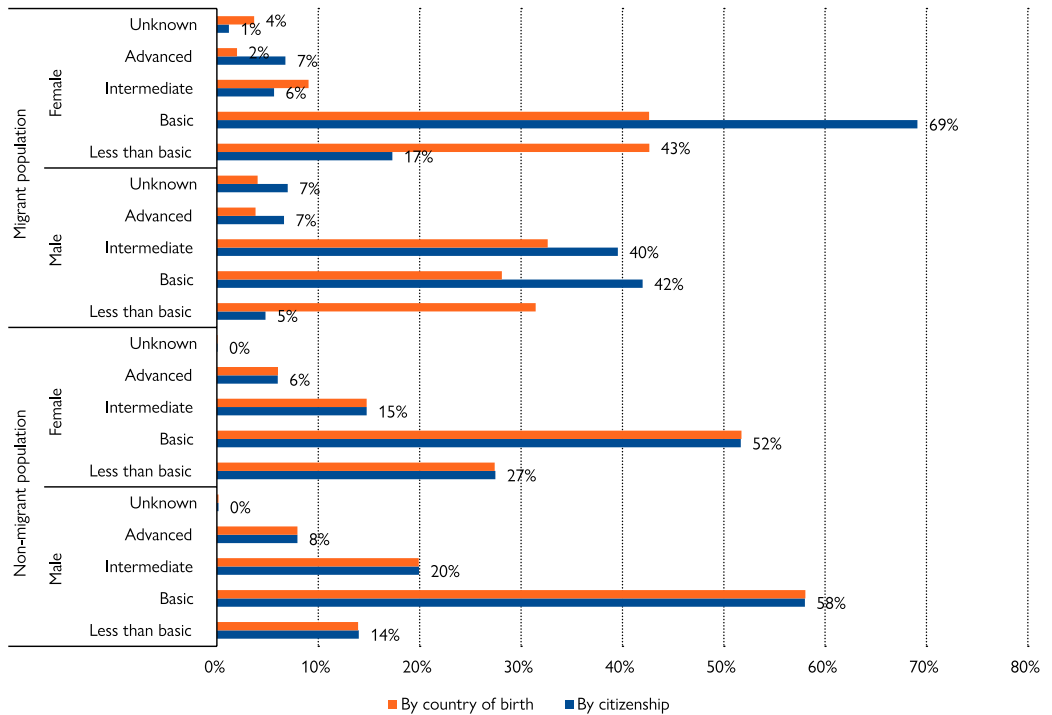
Figure 38. Working-age population of international migrants by sex, 2015 and 2017



Sources: LSB, 2015 and 2018.

The 2017 LFS data on the Lao working-age population can also be broken down by level of education and migratory status (Figure 39) using the 2017 LFS data. The analysis shows that female working-age migrant population was on average less qualified than the female Lao population. Using the citizenship, most female migrants (86%) had a basic level of education or less compared to 79 per cent of their female Lao counterparts. Male foreigners were on average more qualified than male nationals.

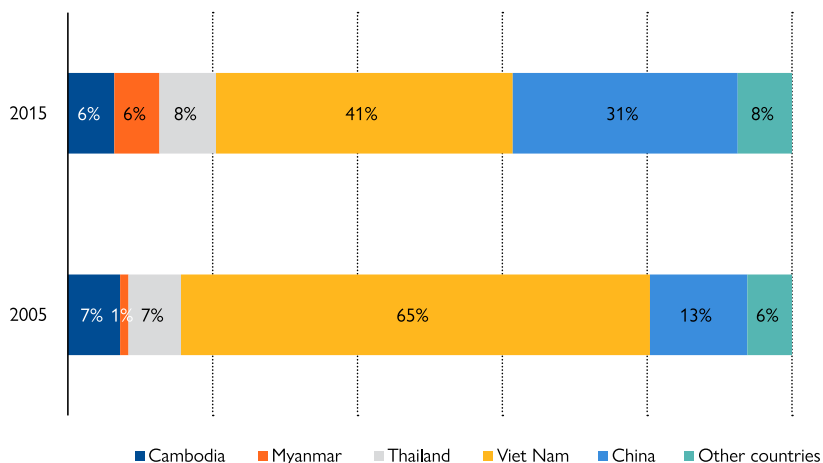
Figure 39. Working-age population by sex, level of education and migratory status, 2017



Source: LSB, 2018.

By country of origin, data showed that immigration to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic was mostly intraregional, at the level of ASEAN. Of the foreign working-age population in 2005, most had Vietnamese citizenship (65%) (Figure 40). The proportion fell to 41 per cent in 2015. In contrast, the proportion of Chinese nationals in the country increased from 13 per cent in 2005 to 31 per cent in 2015.

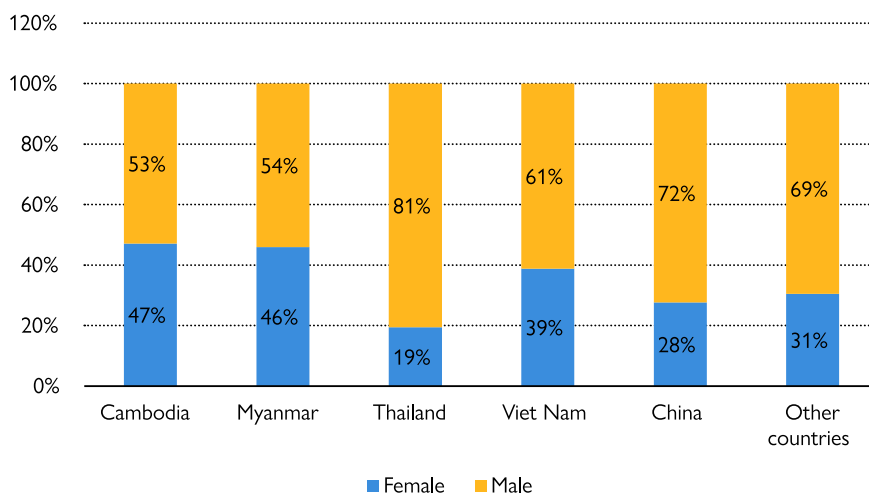
Figure 40. Country of citizenship of the foreign working-age population, 2005 and 2015



Sources: 2005 and 2015 PHC (LSB, 2015).

Data by citizenship and sex are available only for 2015 (Figure 41). They revealed some gendered patterns. For instance, 81 per cent of the Thai working-age population in the country was male. This was the case to a lesser extent among Chinese (72%) and other origin countries (69%). There was a fair gender balance among Cambodians (53% of male) and citizens of Myanmar (54% of male). There was a fair gender balance among Cambodians (53% of male) and citizens of Myanmar (54% of male).

Figure 41. Foreign working-age population by country of citizenship and sex, 2015

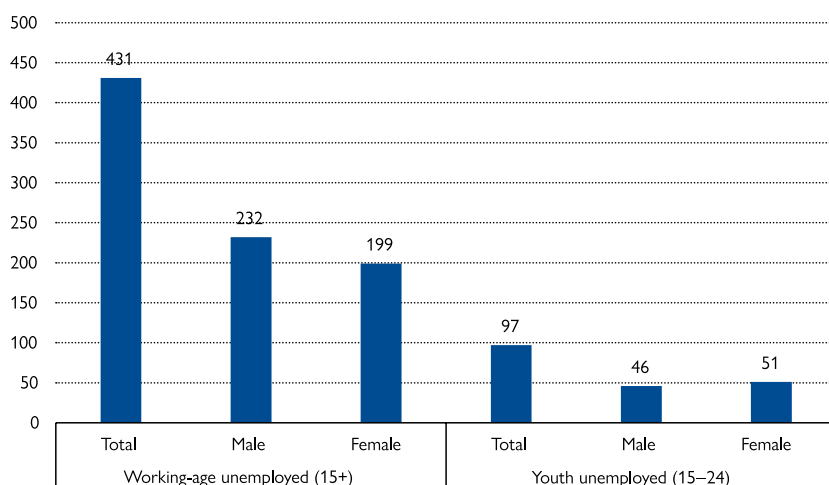


Source: LSB, 2015.

Unemployed labour force

According to national data, the unemployment rate in the country has been structurally low but on the rise.²⁵ The unemployment rate reached 3.3 per cent in 2017 after 25 years of decrease between 1995 and 2010. The unemployment of persons in the Lao People's Democratic Republic disaggregated by citizenship, sex and age is obtained using 2015 PHC data (Figure 42). As of 2017, 431 working-aged foreigners were unemployed in the country (54%). The number of unemployed young foreigners (15–24) amounted to 97 in 2017 (47% male).

Figure 42. Unemployment of migrants by sex and age, 2015



Source: 2015 PHC data.

Note: Based on citizenship.

Employed labour force

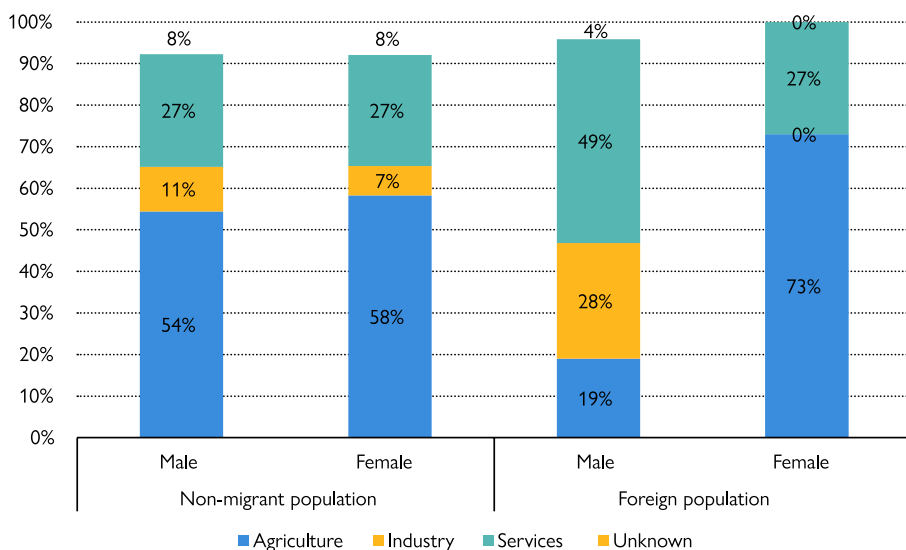
Shifts in employment are commonly used as an indicator of economic development with the assumption that the reallocation of jobs from agriculture and other labour-intensive primary activities to the industrial and services sector. Among those employed (1.8 million in 2017 of which 52% were male), agriculture remained the first employer in the country (61.4% of total employment in 2019) but contributed to only 16 per cent of the GDP, reflecting low labour productivity in the sector. Over time, the proportion of employment in the sector has continuously declined (86.8% in 1991), reflecting a shift of employment to industry and mostly to services. As of 2019, the proportion of employment in the services

²⁵ Indicator not disaggregated by migratory status.

sector was 25.6 per cent (10.4% in 1991) and 12.9 per cent in the industrial sector (2.8% in 1991).

The distribution of migrants by sector is provided by the 2006 Economic Census and 2017 LFS. The 2006 data set gives information on the number of migrants by sector of activity, but not by sex. The 2017 LFS data set provides information by sex, economic activity and citizenship, as well as place of birth (Figure 43). There were more female foreigners working in the agriculture (73% of them) than their Lao counterparts (58%). Besides, male migrants are mostly working in the industrial (28% versus 11% of Lao workers) and services (49% versus 27% of Lao workers) sectors.

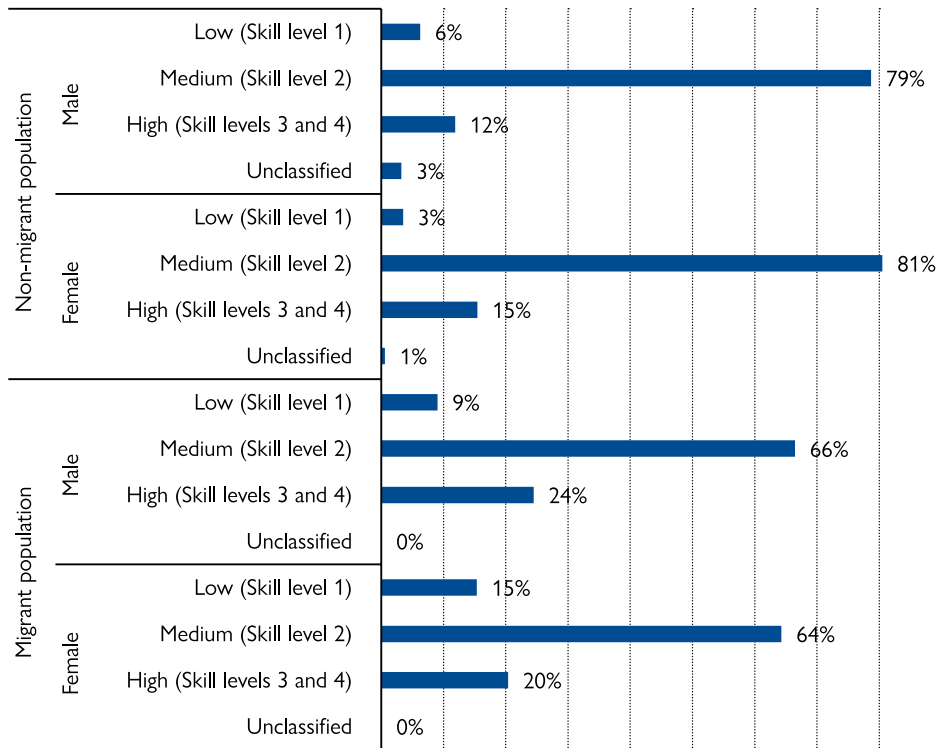
Figure 43. Distribution of employment, by sector, sex and migratory status, 2017 (in %)



Source: LSB, 2018.

Data on employment by sex, migratory status and skills levels are available for 2017 (Figure 44). Both Lao and migrant populations had mostly medium level of skills (80% and 65%, respectively). Furthermore, the proportion of migrants with high skills level was significantly higher than for Lao workers, for both female and male.

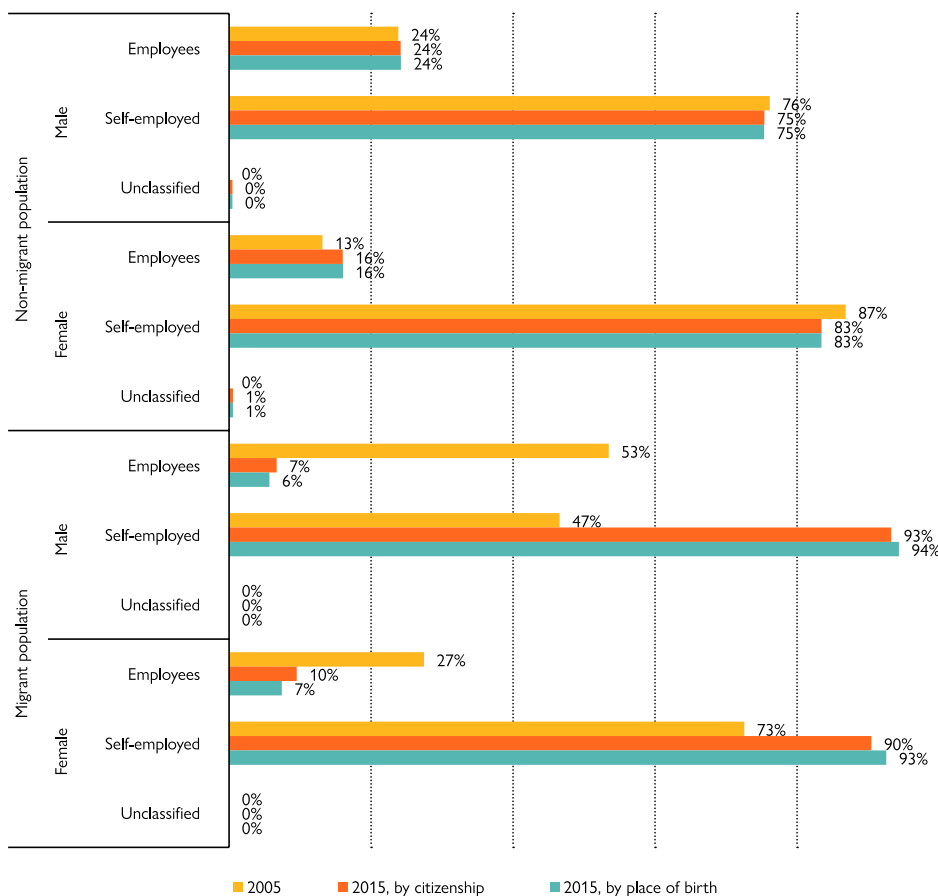
Figure 44. Employment by sex, skills levels, and migratory status, 2017



Source: 2017 LFS.

Information on the employment by sex, occupation and migratory status is available for 2005 and 2015. Data showed that migrants were more often engaged in self-employment than Lao workers, with no notable gender differences (Figure 45).

Figure 45. Employment by sex, occupation and migratory status, 2005 and 2015 (in %)



Sources: 2005 PHC and 2015 PHC.

Microlevel impact of labour immigration on the Lao labour market

Information on the impact of labour immigration on the Lao labour market is scarce. The qualitative data collected during the field visit conducted in October 2022²⁶ can give some indications but must be taken cautiously given the methodological limitations in terms of sample size and location. Several participants in the FGDs considered the presence of international migrants in the area as a threat to their own jobs. They talked about unfair competition, as international migrants would launch their own small business and hire family members or compatriots instead of Lao nationals.

²⁶ See Annex I.

To prevent unfair competition in the local labour market, some districts signed agreements (memorandum of cooperation) with the foreign companies. Hence, an agreement was signed between Paklai district and Chinese companies to fix local worker quotas and increase local employment. The perceptions of the participants in the FGDs in the district became more positive. The participants saw labour immigration and investment as opportunities to find jobs and develop technical skills.

B.3.2. Impact of emigration and internal migration on the Lao labour market

Data on the impact of emigration and internal migration on the Lao labour market is scarce, and evidence is mainly based on a few studies (SNV, n.d.) and anecdotal information.

Evidence shows that the shortage in skills and of (rural) labour was the result of three concomitant and interdependent factors, namely outmigration to neighbouring countries, high turnover rate and skills mismatches. Neighbouring labour markets' demand for low-skilled workers in specific sectors has been significant over the recent years and the situation in Thailand, with a decreasing labour force from 2022 onward, will accelerate the demand for the low- and medium-skilled migrant workers. Consequently, the migration of Lao workers created a temporary migration hump, resulting in tensions on the local labour market.

The SNV (*ibid.*) interviewed communities in eight villages through FGDs. The findings showed that in all villages, parents said they did not want their children to continue farming and wanted their children to pursue education and get a job, preferably with the Government, or emigrate, and send money back home. The aspiration for a better life leads to seeking paid employment rather than unpaid labour on the family farm.

The field visit conducted in 2022 confirms these findings.²⁷ Participants to the FGDs explained how the migration of a family member impacted the role of those who remained behind, including parents and spouses on the labour market. Female participants explained that they tended to substitute wage to non-wage work and hire workers to work in the field during the harvest season using the money sent by the migrants. Some respondents reported that the migrants often engaged in seasonal migration, coming back when needed in the field.

²⁷ See Annex I.

B.4. Migration and social development

Social development²⁸ is the change over time in the living conditions of individuals of the society and in the relationships that these individuals maintain with each other and with other groups and institutions. It encompasses areas such as education, health and employment that can be realized by reducing the levels of poverty, exclusion, isolation and vulnerability of the groups most in need. Migration and remittances can improve or worsen such living conditions and relationships.

In the literature, two types of remittances are distinguished, namely economic and social remittances. Economic remittances are all the monies and goods migrants send from their destination to their origin country (Gubert, 2007). *Social remittances*, also called social transfers, are the ideas, practices and know-hows that circulate along migratory paths (Levitt, 2001 and 1998).

B.4.1. Migration, economic remittances, living conditions and poverty

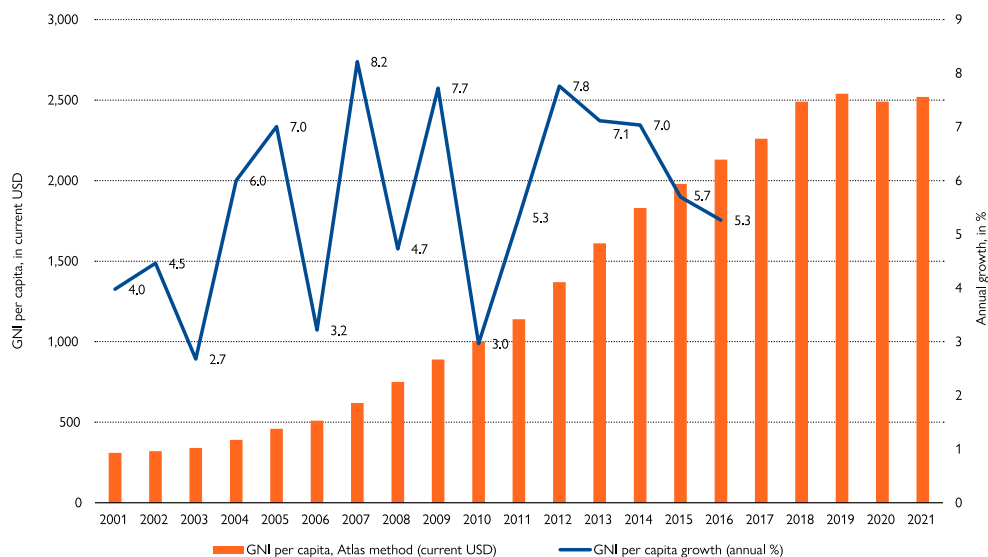
As of 2021, the Lao People's Democratic Republic was a lower middle-income economy with a GNI per capita of USD 2,520 (World Bank, n.d.a). In 20 years, the GNI per capita increased from USD 310 in 2001 to USD 2,520 in 2021 (Figure 47). The GNI per capita growth rate oscillated from a minimum of 2.7 per cent between 2003 and 2004 and a maximum of 8.2 per cent from 2007 to 2008. Of the 189 countries ranked in the 2021 Human Development Index, the Lao People's Democratic Republic was number 135 with a value of 0.607 (UNDP, 2022)²⁹ and the Human Capital Index value was 0.46 (World Bank, n.d.d).³⁰

²⁸ Social development is now known as social sustainability and inclusion by the World Bank (see <https://worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/overview#1>),

²⁹ For information, Thailand was No. 79, Viet Nam was No. 117, Cambodia was No. 144, and Myanmar was No. 147.

³⁰ The Human Capital Index calculates the contributions of health and education to worker productivity. The final index score ranges from 0 to 1 and measures the productivity as a future worker of child born today relative to the benchmark of full health and complete education. For information, as of 2020, the Human Capital Index of Thailand was 0.6, Viet Nam was 0.7, Cambodia was 0.5, and Myanmar was 0.5 (see <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/human-capital-index>).

Figure 47. Gross national income per capita (in current USD) and gross national income per capita growth, 2001–2021 (in %)



Source: Author's elaboration based on World Development Indicators, World Bank using LECS.

Note: Data on GNI per capita growth not available for 2017 onward.

Significant progress has been made to reduce poverty in the country. The primary source of official poverty statistics is LECS. The LSB has conducted the LECS at five-year intervals since 1992/93. The most recent round was implemented in 2018/19.

The impact of migration on poverty is mainly indirect, measured through economic remittances. Using the 2011/12 and 2018/19 LECS data, the LSB and World Bank (2020) and the World Bank (2020) produced analyses of the migration impact on poverty reduction. Results show that nearly 15 per cent (one in seven) of Lao households received remittances, a proportion that almost doubled in ten years. Remittances were considered a potential substitute for non-farm employment, especially in rural areas.

Besides, the World Bank study (2020) indicated that remittance-receiving households had a much lower poverty rate than those without remittances, and their share of the population increased. The poverty rate among households receiving remittances declined from 13.9 per cent in 2012/13 to 10.2 per cent in 2018/19. Estimates using the propensity score matching technique³¹ suggested

³¹ The technique compares the welfare of households that benefited from remittances to a similar household that did not.

that poverty would be 2.2 percentage points higher without remittances. Findings finally confirmed the vital positive influence of migration and remittances on livelihoods in contrast with the limited role of social transfers.

B.4.2. Migration, social remittances, social cohesion and gender norms

Historically, mobility and migration were mainly a male practice in the country. Until 1975, male authority and female subordination were the dominating models. This means that the husbands headed the family, and their role was to seek food and work most often outside the family space. The wives must stay home most of the time to look after the children and cook. Women would be mobile when involved in trading activities, resulting in regular trips to local markets of the district or province (Pavie, 1995).

From 1975 onward, the promotion of gender equality, the launch of the childcare collectivization programme, the provision of kindergarten and paid maternity leaves to female workers, as well as the implementation of NEM³² in 1986 onward gave new opportunities to (rural) women and led to the feminization of migration (Hancart Petitet and Phetchanpheng, 2022). The industrialization with the emergence of non-farm activities brought various changes in the organization of economic activities within families. Thus, young women started migrating to Vientiane or other urban centres to pursue their studies or work in factories.

Besides, remittances that women can send home contribute to a change in traditional gender norms, intergenerational dynamics and family structures. The findings of Hancart Petitet and Phetchanpheng (*ibid.*) corroborated those of Lyttleton and Vorabouth (2011) who showed that migrant daughters were increasingly perceived as more reliable contributors to the household's economy than the sons. This has given daughters increased social standing, including daughters in minority ethnic families.

At the same time, living far from the parents – physically, socially and emotionally – makes migrants less subject to social control. They consult and listen to seniors less often than in the past. Hence, they have more opportunities to experiment new forms of autonomy and sexuality, but they are also exposed to high-risk situations (Hancart Petitet and Phetchanpheng, 2022).

³² Economic reforms in the Lao People's Democratic Republic started in 1986 when NEM was adopted and steps were taken towards a market-oriented economy. Under NEM, the Government promoted development of the private sectors, deregulating price and production controls (see https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/11623592_02.pdf).

Another common illustration of the impact of migration on social development is related to the decision of parents to leave the children with the grandparents. This decision was very common among informants interviewed during the field visit in October 2022.³³ A recent IOM study (2016) on Lao migrants in Thailand also examined this issue. It showed that most married couples migrated together (82.9%). Among married couples who had children under 15 (72.7%), more than half (58.2%) of them left their children in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, while 34 per cent of them brought their children with them (ibid.).

These findings suggest that migration contributes to the reconfiguration of the nuclear family, including the social role of the mother. Most grandmothers interviewed during the field visit explained that having to take care of grandchildren implied different and more responsibilities often related to school.

B.4.3. Social integration of migrants in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Social integration is generally measured via the number of inter-ethnic marriages and interactions with the host communities. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, little is known about the social integration of migrants. Most key informants of the field visit conducted in 2022 explained that marriages were often undocumented.³⁴ Such inter-ethnic marriages influence the Lao families and various codes and regulations among the couple, the children and the elderly.

MOHA collects data on registered marriages that can be broken down in four categories namely: Lao/Lao; Lao/foreigner; Lao/alien; and Lao/Stateless person. Data for 2021 were made available for the Migration Profile. In 2021, of the 8,097 registered marriages, 180 occurred between a Lao national and a foreigner (2.2% of total registered marriages).

B.4.4. Living and working conditions of Lao migrants in Thailand

Labour migration and labour protection legal framework in Thailand

Two national laws govern labour migration in Thailand: (a) the Royal Ordinance Concerning the Management of Employment of Foreign Workers B.E. 2560 (Government of Thailand, 2017); and (b) the Labour Protection Act

³³ See Annex I.

³⁴ Ibid.

B.E. 2541 (Government of Thailand, 1998). Besides, there is also the Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Act B.E. 2554 (Government of Thailand, 2011a).³⁵

Additionally, the Department of Employment of the Ministry of Labour in Thailand has established Migrant Worker Assistance Centres in 2016 onward. Dispatched in ten provinces, the objective was to increase migrant workers' access to justice (ILO, 2020a). According to the United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand (2019), one of the most notable gaps to be filled in Thailand relates to assistance and compensation for labour rights violations by employers.

Occupational and safety issues

Exposure to toxic chemicals in the Thai agriculture sector is a major concern. Thailand is the fourth highest user of agricultural pesticides in the world, and evidence shows that the use of protective equipment is generally insufficient (Kaewboonchoo et al., 2015). Such issues also impact family members (ILO, 2021), and that the main ailments and medical conditions linked to pesticide use include malaria, stomach pain, high blood pressure and colds/flu (Jain et al., 2018).

Migrant workers' rights abuses: Working and employment conditions

Abuses of migrant workers' rights in Thailand are well documented in all employment sectors. They often start before migrant workers arrive at their destination and continues while in the country due to limited or unenforced labour protections and structural inequalities (ILO, 2021; Henneby, 2014).

A recent study conducted by ILO in 2018 focused on the working and employment conditions in the agriculture sector in Thailand of migrant workers, including Lao migrants (ILO, 2021). Among the 528 documented and undocumented migrant workers surveyed, 134 were from the Lao People's Democratic Republic. All of them were in the Loei province, working in sugarcane farms. The 80.6 per cent of them were fully documented. In terms of employment contracts prior to migration, 20.9 per cent of Lao workers had a written contract. Such proportion was important and explained by the fact that Lao workers migrated through the MOU process, which stipulates that all MOU workers are supposed to sign a written contract before leaving their home country (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Government of Thailand, 2016).

³⁵ Social protection is covered by the Social Security Act B.E. 2533 (Government of Thailand, 2011b), Workmen's Compensation Act B.E. 2537 (Government of Thailand, 2007) and Royal Decree categorizing employees in accordance with Section 4 (6) of Social Security Act, B.E. 2533 (B.E. 2545) (Government of Thailand, 2002).

The ILO (2021) findings corroborated with the analysis conducted in 2019 by the United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand (2019). The latter reported that the sector was characterized by high levels of informality, low wages, unsafe living and working conditions, and lingering problems with child labour.

Migrant workers' rights abuses: Recruitment fees and related costs

Migrant workers' rights abuses also include the systematic overcharging for recruitment fees and related costs (ILO, 2020b). Migrant workers frequently pay fees to brokers, cross-border transporters and border officials on both sides of the border (ILO, 2021).

A 2020 ILO study conducted in Thailand shed light on the recruitment fees and related costs paid by low-skilled migrants working in Thailand (ILO, 2020b). In 2018, the survey interviewed 1,200 migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic (302), Myanmar (518) and Cambodia (380). It collected information on recruitment-related costs and fees for both regular and irregular migrant workers prior to departure, during transit and upon arrival in Thailand. The findings showed that Lao workers who participated in the study paid on average USD 503, representing about 2.3 times the monthly wage (ibid.). The study concluded that these costs could be reduced through effective regulation, enforcement and information dissemination.

To pay these recruitment related costs, most workers sell family assets, borrow money at high rates from lenders or go into debt with their employers. Some choose the irregular channel, often perceived as a cheaper option, while others overstay their visa duration, thereby becoming irregular migrants. Both strategies increase their level of vulnerability to further exploitation, including forced labour or human trafficking.

The field visit of October 2022 gave the opportunity for participants to talk about the MOU process and associated fees. Several participants explained that the interest rate was very high, leaving them with debt and pushing them to use other channels to fund migration.

Working conditions: Comparison between regular and irregular migrant workers' experiences

A 2018 study conducted jointly by ILO and UNDP aimed to compare the experiences of regular and irregular Lao migrant workers in Thailand with the assumption that formal labour migration procedures were beneficial to migrant workers including by reducing vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (ILO and

UNDP, 2018). The study relied on two survey data: (a) in 2015, data collected among Lao returned migrant workers from Luang Prabang and Champassack, which enlisted the services of recruitment agencies to take up work in Thailand in line with the MOU between the two countries; and (b) in 2013, data collected among irregular Lao migrant workers, mostly from Champassack and Saravan, who were deported from Thailand across the Wang Tao–Chong Mek international border. The findings showed that regular labour migration yielded more positive migrant work outcomes than irregular channels, and that both regular and irregular migrant workers reported migrant rights’ abuses including document retention is considered an important indicator of forced labour and human trafficking.

At the recruitment stage, the findings showed that 41 per cent of the regular migrants had to make payments directly to their recruitment companies, and covering various items such as passports, visas and/or work permits, pre-departure training packages and transport costs to the destination. Besides, most regular migrants (89%) reported having signed a contract with their recruitment agency, of these only 40 per cent received a copy, and none signed an agreement with their employer upon arrival in Thailand. Such reality contrasts with the national Thai regulations or the bilateral MOU.

B.5. Migration and health

The analysis of the impact of migration on health can highlight social inequality in the different systems. Migration is increasingly recognized as a determinant of health (Davies et al., 2006), but the bidirectional relationship between migration and health remains poorly understood, leading to a lack of sound policies and programmes.

B.5.1. Migrant and mobile populations and health: a regional issue

Due to climate and geographical conditions, the GMS is considered one bioregion, defined by characteristics of the natural environment rather than by human-made division. The GMS is home to several communicable and neglected tropical diseases including artemisinin-resistant malaria, schistosomiasis and sexually transmitted diseases, which affect GMS countries.

Besides, increased regional integration and economic exchanges have facilitated intraregional and internal movements of populations and consequently migration and mobility out of, within and into the Lao People’s Democratic

Republic.³⁶ This situation also facilitates cross-border movements of disease agents and their vectors. Health challenges for people of various nationalities closely linked by cultural, historical and linguistic ties are therefore common across the GMS countries. Thus, these diseases can only be addressed in a coordinated manner at the regional level and the Lao health system must be able to address cross-border health challenges (WHO, 2017).

B.5.2. Mobile and migrant populations' health in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has improved health outcomes in general.

Malaria

The burden of malaria³⁷ in the country has significantly decreased since 2000. As of 2020, the incidence of malaria per 1,000 population at risk was equal to 1.5 compared to 32.4 in 2000 (WHO, n.d.). Malaria is endemic in most the country, but most reported cases (about 97%) generally occur in hilly, forested areas in southern provinces (WHO, 2017).

During this two-decade period of declining malaria burden, an outbreak occurred. From 2011 until 2014, a large malaria epidemic in the country, particularly in southern provinces, led to a sharp increase in the malaria incidence and death. Over 50,000 malaria cases were recorded in 2014 alone. Authorities attributed the outbreak to changes in population movements due to increased economic activity including unregulated deforestation, large-scale development projects, climatic conditions, and drug resistance (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MOH, 2016).

Migrants and mobile populations are generally highly vulnerable to malaria due to their heightened exposure in remote or forest-areas, the access they lack to quality public health services, the challenge of identifying and trafficking them, and their lack of knowledge and understanding of the disease. Barriers and obstacles to basic and quality health-care services concern both health and malaria curative and preventive services. For instance, a 2011 outbreak assessment in Attapeu

³⁶ *Mobile and migrant populations* are defined as any workers or their family members who migrate for economic or labour-related reasons within the Lao People's Democratic Republic or across borders with neighbouring countries. Mobile workers are present in an area for less than six months, while migrant populations are present for more than six months and less than one year. People beyond one year are considered residents.

³⁷ Malaria is a serious and sometimes fatal disease caused by a parasite that commonly infects a certain type of mosquito that feeds on humans.

Province found that migrant workers accounted for 70 per cent of confirmed malaria cases (Hewitt et al., 2013).

Static public and private health-care providers cannot provide services and proper malaria information to all migrants, especially individuals coming from other countries or unregistered workers or individuals moving far away from their home within their home country where access to static health-care facilities is impaired (WHO, 2015a).

National and regional attempts have been made to control and eliminate malaria. The Lao People's Democratic Republic's Prime Minister signed the declaration to eliminate malaria by 2030 and launched the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Control and Elimination, which comprises two phases: 2016–2020 and 2021–2030 of a 15-year strategy to eliminate malaria in the country (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MOH, 2016). The strategy was developed based on guidance from the WHO Strategy for Malaria Elimination in the Greater Mekong Subregion (2015–2030) (WHO, 2015b) and aligned with the principles of the WHO Global Technical Strategy for Malaria 2016–2030 (WHO, 2021). At the GMS level, the Mekong Malaria Elimination programme launched in 2017 is an initiative that supports malaria elimination across the six GMS countries. The programme leads coordination among all countries in line with the WHO Strategy for Malaria Elimination in the GMS (2015–2030) (ibid.).

Tuberculosis

The burden of TB³⁸ in the Lao People's Democratic Republic has decreased at a moderate rate since 2000. The incidence of TB per 100,000 people was 149 in 2020 compared to 330 in 2000.³⁹ TB is a disease that thrives among the poorest and least education in the country. Poor living and working conditions are key factors. Mobile and migrant populations are exposed to a particularly high incidence of the disease. A first national TB prevalence survey was conducted in 2010/2011. Data collected were not disaggregated by citizenship or migratory status.

While the country is not among high-TB burden countries, its neighbouring countries, China and Thailand, belong to the top-20 TB high-burden countries by estimated absolute number. Thus, the Government launched the National Tuberculosis Strategic Plan 2017–2020 (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MOH,

³⁸ TB is a bacterial infection spread through inhaling tiny droplets from the coughs or sneezes of an infected person.

³⁹ Incidence of TB is the estimated number of new and relapse TB cases arising in a given year, expressed as the rate per 100,000 population. All forms of TB are included, including cases in people living with HIV.

2017), which aligns with the objectives of the WHO End TB Strategy (WHO, 2015c). This latter serves as a blueprint for countries to reduce TB incidence by 80 per cent, TB death by 90 per cent, and to eliminate catastrophic costs for TB-affected households by 2030.

HIV/AIDS

The overall HIV⁴⁰ prevalence in the Lao population remains low. As of 2020, the prevalence rate among adults (15–49 years old) of HIV per 1,000 uninfected population was 0.13, and the main channel of transmission is through sexual intercourse, in particular heterosexual sex.

Migration and mobility play an important role in the country's HIV/AIDS risk scenarios. Increased mobility and cross-border labour migration with neighbouring countries with high prevalence in their most-at-risk populations are factors of change in lifestyles and sexual behaviour. They heighten the risk of HIV transmission (WHO, 2010).

Even if data is limited, evidence from UNAIDS (2016) indicated that cases were concentrated among specific groups that are not mutually exclusive:

- Mobile and migrant populations, especially young female migrants and international migrants: reasons for a higher HIV prevalence among young female than male migrants are various. They are more likely to test than their male counterparts, they got infected by their HIV-positive migrant husbands, and they engage more in high-risk behaviour, including sex work. Besides, international migrants, especially from China and Viet Nam, can engage in high-risk behaviour, rendering Lao females at risk of HIV.
- Sex workers, initially female and more recently male who have sex with male and migrant workers, and transgender people.
- Drug users, especially people injecting drugs and generally located in provinces bordering China, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

Efforts to combat HIV/AIDS include the 10-year National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (2021–2030) and Action Plan (2021–2025) for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS and STI (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021a) aiming to achieve UNAIDS global 95-95-95 targets⁴¹ by 2025 and end the HIV epidemic by 2030 (United Nations, n.d.).

⁴⁰ HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS.

⁴¹ Launched by the United Nations (n.d.), the programme targets 95-95-95 for treatment by 2025, which means 95 per cent of people living with HIV knowing their HIV status, 95 per cent of people who know their status on treatment, and 95 per cent of people on treatment with suppressed viral loads.

B.5.3. Health of Lao migrants based abroad

Migrant workers in Thailand

Thailand is considered an area of risk with high prevalence rates of HIV and other tropic or communicable diseases. As of 2020, approximately 500,000 people were living with HIV and 12,000 people died of AIDS-related causes in the country (WHO, n.d.).

Thailand has made significant advances in migrant health access and coverage to reach the universal health coverage. The Government recognizes migrants as a vulnerable group who often lack the economic means or social safety nets to access adequate health services and the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand promotes migrant-inclusive policies that address migration-related health vulnerabilities. An MOU was signed in 2019 with IOM to increase access to health care among migrants and vulnerable communities.

Two systems co-exist to manage migration:

- The one-stop service (OSS), which includes collecting personal data records, undertaking health examinations for irregular migrants, granting residence permits, and cooperating with the Ministry of Labour of Thailand for work permit issuance;
- The bilateral MOU signed with neighbouring countries, including the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

One-stop service and MOU migrants need to pass a Migration Health Assessment for serious communicable diseases before being issued a work permit.

About financial protection, two mechanisms of migrant health insurance were available in Thailand in 2022:

- The Social Security Scheme (SSS) covering migrant workers in the formal sector. Established under the Social Security Act 2013 (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2013a) and the Workmen's Compensation Act 1994 (Government of Thailand, 2007). The SSS carries benefits like those for Thai workers.
- HICS is a migrant-specific public health insurance scheme covering migrant workers, including undocumented workers.⁴² It is implemented by the Ministry of Public Health. It is compulsory for migrant workers not covered by the health

⁴² In practice, it is rare that hospitals allow undocumented workers or their dependants to buy the health insurance (ILO, 2021).

insurance under the SSS, border pass workers and for those who are eligible for the SSS but have so far contributed to it for less than three months.

In addition, the Government of Thailand regularly launches targeted policies addressing migrant health such as the National Master Plan for HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Support for Migrants and Mobile Populations (2007–2011).

Evidence has shown that HICS has improved migrant workers' access to services and reduced out-of-pocket payments (Suphanchaimat, 2016). However, despite migrant-inclusive policies and good practices, barriers to accessing health-care services by undocumented migrants in Thailand remain (IOM, 2011; Chamchan and Apipornchaisakul, 2012). They comprise legal restrictions, high annual fees for the health exam and insurance, lack of awareness of the schemes, language differences, fear of arrest, detention or deportation, and reluctance of some hospitals to promote and implement the policy. Besides, health insurance for migrants has expiry dates making some migrants risk living without insurance if they fail to (re)purchase HICS. Finally, discrimination and extortion by other authorities such as police and immigration officials are other barriers that discourage migrant workers from seeking health care and lead to high rates of self-treatment or use of private clinics (Harrigan et al., 2017; Naing et al., 2012).

B.5.4. Remittances and health of family members left behind

At the time of the study, only one assessed the impact of remittances on health outcomes of left-behind family members in the region (Deelen and Vasuprasat, 2010). The study was conducted among migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar based in Thailand at the time of the survey. The findings showed that health care was the most reported intention for how the remittances were to be used after daily expenses (Jampaklay and Kittisuksathit, 2009).

PART C: MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Part C provides the combined frameworks of legal norms, laws and regulations, policies and traditions, as well as organizational structures and the relevant processes that shape and regulate the Lao People's Democratic Republic's approaches about migration in all its forms, addressing rights and responsibilities and promoting international cooperation. Thus, migration governance has a national and global dimension as it involves States, migrants, citizens, international organizations, the private sector, unions and academia.

C.1. Policy framework

C.1.1. National policy framework

Vision 2030 and 10-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2016–2025

The Vision 2030 and 10-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2016–2025 (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MPI, 2016) defines broad socioeconomic development goals up to 2030, directions, and targets and national priority strategies until 2025 as the basis for the formulation of the 8th and 9th Five-year NSEDP and sectoral and local development plans and strategies (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021b and 2016).

The strategy contains only one explicit reference to migration. Under part III titled “Policies, mechanisms and implementation measures”, the objective is to create, among other policies, labour migration policies to support development. Rather than this reference, the strategy refers to all Lao nationals, which implicitly include migrants and mobile populations.

9th Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021–2025

NSEDP is a five-year plan that sets up the fundamental direction for the national development planning process (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021b). The 9th NSEDP 2021–2025 mentions migrants and migration in a few areas. The focus is mostly on migrant workers, especially among the youth, rural–urban labour migration, and irregular migration to foreign countries relating to border management. The references are as follows:

- In reference to the achievements of the implementation of the 8th plan (2016–2020):
 - Outcome 1 on sustained, inclusive economic growth, output 5 entitled “Public/private labour force capacity” acknowledges the challenging situation of Lao migrant workers who returned home amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

- Outcome 4 on priority cross-cutting outputs, output 3 entitled “Promote and develop women, juvenile, and young people” states that youth migrants need particular attention
- In reference to socioeconomic development, the 9th NSEDP highlights the positive impact of young migrant workers as contributors to development to drive rapid growth.
- Under overall directions, outcomes, and outputs of the 9th NSEDP:
 - In reference to outcome 2 on quality of human resources, output 3 entitled “Workforce skills and productivity improved, and job diversification, security and income opportunities increased to meet the demands of socioeconomic development”, one priority activity is the expansion of the employment service network to provide higher quality services and work to increase labour productivity and income, recognizing current challenges including migrant workers from rural to urban areas, and irregular migration to foreign countries.
 - In reference to outcome 6 on public governance and administration, output 3 entitled “Ensure political stability, peace and order, unity, democracy, justice and civilisation within the society”, one priority activity includes the improvement of the management of border areas, ensuring measures for systematic migration, combating transnational crime, and increasing the capacity of border officials.
- With regards to the measures for the implementation of the 9th NSEDP, point 5 entitled “Building resilient infrastructure to enhance connectivity and integration at all levels” refers to the integration of urban planning into the early stages of cities’ and towns’ development, and ensure the creation of modern urban residential areas (including safe and accessible housing) to reduce urban congestion caused by rural-to-urban migration.

National COVID-19 Recovery Plan

Led by the MPI with the support of a multi-stakeholder task force, the plan sets priorities and formulates practical recommendations for the period from 2021 to 2025 (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MPI, 2021). Many references to migrants – migrant workers in particular – and migration governance appear in the document, especially under theme 3 on green growth, resilience and risk management with respect to potential environmental, health and economic shocks. Linkages between return migrants and development are clearly made. The massive and unexpected return of Lao migrants from abroad led to a loss in remittances, an increase in poverty rate, inequalities and unemployment rate, increased risks of exploitation, trafficking and irregular migration, and an increase in xenophobia and maltreatment. The document also mentions the lack of comprehensive migration governance policies and reintegration frameworks and recognizes the need for high-quality data on migrants.

Under theme 3 and its associated six priorities, migrant workers are specific target groups of several actions and recommendations. To mention a few:

- Strengthen system for dispatching Lao workers to work abroad to reduce irregular labour migration, including develop/revise MOUs with labour receiving countries such as Thailand and Malaysia;
- Enhance access to regular and safe migration pathways by migrant-friendly admissions and stay procedures in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and countries of destination;
- Strengthen migration data gathering systems to ensure continuity of data collection, enhancement of analysis and forecasting capacities of governments and other partners for COVID-19 recovery. The areas of data collection and analysis include the impact of the pandemic on migrant protection and assistance, inflow and outflow mapping, and impact of COVID-19 on decent work.

National Population and Development Policy 2019–2030

The National Population and Development Policy seeks to address the balance between population and development. The plan refers extensively to internal and international migration. Among the nine goals serving the vision, goal 5 aims to maximize benefits and minimize negative effects of rural–urban migration and international migration (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MPI and UNFPA, 2020).

The document recognizes the impact of migration on population dynamics, urbanization, urban congestion and rural depopulation. Thus, the establishment of a capacity-building for institutions appears as a priority through the launch of a multisector task force to ensure that issues relating to migration and urbanization are addressed in development plans and strategies.

National Action Plans to Promote Gender Equality and Combat Violence Against Women and Children 2021–2025

On 16 December 2021, four national plans were officially launched with support from the UNFPA and UNICEF and funding from the Korea International Cooperation Agency: the Fourth Five-Year National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2021–2025) (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021c); the Second National Plan of Action on Protection and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2021–2025); the Third National Plan of Action on Mother and Children (2021–2025); and National Women Development Plan (2021–2025). The different documents do not refer explicitly to migrants and mobile populations.

Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021–2025

The Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021–2025 sets four priority policy objectives (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MOES, 2020). Among them, some are related to human mobility and migration:

- The promotion of foreign language teaching in all levels of education (primary, secondary) may imply the immigration of foreign language teachers;
- The development of a framework to prioritize scholarships to students for further studies in foreign countries in line with the country’s socioeconomic development;
- Intermediate outcome 7 on the quality of lecturing staff in higher education institutions includes activities aiming to upgrade teachers and exchange technical lessons with foreign universities;
- Intermediate outcome 10 on external scholarship focuses extensively on the mobility of students. The key activities included are as follows:
 - Organizing meetings to develop legislation on the management of Lao students and provide scholarships for Lao students to study abroad and foreign students to study in the country and disseminate such legislation;
 - Hold meetings to consider and discuss funding for students to study abroad in the field of science and technology.
- Intermediate outcome 11 on the promotion of scientific research includes the development of a database to collect data of Lao students studying abroad and foreign students studying in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

Health Sector Reform Framework 2013–2025

The reform framework prioritizes the deployment of skilled health workers in rural and remote areas and targets a universal health coverage. However, there is no explicit reference to them (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MOH, 2013).

National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction 2021–2030

The National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction aims to strengthen disaster management in the prevention and reduction of disaster impacts, preparedness emergency response, and recovery after a disaster, including resilient reconstruction. The intention of the National Strategy consists of a vision and goals for 2030, 7 key strategies and 12 objectives (Lao People’s Democratic Republic Prime Minister, 2021). References to displaced populations are rare in the strategy:

- Displaced populations are briefly part of an activity relating to the development of standard operating procedures for coordination and preparedness, early

warning, emergency response and early recovery according to the Disaster Management Law and under strategy One.⁴³

- Under the focus on violence against women and girls in disasters, for prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in a disaster, a brief reference to communities displaced or affected is made.

United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

The Cooperation Framework between the United Nations and the Lao People's Democratic Republic determines and reflects the united development system's contributions in the country and guides the entire programme cycle (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and United Nations, 2016 and 2021).

C.1.2. National legal framework

Constitution of 1991

As per Article 34 of the Lao People's Democratic Republic's Constitution of 1991 with Amendments through 2003 (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2003), Lao citizens are persons who hold Lao nationality as provided by the laws. Besides, Article 50 (Amended) states that "foreigners who have contributed good deeds to the country and have a significant standing and contributions to the protections and constructions of the nation have the right to gain citizenship with honor of the Lao People's Democratic Republic" (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2015).

Law on Lao Nationality

The Law on Lao Nationality was promulgated on 17 May 2004. It "defines principles and rules on the acquisition and forfeiture of Lao nationality with the aim of administering and monitoring the citizens effectively according to the laws and regulations" (Article 1) (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2004). Citizenship can be acquired by birth, naturalization, reacquisition of Lao nationality and other bases (Articles 11 to 14). Lao citizens are not authorized to hold several nationalities at the same time (Article 3).

A foreign individual is a "person holding another nationality who enters the Lao People's Democratic Republic [either] temporarily or for a longer period in

⁴³ Strategy 1 is titled "Develop and strengthen the disaster prevention system, disaster risk reduction, disaster preparedness and response" and objective 1 aims to disseminate and implement the Displacement Management Law and establish a DRR system at the central and local levels, coordinate disaster management, and regional and international cooperation.

order to fulfil certain tasks and [who,] after completion of the task[,] may return to his home country” (Article 7). A foreign individual must have stayed in the country legally for at least 10 consecutive years before being permitted to apply for Lao nationality.

Law on Immigration and Foreigner Management of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

The Law (No. 079/PO) defines the conditions for entry, stay, incorporation and exit of Lao and foreigners in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Article 1) (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MOPS, 2015). It comprises 10 parts and 66 articles.

Entry to and departure from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Regulations to enter and exit the Lao People’s Democratic Republic depend on the nationality. Lao citizens shall obtain entry visa⁴⁴ of the country to travel to, use border pass or temporary border pass for border trafficking between the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the border-attached countries in accordance with the bilateral agreement, use passport to enter into and depart from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, declare the entry and departure to the immigration police officers at a checkpoint, and have an officially certified document for those who use diplomatic passports and official passports (Article 10) (ibid.).

All foreign nationals and stateless people who are planning to enter and exit the Lao People’s Democratic Republic shall comply with the bilateral agreement and with the visa application procedures before entering and declare the entry–departure to the border checkpoint immigration police officers.⁴⁵

Visa regulations

There are 13 visa categories of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic described in Articles 19 and 20 and listed in Table 2 (ibid.).

⁴⁴ A visa means the authorization in entering and departing from a country.

⁴⁵ Citizens from nine countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam) can travel to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic without a visa for stays under 30 days.

Table 2. Description of visa categories in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Name	Visa type	Issued to
D-A1	Diplomatic visa	Diplomat of junior secretary ranking and above, consul, resident representatives and deputy resident representatives of the United Nations organizations and other international organizations (including their family members) who have been assigned to take up their duties both in short term and long term in the Lao People's Democratic Republic with a letter of proposal from a relevant organization.
S-A2	Official visa	Administrative and technical staff of embassies, general consulates and consulates, including their family members.
C-B1	Courtesy visa	For example: Staff of cooperation office dealing with bilateral cooperation, staff of the United Nations organization and other international organizations posted at the representative office of such organization in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
T-B3	Tourist visa	Foreigners and stateless people who have the purpose of visiting the Lao People's Democratic Republic for tourism.
NI-B3	Short-term visa	For example: Foreign technical officers and foreigners who have been approved to temporarily come for meetings, trainings or study tours in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
I-B3	Long-term visa	Foreigners and stateless people who have their goodness contribute to national protection and development tasks, including those who provide benefits to the Lao People's Democratic Republic with the long-stay purpose in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
P-B3	Permanent visa	Foreigners and stateless people who are approved to permanently live in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
E-B2	Expert visa	Experts and staff of NGOs who are approved to perform their duties in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and experts and technicians who are employed or business contractors of the Government, private or other international organizations, including their family members.
TR-B3	Transit visa	Foreigners and stateless people whose travel is to transit to other countries.
NI-B2 or I-B2	Business visa	Foreign businesspeople including their family members who come for investment or economic data collection in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
ST-B2	Student visa	Students who come to study, research, collect data or come for a technical internship in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
M-B2	Media visa	Foreign journalists who come to collect news in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
LA-B2	Labour visa	Foreigners and stateless people who come to work as labourers in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, including their family members

Source: Article 19, Lao People's Democratic Republic, MOPS, 2015.

There is also the multiple entry-exit visa that has separate regulations.

Staying in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Foreigners and stateless people may be willing to stay for a specific period in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The stay duration depends on the

visa category or bilateral agreement or government agreement. Extension of stay is permitted, and a request should be made to the relevant immigration police officers. The registration of stay is mandatory and done by the foreigner management policy officers who seal each ninety-day stamp on a page of travel document.

The same policy officers also have the responsibility to register and issue a Stay Permit Card with one to five years validity to foreigners and stateless people who are willing to stay in the country and to individuals who legally register their marriage with Lao citizens.

Migrant workers' legislation

Labour Law (Amended)

Adopted on 24 December 2013, the Labour Law (No. 043/NA) defines the “principles, regulations and measures on administration, monitoring, labour skills development, recruitment, and labour protection in order to enhance the quality and productivity of work in society” (Article 1) (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2013b).

Employers who wish to employ migrant workers for their business operations must apply for quota for migrant workers. Among its rights and duties, the MOLSW studies and approves the import quota, directs the registration of and the work permit issuance to the foreign workers (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MOPS, 2015). It also specified the time for consideration of the import and use of foreign workers (ibid.). The number of migrant workers employed in the business cannot exceed 10 per cent of the total employees in the labour unit for low- and medium-skilled jobs, namely manual jobs, or physical labourers and 20 per cent of professional or high-skilled jobs namely having intellectual expertise to work (Article 25) (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2013b). The Law allows for exceeding the proportions in the case of necessity, against the approval from the Government. In the same article, it is stipulated that foreign workers have the obligation to transfer expertise to Lao workers.

Decree on Placement of Lao Workers to Work Abroad

The Decree on Placement of Lao Workers to Work Abroad (No. 245/GOV) (Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 2020) and revises the Decree on the Dispatching of Lao Labour to Work Abroad (No. 68/GOV) (Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 2002). Aligned with the 2013 Labour Law (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, National Assembly,

2013b), Decree 245 comprises 34 articles. It “defines principles, regulations and measures concerning the management, follow up, and inspection of placement of Lao workers working abroad” (Article 1) (Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 2020).

Decree 245 lists the occupations prohibited for Lao workers to work abroad (Article 19) (*ibid.*), which include the following:

- Occupations that are deemed against the custom, traditions and laws of the country, such as sex worker, prostitution broker, arms trader, masseuse with sex service, selling sex toys, performance of sexual activities, including pornography or nude photographs;
- Jobs that may harm the health and lives of workers, such as working in close contact with chemicals or producing chemical substances or explosive substances. Jobs with loud engine noise above standard noise, jobs on small fishing boats, work where there is a risk of infectious disease, and catching wild or protected animals are also prohibited.

In doing so, Decree 245 eliminates the ban on domestic work,⁴⁶ which previously created the risk that some workers would migrate through informal channels and increase their vulnerability to smugglers and traffickers.

Ministerial Agreement on the Management of Employment Service Enterprises

Ministerial Agreement No. 1050/MOLSW replaces Ministerial Agreement No. 043 and comprises 53 articles (Lao People’s Democratic Republic, MOLSW, 2022). It defines “principles, regulations, and measures on the management of employment service enterprise operations to ensure the unity equality, uniformity, and effectiveness across the country in accordance with the laws and regulations” (Article 1) (*ibid.*). Employment service enterprises refer to legal entities, which have approval to legally operate an employment business service in accordance with relevant laws and regulations in the country (Article 3) (*ibid.*).

Two types of service are distinguished as follows:

- Domestic employment service, which refers to the provision of consultation and advice on employment information and legislation and the creation of favourable conditions for workers to find jobs and for employers to recruit workers within the country by using the network of State employment services and employment service enterprises;

⁴⁶ The migration of Lao women abroad for domestic work, especially in Thailand, occurs outside formal channels. Decree 245 should bring legal changes.

- Overseas employment service, which refers to the dispatch of Lao workers for work, training and on-the-job training. The purpose is for Lao workers to learn, apply lessons learned, upgrade their technical capability, develop their skills, and develop a good work ethic for industrial work in countries where the Lao People's Democratic Republic has signed an MOU on employment.

Family Registration Law

Adopted on 30 December 1991, the Law (No. 03/PSA) has the function to define regulations relating to the registration of family books, births, disappearances, deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, acknowledgements of paternity, changes in first name or surname, changes in residence, and the building or dismantling of homes, in order to facilitate State agencies in their administration of citizens and ensure security and public order (Article 1) (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 1992). Resident aliens, foreign individuals and apatrides who are in the country must adhere to the Law.

Penal Code

The Penal Code (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2017) includes two articles that refer to migration: Article 128 focuses on the mobilization of unlawful migration or immigration; and Article 215 focuses on human trafficking. Both articles define the provisions concerning these crimes and offenses.

Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law

The law defines the “principles, rules and measures regarding the administration, monitoring, supervision, inspection of anti-trafficking in persons activities” (Article 1) (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2015) and prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons. Three categories of victims are identified in Article 38: (a) Lao citizens, aliens, stateless persons and foreigners who live in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and become victims of the trafficking in persons in the Lao People's Democratic Republic; (b) those who become victims in a foreign country; and (c) foreigners living in a foreign country who become victims of trafficking in persons in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Resettlement and Vocation Law

The Resettlement and Vocation Law regulates the planned resettlement and reallocation of vocations by the Government. There are two categories of resettlement: specific resettlement for people affected by development projects, and general resettlement for people in underdeveloped areas including high-risk living areas (Article 11). High-risk living areas are areas where intense natural hazards occur, although the Law does not address emergency displacements (Article 14).

The resettlement areas consist of areas with difficult access and lacking conditions for development, high-risk living areas, special areas and areas affected by development projects. The resettlement process includes various steps, such as compensation for damages caused by resettlement, displacement or relocation, and livelihood rehabilitation during transition period (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2018).⁴⁷

Law on Foreign Exchange Management

The Law on Foreign Exchange Management (No. 55/NA) was adopted on 22 December 2014 (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2014a).⁴⁸ It “defines the principles, regulations and measures regarding to the effectiveness and accuracy of activities, management, and monitoring of foreign exchange businesses and transactions to ensure the stability of the Lao kip, to promote the circulation of domestic goods and currency, and to expand economic cooperation with foreign nations, as well as to contribute to the national socioeconomic development of the country” (Article 1) (ibid.).

The terms *remit* or *remittances* are not explicitly mentioned, but Article 13 stipulates that “residents and non-residents of the country are able to transfer an unlimited amount of foreign exchange to the Lao PDR” (ibid.).

Asylum-seekers and refugees' legislation

To date, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees (United Nations, 1951), and there is no legal refugee framework for identifying international protection needs or refugee protection. Thus, refugees fall under national immigration laws. This means that if individuals have entered illegally or they have overstayed their visas, they may be at immediate risk of arrest, detention and/or deportation regardless of refugee status in reference to the Decree on the Penalties and Other Measures Application towards the Violator of Laws and Regulations about the Entry and Exit and Foreigner Management in the country (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021d). Besides, UNHCR does not have presence in the country, which renders challenging to monitor the national protection environment, intervene with authorities, or engage in easing the exit clearance/ departure process. Additionally, bilateral relationships between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and other neighbouring countries can outweigh international obligations.

⁴⁷ As per Article 3, *displacement* means to orderly and properly reallocate living place for persons in former village or location. *Relocation* means the change of initial residence area of families and villages to a new residence area (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2018).

⁴⁸ The Bank of the Lao People's Democratic Republic issued decision No. 449/BOL on 14 June 2022 to manage currency exchange services provided by commercial banks and currency exchange bureaus operating in the country.

Health Care Law

The Law on Health Care was adopted in 2014 (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2014b). The 2014 Law determines the principles, regulations and different measures relating to the organization, activities, management and control of health care activities (Article 1) (ibid.). All citizens, including migrants, living in the country without discrimination can have access to health-care providers.

Law on Social Security

The Law (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2013a) defines the principles, rules and provisions for the organization, implementation, management, monitoring and inspection of social security affairs. It does not mention explicitly migrants and mobile populations.

C.2. Institutional framework

C.2.1. Government entities dealing with migration

Ministry of Planning and Investment

The MPI is responsible for promoting the improvement of business and investment environment to attract quality investment, managing public investment more effectively, mobilizing and managing the use of official development assistance for both bilateral and multilateral frameworks, researching and developing various economic and development measures, and producing statistical services. Through the DRI, it produces migration-relevant research.

Lao Statistics Bureau

The LSB is a government secretariat-equivalent agency operating under the MPI. It is the focal point for coordination regarding all statistics-related issues within the national statistics system vertically and horizontally at central and local levels.

It is also the focal point for the collection, formulation and provision of official statistics, as well as the establishment of a statistics database in line with the 2017 Law on Statistics (Lao People's Democratic Republic, National Assembly, 2017). It collects and analyses migration-relevant data from different data sources, such as the PHC and LFS.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MOFA comprises 17 departments, including the Consular Department and the Lao Overseas Affairs Department. The rights and duties of MOFA are especially described in Article 61 of the 2014 Immigration Law including the following:

- Issue, cancel or revoke the diplomatic passports, official passports, ordinary passports and other substitutes of travel documents of Lao citizens;
- Issue or cancel exit visas of foreigners and stateless people whose passports are lost, stolen or damaged after receiving the new replacements;
- Issue or cancel multiple entry-exit visas of foreigners and stateless people;
- Study, comment on the request for marriage of Lao citizens to marry foreigners and stateless people;
- Amend or cancel all entry-exit visa categories at the Lao People's Democratic Republic embassies, general consulates, consulates in foreign countries, and at visa-on-arrival units of international border checkpoints that have issued to foreigners and stateless people.

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

The rights and duties of the MOLSW are described in different laws. For instance, Article 62 of the 2014 Immigration Law, comprises 10 points, including the following:

- Direct the management, inspection and bookkeeping of foreign workers who work in the country;
- Study and approve the import quota, direct the registration of and the work permit issuance to foreign workers;
- Manage the Lao workers who work abroad and foreign workers who work in the country, by coordinating and cooperating with other sectors.

Ministry of Public Security

MOPS is the ministry of interior. Article 60 of the Immigration Law (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MOPS, 2015) describes the rights and duties of MOPS. It comprises 13 points including the following:

- Research, create, propagate and disseminate strategic plans, policies, law on immigration and foreigner management of the country;
- Direct the registration, manage statistics, monitor, inspect and solve the movement issues of aliens, foreigners and stateless people;

- Direct, guide, command, manage, monitor and inspect police officers involved in migration management;
- Research, comment on the request for marriage of Lao citizens to marry aliens, foreigners and stateless people.

Besides, MOPS is the coordinating agency on anti-trafficking in persons. It coordinates the activities of the Anti-human Trafficking Department, the National Committee on Anti-human Trafficking and other relevant agencies from central to local levels.

Bank of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

The Bank of the Lao People's Democratic Republic oversees currency issues, banking regulation and supervision, monetary policy and the management of international reserves. It especially works on the collection of remittances data.

Ministry of Home Affairs

The Department of Civil Management in MOHA oversees the compilation and analysis of the data on births, marriage, divorce, deaths, changes in names and surnames, changes in nationality and movements. Data collected can refer to marriage or divorce with foreign citizens and internal mobility. MOPS is responsible for the data collection and sends the aggregated numbers to the Department of Civil Management.

Ministry of Education and Sport

MOES collects information on foreign students and on Lao students who are abroad for study purposes.

Ministry of Health

The MOH formulates health policies and provides strategic direction for health delivery services to the population, including mobile populations and migrants.

Ministry of Public Works and Transport

The Ministry of Public Works and Transport is primarily responsible for expansion and maintenance of the transport infrastructure in the country.

C.2.2. External actors engaged in migration-related work

International Organization for Migration

The Lao People's Democratic Republic joined IOM as its 171st Member State in June 2018. IOM opened an office in Vientiane in 2002 with technical

support from the IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok. The Organization closely works with the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and relevant counterparts, including MOFA, MOLSW, MOPS, MPI, MOH and LWU.

In February 2022, IOM launched its 2022–2026 Country Strategy, which is the first-ever strategic framework under the cooperation agreement that was signed between the Organization and the Government in September 2021 (IOM, 2022).

International Labour Organization

The Lao People's Democratic Republic joined ILO in January 1964. Building on the tripartite structure, the organization works closely with the MOLSW, the Lao Federation of Trade Unions and the Lao National Chamber of Commerce to jointly shape policies and programmes.

On 16 June 2022, a new Decent Work Country Programme was officially launched (ILO and Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2022). The Decent Work Country Programme aims to guide cooperation between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and ILO for 2022–2025 and focuses on various areas, including building an inclusive social protection system, migrant worker rights, employment promotion for rural women and men, as well as skills development.

Finally, the ILO is the focal point to the United Nations for labour statistics and the custodian of 14 decent work indicators in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including labour migration indicators under Targets 8.8 and 10.7 (United Nations, 2015a).

World Bank

The World Bank Group signed Country Partnership Frameworks with the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to support the government's NSEDP. For instance, the framework (2017–2021) supported the Government's 8th NSEDP (2016–2020) and the current one (2022–2026) supports the Government's 9th NSEDP.

C.2.3. Lao mass organizations

Lao Women's Union

The LWU is one of the main mass organizations. The LWU is mainly involved in community-level socioeconomic development work with projects generally aiming at reducing poverty and increasing women's knowledge and skills, including migrants and victims of human trafficking.

Lao Front for National Construction

The Lao Front for National Construction's role is to enhance unit and concord among all Lao ethnic people, including Lao overseas, to propagate, educate, mobilize and foster the rights of all ethnic people in implementing directives, guidelines, constitution, laws and national socioeconomic plan. It is also responsible for coordinating mass organizations and other sociopolitical groups and for religious affairs.

Lao Federation of Trade Unions

The Lao Federation of Trade Unions is the sole national workers' organization and is directly linked to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The role of the Union is to represent workers' rights and benefits as well as education whatever their migratory status.

Lao Youth Union

The Lao Youth Union oversees mobilizing young people to contribute to the national development. Established in 1955, it educates, raises awareness and understanding, encourages unity and solidarity among the multi-ethnic youth in the country. It focuses on the fields of information, media, entertainment, arts and music.

C.2.4. Civil society

The civil society landscape in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is not well known. Historically, three international NGOs were allowed to operate in the country, namely the American Friends Service Committee, the Mennonite Central Committee and Save the Children UK. With the right of association (Article 44) in the Lao People's Democratic Republic's Constitution of 1991 with Amendments through 2003 (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2003), the civil society expanded and includes now more organizations whose activities relates to mobile populations and migrants.

C.2.5. Research institutes and universities

To date, there is no independent national academic research institute dedicated to international migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

C.3. Regional and international frameworks

C.3.1. Regional framework

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

At the regional level, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a member of ASEAN. Joined on 23 July 1997, it comprises nine other countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam) (ASEAN, n.d.).⁴⁹

A committee was set up to implement the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. At the first meeting in September 2008, the four areas of cooperation were identified:

- Step up protection and protection of the rights of migrant workers against exploitation and mistreatment;
- Strengthen protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers by enhancing labour migration governance in ASEAN countries;
- Regional cooperation to fight human trafficking in ASEAN;
- Development of an ASEAN instrument on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers.

The 2007 ASEAN Declaration also states that ASEAN member States will “facilitate data-sharing on matters related to migrant workers, for the purpose of enhancing policies and programmes concerning migrant workers in both sending and receiving states” (Article 18) (ASEAN, 2007).

Further, the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers stipulates that ASEAN member States will “facilitate information sharing through development or strengthening of their respective database and information systems on matters relating to migrant workers, for the purpose of enhancing policies and programmes concerning migrant workers in both sending and receiving States” (Article 53) (ASEAN, 2017).

⁴⁹ Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) of 1976.

Besides, an ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour serves as an open platform for review, discussion and exchange of best practices and ideas between governments, workers and employers' organizations, and civil society stakeholders on key issues facing migrant workers in South-East Asia. It is carried out in a tripartite nature with involvement of civil society organizations, ILO, IOM, UN-Women and the ASEAN Secretariat each year.

TRIANGLE project in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Launched in 2011, TRIANGLE in ASEAN is part of the ILO's worldwide effort to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of labour migration for all those involved. It delivers technical assistance with the overall goal of maximizing the contribution of labour migration to an equitable, inclusive and stable growth in ASEAN. The project is supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Australia and Global Affairs Canada. The main objectives are threefold: protection, development and mobility.

Through TRIANGLE in ASEAN, the collection of International Labour Migration Statistics in ASEAN in 2013 and has since published reports annually (ILO, 2022). As of 2022, it comprises 21 tables regarding the presence and movements of international migrants and international migrant workers.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Tourism Professionals

The ASEAN arrangement is designed to enable the mobility of employment for skilled tourism labour within each member State and to recognize the skills and qualifications of working tourism professionals from different ASEAN countries (ASEAN, 2018). This means that qualified tourism professionals can apply for jobs in other ASEAN member countries, and tourism companies can search for qualified personnel from the community to meet their staffing needs.

Recognition of skills and labour mobility in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is the mechanism that benchmarks national qualification frameworks into mutually comparable regional standards. Eight levels of competencies were designed under the framework, and these competencies have been agreed among all ASEAN member States. The mechanism is voluntary and consists of two labour mobility tools: the Mutual Recognition Arrangements, which facilitate the mobility of skilled professionals in ASEAN; and Mutual Recognition of Skills, which focuses on technical and vocational skills.

Greater Mekong Subregion

The country is a member of the GMS, which includes six member States (Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam). Established in 1992 with the assistance of the ADB, the economic cooperation aims to enhance economic relations by supporting the implementation of subregional projects in various areas, such as urban development, agriculture, health and human resource development.

The Regional Dialogue on Labour Migration in the GMS, jointly convened by IOM and ADB (GMS, 2020) aims to strengthen cooperation through enhanced labour migration management and highlight the multidimensional links between migration and development.

Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in the Greater Mekong Subregion

Adopted in October 2010, the MOU (INT2004/IA/93359) represents the governments' recognition that trafficking in persons impacts the human security and the human rights of the individual, and that in many ways trafficking is a direct result of a lack of human security and must be addressed at different levels (GMS, 2004).

Bilateral agreements for sending Lao workers abroad

As of 2022, three bilateral agreements on labour were signed. A fourth one was under discussion with Malaysia at the time of this research.

- (a) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Labour Cooperation between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Government of Thailand.

The two countries signed a first MOU⁵⁰ on 18 October 2002 (Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Government of Thailand, 2002) and revised it in 2016.

The 2002 MOU gives a formal labour migration process between the two countries with the objective to dissuade migrants from utilizing irregular migrant schemes. The MOU process is the only official channel for Lao migrant workers in elementary employment to enter Thailand.⁵¹ With 24 articles, the MOU specifies that each worker will receive a two-year work permit. The total term of permit

⁵⁰ An MOU is an agreement between two parties in the form of a legal document. It is not fully binding as it does not have any legal enforceability but shows that two parties have agreed to cooperate to achieve an objective.

⁵¹ Thailand signed bilateral agreements on border employment with Myanmar and Cambodia but not with the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

shall not exceed four years. Workers who have completed the terms of their work permit can reapply for work again after three years have passed between the date of the expiration of the first term and the date of the reapplication (Article 9) (ibid.). It also stipulates those workers will contribute 15 per cent of their salary to the deportation fund set up by the host country (Article 11) (ibid.) and those workers will receive wage and benefits at the same rate to national workers based on the principles of non-discrimination and equality based on gender, ethnic identity and religious identity (Article 18) (ibid.).

In 2016, Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic signed a new MOU that broadens previous agreement on labour migration to include cooperation on social security and skills development. The MOU is also attached by an implementation agreement signed in 2017.

(b) Service Commitment Agreement between the Republic of Korea and the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

As of 2022, the Republic of Korea and the Lao People's Democratic Republic put in place two programmes to send and receive Lao workers to the Republic of Korea, namely a seasonal worker programme and an EPS programme.

Led by the Ministry of Justice in the Republic of Korea and the Department of Skills Development and Employment of the MOLSW in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the seasonal worker programme is decentralized as it allows Lao district governors and Korean mayors to make agreements in promoting mutual understanding and friendship and providing seasonal workers to the Republic of Korea. The duration of the temporary programme is 90 days to 5 months in agriculture sectors, such as farming and fishing.

For instance, an MOU on seasonal worker programme was signed on 21 April 2022 between Changnyeong-Gun, South Gyeongsang province of the Republic of Korea and the Department of Skills Development and Employment of the MOLSW. The MOU comprises six articles on the implementation of the MOU, the roles and responsibilities of both parties, and the implementation of provisions.

The EPS has been the object of a specific MOU signed on 29 March 2019 between the MOLSW of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Ministry of Employment and Labour of the Republic of Korea (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MOLSW, 2019). Comprising 17 paragraphs, the MOU aims to sustain a viable framework for cooperation between the two parties and enhance transparency to efficiently process sending Lao workers to the Republic of Korea

by setting out the provisions concerning sending and receiving of the workers under the EPS.

(c) Memorandum of cooperation between Japan and the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

As of 2022, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Japan signed set up two different programmes, namely the technical intern training programme and the specified skilled worker programme by signing two memoranda of cooperation.

On 28 November 2017 and 9 December 2017, the two countries signed a memorandum of cooperation on the technical intern training programme (Lao People's Democratic Republic MOLSW, and Japan Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2017). The purpose of the memorandum is to transfer technical skills from Japan to the Lao People's Democratic Republic appropriately and smoothly through the programme by setting out the commitments between both parties and accept technical intern training and thus to promote international cooperation. Currently, there are five to six active recruitment agencies in the Lao People's Democratic Republic that select and send technical intern trainees, provide support to find occupations upon return and cooperate on follow-up surveys with Japanese authorities concerning the utilization of acquired technical skills after the technical intern trainees return to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

On 28 July 2022, the two countries signed a second memorandum of cooperation that aims to establish a basic framework for information partnership to ensure smooth and proper sending and accepting of specified skilled workers (Lao People's Democratic Republic, MOLSW, and Japan Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, and the National Police Agency, 2022). It also aims to resolve the problems of sending and accepting specified skilled workers and those residing in Japan, as well as enhance the mutual benefits of both countries through cooperation for proper operation of the system.

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

The Sendai Framework was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 (United Nations, 2015b). It focuses on the adoption of measures, which address the three dimensions of disaster risk, namely exposure to hazards, vulnerability and capacity, and hazard's characteristics to prevent the creation of new risk, reduce existing risk and increase resilience.

Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking

On anti-human trafficking issues, the country is involved in several initiatives. It is a member of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.⁵² The country is also a member of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT), which is a high-level policy dialogue in the GMS. COMMIT process includes specific areas of discussion, such as combating human trafficking, combating migrant smuggling and combating forced labour and (trans)national referral mechanisms for trafficked persons. It adopts a comprehensive approach as it combines efforts on prevention of trafficking, protection of victims and their repatriation and reintegration, and prosecution of the criminals.

Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance Consortium

The Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance (MBDS) Consortium⁵³ is a subregional cooperation spearheaded by health ministries from member countries Cambodia, China (Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces), the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam.

MBDS established 16 functioning cross-border sites at major crossings between the 6 countries. The purpose of these sites is to facilitate cross-border teams of health, customs and immigration to undertake joint outbreak investigation and response.

C.3.2. International frameworks

International Labour Organization conventions and regulations

The Lao People's Democratic Republic joined the ILO in January 1964 as its 120th member State. To date, the country has ratified 12 ILO conventions, which are legally binding international treaties: 7 of 10 fundamental conventions, 1 of 4 governance conventions, and 4 of 176 technical conventions (Table 3).

Table 3. International Labour Organization conventions ratified by the Lao People's Democratic Republic

#	Convention and year	Year of ratification	Status
Fundamental (7 out of 10)			
C029	Forced Labour Convention, 1930	1964	In force
C100	Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951	2008	In force

⁵² See www.baliprocess.net/.

⁵³ See www.mbdnet.org/ and www.cordsnetwork.org/networks/mbds/.

#	Convention and year	Year of ratification	Status
C111	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958	2008	In force
C138	Minimum Age Convention, 1978	2005	In force
C155	Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981	2022	Not in force (July 2023)
C182	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999	2005	In force
C187	Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006	2022	Not in force (July 2023)
Governance (1 out of 4)			
C144	Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976	2010	In force
Technical (4 out of 176)			
C004	Night Work (Women) Convention, 1919	1964	Not in force (abrogated in 2017)
C006	Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention, 1919	1964	In force
C013	White Lead (Painting) Convention, 1921	1964	In force
C171	Night Work Convention, 1990	2014	In force

Source: ILO, n.d.

Among specific international labour standards on agriculture, the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (C155) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (C187) were ratified by the country on 4 July 2022 and will enter into force on 4 July 2023. The conventions provide for the adoption of a coherent national occupational safety and health policy, as well as action to be taken by governments and within enterprises to promote occupational safety and health to improve working conditions.⁵⁴

There are other technical conventions that set international labour standards important to labour migration and that the country has not ratified yet:

- Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention, 1925 (C019);
- Migration for Employment Convention (Revised) 1949 (C097), which provides a series of measures that member States should take to safeguard the rights of migrant workers;
- Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (C118);

⁵⁴ Occupational safety and health is the discipline dealing with the prevention of work-related injuries and diseases, as well as the protection and promotion of the health of workers.

- Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (C143), which concerns migrations in abusive conditions and the promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment of migrant workers;
- Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (C181);
- Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention, also known as Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (C189).

Besides, a series of ILO recommendations related to migrant workers and serve as non-binding guidelines have not been adopted yet by the country (Table 4).

Table 4. List of International Labour Organization migrant-relevant recommendations

#	Recommendation	Year
R019	Migration Statistics Recommendation	1922
R026	Migration (Protection of Females at Sea) Recommendation	1926
R061	Migration for Employment Recommendation	1939
R062	Migration for Employment (Co-operation between States) Recommendation	1939
R086	Migration for Employment Recommendation (Revised)	1949
R100	Protection of Migrant Workers (Underdeveloped Countries) Recommendation	1955
R151	Migrant Workers Recommendation	1975

Source: Author, based on ILO website.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a milestone in the document in the history of human rights (United Nations, 1948). It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. It declares that human rights are to be enjoyed by all people, no matter who they are or where they live. The Lao People's Democratic Republic ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ensures the equal right of men and women – including migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees – to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights including the rights to education, fair and just conditions of work, an adequate standard of living, the highest attainable standard of health, and social security (United Nations, 1966a). The Lao People's Democratic Republic signed the Covenant on 7 December 2000 and ratified it on 13 February 2007.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is a multilateral treaty that commits States parties to respect the civil and political rights of individuals, including the right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. It is part of the International Bill of Human Rights (United Nations, 1966b). The treaty includes explicit references to migration in Articles 9 and 10 on the liberty and security of the person. The Lao People's Democratic Republic signed the Covenant on 7 December 2000 and ratified it on 25 December 2009.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination essentially resolves “to adopt all necessary measures for speedily eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations, and to prevent and combat racist doctrines and practices” (United Nations, 1965). The Lao People's Democratic Republic accessed the Convention on 22 February 1974.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Governments who commit to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are legally bound to eliminate discrimination against women, including women migrant workers. The Convention comprehensively defines discrimination against women as including sexual and gender-based violence against women, and other human rights violations (United Nations, 1979). The Lao People's Democratic Republic signed the Convention in July 1980 and ratified it in August 1981.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The text stipulates that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee – whether unaccompanied or accompanied by the parents or by any other person – should receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. It also refers to reunification efforts with the family (United Nations, 1989). The Lao People's Democratic Republic ratified the Convention on 8 May 1991. Besides, the country accessed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (United Nations, 2000b) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on 20 September 2006 (United Nations, 2000c).

Association of Southeast Asian Nations Convention Against Trafficking in Person

The country signed the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, which was ratified by the Lao National Assembly in April 2017 (ASEAN, 2015). It acknowledges the need for more coordinated enforcement and collaborative action across the region to better prevent trafficking and protect and assist victims.

United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is the main international instrument in the fight against transnational organized crime (UNODC, 2000).⁵⁵ States that ratified the Convention commit themselves to taking a series of measures against transnational organized crime, including the creation of domestic criminal offences, adoption of new and sweeping frameworks for extradition, mutual legal assistance and law enforcement cooperation and the promotion of training and technical assistance for building or upgrading the necessary capacity of national authorities. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has accessed the Protocol on 26 September 2003 and made the following reservation (United Nations, 2000d):

In accordance with paragraph 3, Article 35 of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, the Lao People's Democratic Republic does not consider itself bound by paragraph 2, Article 35 of the present Convention. The Lao People's Democratic Republic declares that to refer a dispute relating to interpretation and application of the present Convention to arbitration or the International Court of Justice, the agreement of all parties concerned in the dispute is necessary.

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children

The country accessed⁵⁶ the Protocol, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime on 26 September 2003 (United Nations, 2000a). The Protocol is the first globally legally binding instrument with an agreed definition of trafficking in persons, which intends to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and facilitate international cooperation against it. An additional

⁵⁵ The Convention is supplemented by three protocols that target specific areas and manifestations of organized crime: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air; and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition.

⁵⁶ An *accession* is the act whereby a State accepts the offer or the opportunity to become a party to a treaty already negotiated and signed by other States. It has the same legal effect as ratification.

objective of the Protocol is to protect and assist the victims of trafficking in persons with full respect for their human rights. A reservation⁵⁷ was made by the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic upon acceptance as follows (ibid.):

[T]he Lao People's Democratic Republic does not consider itself bound by paragraph 2, Article 15 of the present Protocol. The Lao People's Democratic Republic declares that to refer a dispute relating to interpretation and application of the present Protocol to arbitration or [the] International Court of Justice, the agreement of all parties concerned in the dispute is necessary.

Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air

The Protocol supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (United Nations, 2000d). It aims at preventing and combating the smuggling of migrants and promoting cooperation among States Parties, while protecting the rights of smuggled migrants and preventing the worst forms of their exploitation that often characterize the smuggling process. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has acceded the Protocol on 26 September 2003 and made the following reservation (United Nations, 2000e):

In accordance with paragraph 3, Article 20 of the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, the Lao People's Democratic Republic does not consider itself bound by paragraph 2, Article 20 of the present Protocol. The Lao People's Democratic Republic declares that to refer a dispute relating to interpretation and application of the present Protocol to arbitration or the International Court of Justice, the agreement of all parties concerned in the dispute is necessary.

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The treaty aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The Lao People's Democratic Republic signed it on 21 September 2012 and made the following reservation: "The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic does not recognize the competence of the Committee against Torture under Article 20" (United Nations, 1984).

⁵⁷ A *reservation* is a declaration made by a State by which it purports to exclude or alter the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their application to that State. A *declaration* enables a State to accept a multilateral treaty as a whole by giving it the possibility not to apply certain provisions with which it does not want to comply.

There are three instruments that the Lao People's Democratic Republic has not ratified yet:

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

The Convention sets minimum standards for migrant workers and members of their families, with an attention to the elimination of exploitation of workers in the migration process (United Nations, 1990). It aims to guarantee dignity and equality considering the principles embodied in the basic instruments of the United Nations concerning human rights, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the principles and standards set in the framework of the ILO. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has not ratified the Convention yet.

1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and 1954 Statelessness Convention

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has not ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (United Nations, 1951 and 1967). They define the term *refugee* and outline the rights of refugees, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has not signed the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (United Nations, 1954) nor the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (United Nations, 1961).

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is the first universally legally binding human rights instrument on enforced disappearance intending to prevent the said act. *Enforced disappearance* is the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State. As of April 2023, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has not ratified the Convention yet.

C.3.3. International cooperation

Cooperation with the United Nations

The Lao People's Democratic Republic became a member of the United Nations on 14 December 1955. A total of 23 United Nations organizations are represented in the country and the United Nations Country Team consists of 16 agencies. All are resident agencies except ILO, United Nations Industrial Development Organization and IOM. The United Nations Country Team in the country works closely with the World Bank, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, ADB and IMF. The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which is aligned with the 2021–2025 9th NSEDP, represents the contributions to sustainable development of 25 agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations Development System.

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

The Lao People's Democratic Republic welcomed the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration (United Nations, 2018). The Global Compact for Migration is a non-legally binding, cooperative and global framework with the comprehensive objectives for fostering international cooperation in migration and mitigating the adverse drivers and structural factors that hinder people from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods in their countries of origin.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The country ratified the Paris Agreement on 7 September 2016 and the Kyoto Protocol on 6 February 2003 as a Non-Annex I Party to the Convention. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change sets out the basic legal framework and principles for international climate change cooperation with the aim of stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases.

PART D: KEY FINDINGS, POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

D.1. Main findings on current migration trends

The Migration Profile exercise gave the opportunity to examine the current migration patterns and trends in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. As a landlocked country bordered by Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, the country is a net emigration country. The number of emigrants has exceeded the number of immigrants since 1975 and was equal to -1.4 per cent for the period 2015–2020.

Migration is considered by the Lao population as an opportunity to increase livelihoods and improve living standards. Given the lack of employment and education opportunities in the country, Lao people often engage in international migration and rural–urban internal mobility.

Cross-border emigration is mostly regional. The main corridor is from the Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand. Most movements are labour-related and take different forms, from seasonal to permanent. As of 2020, approximately 1.296 million Lao people lived abroad (56% were female).

Immigration is small in scale and mostly driven by employment and business opportunities, especially in the SEZs. As of 2020, there were 48,731 migrants living in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Again, more than 99 per cent of them come from a neighbouring country (China, Myanmar and Viet Nam).

The patterns and trends of internal migration are closely related to education and employment opportunities and is mostly rural–urban. The PHC data distinguishes between different types of internal mobility, which are lifetime migration, current migration and return migration. Challenges in monitoring internal migration make data available incomplete but still give an indication to the stakeholders.

Information on return migration started to be of interest to policymakers and other stakeholders starting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, amidst the pandemic, the data collection remained scattered, which made the estimation of the number of Lao returnees hazardous.

Data on climate and involuntary migration tend to lack in the country.

D.2. Recommendations on how to improve migration statistics

D.2.1. Improve migration data governance

Short-term recommendations (within a year)

Develop comprehensive and common knowledge on migration data governance: Maintaining capacity development training and workshops for the development of a comprehensive and common knowledge on migration (data) governance, the collection, management and analysis of migration data is also necessary. Given the high turnover rate in some departments, user manuals and online recorded training modules with practical activities should be prioritized.

Establish a network of core institutions dealing with migration-related data: The ITWG could continue its function after the completion of the Migration Profile project with the active engagement of LSB. The core objectives of the ITWG during the project were to strengthen coordination and provide technical inputs to the development of the Migration Profile and ensure ownership and buy-in of the relevant stakeholders. After the project completion, the ITWG could be engaged in the development and consultation of policy discussions on migration issues, particularly those identified by project findings and recommendations.

Establish a systematic review of the national migration data system: The review consists of identifying available migration-relevant data sources at the country level and serves as a basis for assessing thematic data gaps at the country level and subsequently the regional level. The Regional Data Hub at the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific can support the process.

Medium-term recommendations (two to three years)

Develop a migration-relevant data strategy: The development of a migration strategy by the Government could help to implement a data-driven decision-making in the field of migration. It could be linked to the NSEDP and encompass a 5- or 10-year vision for how the government will accelerate the use of migration-relevant data to deliver on mission. The strategy could also serve the development of data disaggregated by migratory status in reference to the SDGs and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015a). By framing the action of the government on data, the strategy would ensure that stakeholders can tackle all migration and migrants' issues, and to guarantee informed decisions.

Foster the implementation of an initiative relating to the integration of migration data: The development of an integrated statistical database related to migration, such as a national integrated migration data portal under the leadership of the LSB, should be fostered. A move to the cloud could also be considered.

D.2.2. Improve migration data collection, management and processing

Short-term recommendations (within a year)

Standardize data collection methods and definitions: Data collection methods such as questionnaire, FGDs and KIs should be standardized, as well as the definitions used to eliminate inconsistencies over time. Standards for data format could be defined. Data could be converted to a common format to enable users to process and analyse it.

Provide metadata: The description of data collected, or statistics produced is not systematically accompanied by the provision of metadata. Metadata management enables knowledge of what data exists and its potential value. A first step could be to develop the standards used to describe data sets disseminated via the LSB's website, both in terms of content and quality. Metadata should include a structural dimension on titles, short description, variable names, data format, time dimensions and a reference dimension that describe statistical concepts and methodologies used for the collection and generation of data and provide information on data quality. The second step could be to develop a technical platform for storing and disseminating metadata.

Medium-term recommendations (two to three years)

Develop an online platform for migration data collection and information-sharing. The visualization of data and indicators could be supported by the launch of interactive dashboards and infographics incorporated into the LSB website. These visuals allow decision makers to review information through visuals, tables and metrics on a single page.

Continue to follow international guidelines, especially for administrative data and mainstream migration into official data: Great efforts have been produced to follow international guidelines, especially for the PHC and sample surveys such as the LFS. Migration-related questions on the duration of residence, place of the previous residence, year of the first arrival in the country, as well as on the parents' country of birth and legal status could be added to the PHC. Besides, attention should be drawn to the incorporation of international guidelines into administrative data.

Increase migration data collection and availability and disaggregation by migratory status: Attention has been mostly driven to labour migration to Thailand resulting in a lack of relevant data and/or statistics in other areas, such as labour migration, environmental migration, irregular migration, migrant integration, forced migration and migration impact on health or the labour market. Available data are not systematically disaggregated by migratory status, and those that are related to migration are scarce and mostly cross-sectional. Thus, there is a need to produce data that can be broken down by migratory status and serve as SDG indicators. There is also a need to collect qualitative data using data collection tools, such as KIIs, in-depth interviews and FGDs as well as panel data using tools that would allow for comparison over time and follow-up with respondents or participants.

Foster the use and regular training of statisticians and staff at all levels: Statisticians help optimize the data collection, data management, data transfer and data analysis. They can also understand the data set, identify inconsistencies and other methodological issues associated especially with administrative data. Training with the support of user manuals could be extended to all staff members working on data especially at the local level.

Long-term recommendations (four years and more)

Foster the replacement of the use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets with specialized databases: Using Excel for data management has some major drawbacks. For instance, Excel is subject to human errors, prevents quick decision-making, has inadequate scalability and lacks encryption features for safeguarding sensitive data such as personally identifiable information.

Evaluate the opportunities and challenges for using innovative data sources in migration: Innovative data sources refer to digital trace data such as mobile phone call detail records and air passenger data. The LSB could evaluate the opportunities offered by such data sources to collect timely information on migration and assess the challenges in terms of data privacy and ethics that can be explored.

D.2.3. Improve data dissemination for public use and informed policies

Short-term recommendations (within a year)

Establish a list of 5 to 10 aggregated data indicators that are needed at the national level to inform decision-making: The development of core indicators will help to produce policy-oriented recommendations and monitor

and evaluate the policy impacts. Some core indicators could be stock figures on the number of foreign-born and migrants in the country, applications on work permits, number of foreign-born and foreigners entering the country, number of foreigners leaving the country, number of nationals leaving the country and number of nationals returning.

Medium-term recommendations (two to three years)

Foster migration-relevant data dissemination for public use and academic research: Data collected are barely shared with the public and academia. The dissemination should be accompanied by a discussion on data protection, including data privacy and data ownership. The LSB website and online dissemination databases could be used. Besides, monitoring the number of data or publications downloaded (data extractions) from the website could be used as an indicator of the relevance of the migration-relevant data to the LSB's users.

Foster academic research on migration-related topics: Cooperation with research institutes and academia is needed. To date, there are no independent entities working on migration in the country so regional or international collaboration could be fostered, especially with the DRI. The DRI could set up a working group or unit to develop research on migration-related issues and produce reports.

D.3. Recommendations on migration governance framework

Medium-term recommendations (two to three years)

Establish a national coordination structure for migration governance at all relevant levels: There is a need to adapt existing the Lao migration governance mechanism by expanding horizontal coherence across ministries and with non-government actors, and vertical coherence across government levels (national, subnational and provincial). A national coordination structure for migration governance at all relevant levels could be established. The mechanism could take one of the following forms:

- An ad hoc mechanism created for that purpose, established by an individual ministry or by an interministerial committee;
- A ministerial mechanism based within a single government ministry, and retains its institutional capacity, practices, network or knowledge for the task;
- Interministerial mechanism convened across two or more ministries through a joint structure and a formal legislative mandate, serviced by an executive secretariat in a relevant ministry;

- An institutionally separate institution established by the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and responsible for coordination is endowed with a separate budget, separate staff and structured into internal directorates and programmes, and is institutionalized.

D.4. Recommendations on mainstreaming migration into development policies

Short-term recommendations (within a year)

Pursue the Migration Profile exercise: More issues of the Migration Profile are expected. Other areas of migration could be included in the forthcoming exercises, such as environmental migration, migrants living and working abroad (diaspora), diaspora engagement, irregular migration and immigration.

Medium-term recommendations (two to three years)

Formulate a national action plan on migration: The policy document could list the steps and activities needed to achieve the strategic goals and priorities. It could map stakeholders and programme areas. It could also describe the process to mainstream migration when national development plans are being formulated, especially the NSEDP.

Long-term recommendations (four years and more)

Develop and implement a road map for diaspora engagement: As an integral part of development planning, there is a need for involving the Lao diaspora in development. The diaspora engagement strategy could comprise the following four steps:

- (d) Identify the goals such as to reduce poverty or support the national balance of payments and capacities – such as investment, knowledge or skills transfers, and remittances – and define the tools and mechanisms required for the task. Consultations with the diaspora are required to set the goals.
- (e) Identify the diaspora that the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic hopes to engage through a mapping of diaspora organizations, skills and experience inventory, administration of quantitative and qualitative diaspora surveys.
- (f) Build trust. The Government could launch pilot projects, such as cultural events, language promotion, interventions with host government, services to the diaspora, privileges to non-resident expatriates and descendants, and active consular networks.

(g) Mobilize the diaspora for development by developing a migration diaspora policy.

Develop and implement a national diaspora policy: In the long term, a national diaspora policy could be implemented to engage the Lao diaspora. A dedicated institution such as a ministry could be established. A series of initiatives could include high-profile events, diaspora spokespersons, sponsored travel for opinion leaders and youth, promoting partnerships, and facilitation of investment through one-stop centres.

ANNEX

Field visit in October 2022

The objective of the field visit was to collect qualitative primary information among different profiles of migrants (such as return migrant workers, aspirational migrants and members of migrant-affected communities) and heads of village. Data were collected by the field team from 17 to 25 October 2022 using FGDs and KIs. The field team consisted of IOM staff including the international consultant and staff from the DRI of the MPI. The information collected aimed to contribute to the development of the country’s migration profile.

Participants and key informants were identified using the existing IOM and DRI of the MPI networks. The national and local partners supported the idea of defining the way of reaching out to the participants. The snowball sampling assisted in this regard for the team to find participants in the FGDs. Before obtaining any personal-level information and contact details, participants were explained the objective and scope of the study. Besides, the field team systematically obtained the participants’ consent to the interview and photos.

Table 5 provides information on provinces, districts and villages visited in English and Lao languages. In total, 6 KIs and 18 FGDs were conducted in 6 different villages.

Table 5. Information on provinces, districts and villages visited

Number	Province ແຂວງ	District ເມືອງ	Village ບ້ານ	Date ວັນທີ
1	Champasak ຈຳປາສັກ	Soukhoumma ສຸຂຸມາ	Houayhae ຫ້ວຍແຈ້	17/10/2022
		Sanasomboun ສະນະສິມບູນ	Nakeo ນາແກ້ວ	18/10/2022
2	Savannakhet ສະຫວັນນະເຂດ	Songkhone ສອງຄອນ	Nakhammon ນາຄຳມິນ	19/10/2022
		Champhone ຈຳພອນ	Houamuang ຫ້ວມືອງ	20/10/2022
3	Xayabouly ໄຊຍະບູລີ	Boten ບໍ່ຕ້າມ	Nakhok ນາກອກ	24/10/2022
		Paklay ປາກລາຍ	Muangva ເມືອງວາ	25/10/2022

The limitations of the field visit are numerous. Given the sampling strategy and size, the findings are not representative of the population and are not generalizable. FGDs involved a small group of participants. Participants may also

feel pressured to conform to social norms and give answers that are socially desirable. Besides, the dynamics of the discussion were sometimes difficult to control, with some participants dominating the conversation or introducing new topics that were not relevant to the research objectives.

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