

# Thailand Compendium - Human Trafficking Law

## Prepared by

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## Purpose of the Compendium

This compendium was prepared as part of the BABSEACLE International Legal Studies Externship Program in support of the Southeast Asia Team Eliminating Child Trafficking (SEATECT). The purpose of this compendium is to compile and present the legal framework governing human trafficking in Thailand.

Date: 23 February 2026

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Legal System	Constitution	Bill of Rights	Country Structure	Form of Government
Civil law system (influenced by European civil law, with some common-law elements)	Written	Yes	Unitary state, with administrative decentralization to provinces and local governments	Constitutional Monarchy with a Parliamentary system

**1. Introduction**

This compendium provides an academic overview of Thailand’s legal and institutional framework for combating human trafficking, modern slavery, and forced labor. It proceeds from the foundational criminal offenses under the Thai Penal Code B.E. 2499 (1956) (“TPC”) and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008) to the broader regulatory and operational measures that define Thailand’s legislative response to human trafficking, slavery and forced labor. The compendium covers key areas including supply chain transparency and government procurement framework, employment and migrant protections, victim compensation mechanisms, and the multidisciplinary cooperation essential for enforcement and victim support. It is intended to serve as a practical and accessible resource that integrates legal analysis with policy and operational perspectives.

Despite significant legislative and institutional developments, Thailand continues to face a high prevalence of modern slavery relative to other countries in the region, having been reported as having the 14 highest prevalence of modern slavery regionally, underscoring the structural nature of exploitation risks faced by migrant workers<sup>1</sup>.

**2. Thailand’s Policy and Legal Position**

Thailand has laws and policies in place to address human trafficking, modern slavery, and forced labor. The main legal tools are the Thai Penal Code and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, which make trafficking, forced labor, and related exploitation criminal offences. These laws cover a wide range of abusive practices, including debt bondage, child exploitation, and forced labor in both formal and informal work settings.

In addition to criminal law, Thailand has developed policies and systems to support victims. Government agencies work together through multidisciplinary teams, and the National Referral Mechanism is used to identify victims and connect them to shelters, legal aid, and other services. There are also specific policies aimed at high-risk sectors such as fishing, construction, agriculture, and manufacturing.

Even with these laws and policies, serious problems remain. Migrant workers are still at high risk of exploitation. Many face discrimination, language barriers, and strict migration rules that tie their legal status to employers. Fear of arrest or deportation often stops workers from reporting abuse or seeking help. As a result, legal protections do not always work in practice, especially for undocumented or low-wage migrant workers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/country%20%20studies/thailand/#:~:text=Thailand%20is%20among%20countries%20taking,in%202018%20and%202019%20respectively>

In conclusion, Thailand's policy and legal position show a clear commitment on paper, but gaps in implementation continue to allow exploitation to happen. Stronger protection for migrant workers, easier access to justice, and more trust-based approaches are needed to make the system work in real life.

### 3. Overview of Thailand's legal approach to combating modern slavery and human trafficking

Thailand addresses modern slavery and human trafficking through a multi-layered legal and institutional framework that combines criminal law, labor regulation, migration governance, and coordinated government action. Rather than relying on a single statute, Thailand applies multiple laws and policies in parallel to prevent exploitation, prosecute offenders, and protect victims.

This framework is commonly structured around the **5P policy approach which is Policy, Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership** which guides Thailand's national strategy and implementation across government agencies.

#### 3.1 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008)

The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008) is Thailand's primary law addressing human trafficking and modern slavery. The Act criminalises trafficking in persons and covers a broad range of exploitative practices, including forced labor, sexual exploitation, debt bondage, forced begging, and the exploitation of children.

Trafficking is defined broadly to include acts such as recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or receiving a person through means including force, threats, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation of vulnerability. Where the victim is a child, proof of coercive means is not required, reflecting a heightened level of legal protection.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to criminal penalties, the Act places strong emphasis on victim protection. Victims are entitled to shelter, medical treatment, legal assistance, rehabilitation, and, where applicable, safe and voluntary repatriation. The Act also establishes national coordination mechanisms and committees to support prevention, prosecution, protection, and partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and international actors.<sup>3</sup>

#### 3.2 Thai Penal Code (Criminal Code)

The Thai Penal Code provides the core criminal law basis for addressing slavery, slavery-like practices, and related forms of exploitation. These provisions allow authorities to prosecute serious abuses of personal liberty even where conduct may fall outside the technical definition of trafficking. Key provisions include:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/wba-allies/labour-protection-network-foundation-lpn/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

- **Section 312. Slavery:** Whoever, so as to enslave the person or to cause the person to be in the position similar to the slave, bringing into or sending out of the Kingdom, removing, buying, selling, disposing, accepting or restraining any person, shall be imprisoned not out of seven years and fined not more of fourteen thousand Baht.
- **Section 312/2 Child Slavery:** Provides enhanced penalties where slavery offences are committed against children under the age of fifteen.
- **Section 312/3. Taking children over 15 but under 18**  
Whoever, by dishonestly, accepting, disposing, procuring, seducing, or taking away the person over fifteen years but not yet over eighteen years of age by such person's consent, shall be imprisoned not more of five years or fined not more of ten thousand Baht, or both. If the committing the offence according to paragraph 1 committed to the child not yet out of fifteen years of age, such offender shall be not out of seven years or fined not out of fourteen thousand Baht, or both.
- **Section 320. Human Trafficking outside Country**  
Whoever, by using fraudulent or deceitful means, threat, violence, unjust influence or any other means of compulsion, takes or sends a person out of the Kingdom, shall be punished with imprisonment of two to ten years or fined of four thousand to twenty thousand Baht, or both. If the commission of the offence according to the first paragraph be committed in order that the person taken or sent out to be under the power of the other person unlawfully, or in order to abandon such person to be in a helpless condition, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years and fined of six thousand to thirty thousand Baht.
- **Section 319. Sexual Trafficking**  
Whoever takes away a minor over fifteen years of age but not yet over eighteen years of age from the parent, guardian or person looking after such minor for lucre or indecent purpose with the consent of such minor, shall be punished with imprisonment of two to ten years and fined of four thousand to twenty thousand Baht. Whoever dishonestly buys, disposes, or accepts a minor to be taken away according to the first paragraph, shall be liable to the same punishment as the person who takes such minor away.<sup>4</sup>

Together, these Penal Code provisions complement the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act by ensuring that a wide range of conduct associated with modern slavery and human trafficking can be prosecuted under criminal law.

### **3.3 National Policy Framework: The 5P Approach**

In addition to legislative measures, Thailand applies national policies and coordination mechanisms structured around the **5P policy framework**:

The 5P policy consists of the following:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thailandlawonline.com/table-of-contents/criminal-law-translation-thailand-penal-code>



- **Policy:** enacting to reform whole legislative system, and proceed under Strategic Plan on Management of Migrant Worker to ensure the protection of migrant worker, and their employment through legal channel
- **Protection:** indicating that all workers will be protected equally on nondiscriminatory basis, in accordance with international standards
- **Prosecution:** focusing on increasing capability of inspection and law prosecution, prioritized the at-risk or vulnerable group
- **Prevention:** focusing on promoting and raising awareness of workers on the labour rights, as well as accessible complaint/grievance channels and services of language coordination
- **Partnership:** focusing on the collaboration with ILO, NGOs, the governmental agencies, and private sectors<sup>5</sup>

To strengthen the enforcement of the 2019 amendments of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, the Ministry of Labor also created the Anti-Labor Trafficking Operations Centre, which focuses on identifying and preventing labor-related trafficking through workplace inspections and victim screening.<sup>6</sup> While this initiative represents a significant institutional development, further capacity-building remains necessary to address the scale of Thailand’s labor market and migrant workforce.

Under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, multiple government bodies and civil society organisations work collaboratively within this framework. These include the **Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee**, the **National Committee on the Prevention of Official Complicity in Human Trafficking**, and the **Department of Anti-Trafficking in Persons** under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), which coordinates national strategies and information-sharing among stakeholders.

<sup>5</sup> [https://phetchaburi.mol.go.th/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2019/01/18-smudpkkhaawupdate\\_chbabphimph.pdf](https://phetchaburi.mol.go.th/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2019/01/18-smudpkkhaawupdate_chbabphimph.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.aseanact.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-MSA-Policy-Brief\\_English.pdf](https://www.aseanact.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-MSA-Policy-Brief_English.pdf)

Thailand also publishes regular public reports on its anti-trafficking efforts and has adopted a **National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights**, which includes human trafficking and forced labour as priority issues.

### 3.4 National Referral Mechanism and Role of Civil Society

In March 2022, Thailand formally adopted the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which provides standardized procedures for victim screening, identification, referral, and protection. The NRM remains a central instrument in Thailand’s anti-trafficking response and formally integrates government agencies, NGOs, and international organisations into victim assistance processes.

A wide range of civil society and international organisations support Thailand’s anti-trafficking efforts. These include USAID Thailand Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP)<sup>7</sup>, which works with government and civil society partners to strengthen protection systems and cross-border cooperation; International Justice Mission (IJM), which supports investigations and prosecutions; and Thai NGOs such as the Labour Protection Network (LPN), which provides direct support, advocacy, and rights education for migrant workers.<sup>8</sup>

## 4. Thailand’s criminal offenses relating to slavery, slavery-like conditions, and human trafficking

Thailand criminalizes slavery, slavery-like conditions and human trafficking through a combination of provisions under the *Thai Penal Code B.E. 2499 (1956)* (“TPC”) and the *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008)*. Together, these laws establish a comprehensive criminal framework addressing severe violations of personal liberty, exploitation, and coercive control over individuals.

### 4.1 Slavery and Child Slavery

Slavery offenses are primarily regulated under **section 312 of the Thai Penal Code**, which criminalises conduct undertaken with the intention of enslaving a person or placing a person in conditions comparable to slavery. Prohibited acts include buying, selling, transporting, detaining, or otherwise exercising control over a person for exploitative purposes.

Enhanced penalties apply where victims are children. The Penal Code provides increased punishment for slavery offenses committed against children under the age of fifteen and criminalises the dishonest taking, procuring, or disposal of minors aged fifteen to eighteen. Penalties escalate further where such offenses result in serious physical harm or death, reflecting the heightened gravity of exploitation involving children.

### 4.2 Slavery-Like Conditions and Related Offenses

In addition to slavery offenses, the Thai Penal Code addresses a range of conduct that may constitute slavery-like conditions. These include offenses relating to coercion, unlawful detention, and deprivation of liberty. Relevant provisions criminalise the use of threats or violence to compel a person to act against their will, as well as the detention or confinement of a person for the purpose of forcing labour or services.

The Penal Code also contains offenses addressing kidnapping, ransom, and the buying or selling of abducted persons, including children. These provisions are particularly relevant where exploitative practices involve the removal,

<sup>7</sup> <https://winrock.org/projects/thailand-ctip/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ijm.org/locations/thailand>

concealment, or transfer of victims in ways that facilitate forced labour, sexual exploitation, or other abusive conditions.

Relevant provisions criminalise the use of threats or violence to compel a person to act against their will, as well as the unlawful detention or confinement of a person, including detention for the purpose of forcing labour or services. In particular, section 309 criminalises extortion involving threats or violence, with aggravated penalties where weapons or organised groups are involved. Sections 310 and 310/2 prohibit unlawful detention and deprivation of liberty, including detention used to compel a person to perform labour or services.

The Penal Code also addresses conduct involving the removal or control of persons that facilitates exploitation. Sections 313–318 criminalise kidnapping, ransom-related offences, and the buying or selling of abducted persons, including children. These provisions are particularly relevant in situations where victims are removed, concealed, transferred, or confined in ways that enable forced labour, sexual exploitation, or other abusive conditions.

Penalties for these offences vary depending on factors such as the victim’s age, the purpose of the conduct, the involvement of organised criminal activity, and the extent of harm suffered. In serious cases, penalties may extend to long-term imprisonment or life imprisonment under the general punishment framework of the Penal Code.

#### **4.3 Human Trafficking Offenses**

Human trafficking offenses are addressed both through specific Penal Code provisions and through specialised anti-trafficking legislation. The Penal Code criminalises certain forms of trafficking-related conduct, including sexual exploitation of minors and the coercive or deceptive removal of persons from Thailand.

The **Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008)** provides the principal statutory framework for trafficking offenses. The Act defines trafficking broadly to include acts such as recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring, or receiving a person through means including force, threats, coercion, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation of vulnerability. Where the victim is a child, proof of coercive means is not required.

The Act also extends criminal liability to individuals who facilitate or support trafficking, including recruiters, transporters, harbourers, and those who knowingly assist or protect trafficking operations, including organised criminal groups.

#### **4.4 Penalties and Enforcement**

Penalties for offenses relating to slavery, slavery-like conditions, and human trafficking range from fines and terms of imprisonment to life imprisonment, in accordance with the general punishment framework under the Thai Penal Code. The severity of penalties depends on factors such as the victim’s age, the nature of the exploitative conduct, the involvement of organised crime, and the extent of harm suffered by the victim.

In recent years, Thailand has increased enforcement efforts through expanded investigations, prosecutions, and convictions for trafficking-related crimes. These efforts have been supported by enhanced inter-agency cooperation, labour inspections in high-risk sectors, and international collaboration to address transnational trafficking. National training initiatives and implementation of the National Referral Mechanism have further strengthened the identification of victims and the prosecution of offenders.

## 5. Forced labor: overview of Thailand's applicable employment and migration laws

Within Thailand, forced labor is combated through various legal frameworks. These include the Constitution, the Penal Code, Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008), and Labor Protection Act (LPA). Forced labor is also protected within Thailand's migration laws.

### 5.1 Constitution

Forced labor is prohibited under Article 30 of the Constitution of Thailand, which guarantees freedom from forced labor and equality before the law.<sup>9</sup>

The provision applies to all persons and prohibits forced labor except where expressly authorised by law for the purpose of averting a public calamity, or during a declared state of emergency, martial law, or a period of war or armed conflict. This provision provides constitutional protection against exploitative labor practices, including migrant and vulnerable workers.

### 5.2 Penal Code

Enslaving a person or causing a person to be in a similar position to a slave is a penal offence under section 312 of the Penal Code of Thailand.

### 5.3 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act

Penal sanctions are imposed to those found guilty of trafficking in persons under sections 6 and 52 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008). In 2017, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act was amended to broaden the definition of forced labor. This amendment means that practices such as debt bondage and withholding identification documents are now classified as forced labor.

### 5.4 Labor Protection Act

The Labor Protection Act established that all workers regardless of status are protected from forced labor, by preventing indicators of forced labor, such as exploitation and abusive conditions.

#### 5.4.1 Labor Inspectors

In Thailand, Labor inspectors play an important role in overseeing compliance and enforcement of Labor Laws. Including monitoring compliance with work health and safety guidelines, general working conditions and labor relations. Labor Inspectors are empowered under a series of statutes including *Labor Relations Act* B.E. 2518 (1975); *Labor Protection Act* B.E.2541 2541 (1998), *Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Act*, BE 2554 (2011).

Under Chapters 14 and 15 of the *Labor Protection Act*, Labor Inspectors are empowered to enter a place of business, during any hours of work to examine the working conditions of the employees, to take photographs and make copies of documents concerning employment, the payment of wages, to sample any material or product for analysis regarding work safety and to perform any other necessary tasks for the purpose of acquiring facts regarding employment conditions.<sup>10</sup> Labor

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<sup>9</sup> [https://cdc.parliament.go.th/draftconstitution2/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=1460&filename=index](https://cdc.parliament.go.th/draftconstitution2/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=1460&filename=index)

<sup>10</sup> s 139(1) of the Labor Protection Act

Inspectors also have the power to issue an inquiry note or summon an employee, employer or other relevant persons to give factual statements or submit relevant documents<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Labor Inspectors have the power to issue a written order to an employee or employer that compels the issued parties to comply with the Act.<sup>12</sup>

Appeals can be made against an order made by a Labor Inspector to the Director-General within a specific date stated on the order. The Director-General must determine the appeal and notify the appellant no longer than 30 days from the date of receipt.<sup>13</sup> This decision made by the Director-General cannot be appealed.

#### 5.4.2 Penalties

Penalty provisions are noted within chapter 16 of the Labor Protection Act.

### 5.5 Migration Laws

Thailand's migration laws play an important role in shaping both protection mechanisms and vulnerability to forced labor and human trafficking, particularly for migrant workers. The legal framework governing entry, residence, and lawful employment directly affects migrants' access to labour protections, remedies, and victim identification mechanisms.

Thailand's migration and immigration system is primarily governed by the Immigration Act B.E. 2522 (1979). This Act regulates key aspects of migration, including:

- Entry and exit of foreigners
- Visa categories and periods of stay
- Reporting requirements, including the 90-Day Report
- Powers of immigration officers
- Overstay and deportation procedure

The Immigration Act establishes the legal basis for lawful entry and residence in Thailand. However, migrants who fall outside lawful immigration status may face increased vulnerability to exploitation, as fear of arrest or deportation can discourage reporting of abusive or forced labour conditions.

Employment of migrant workers is governed primarily by the **Alien Employment Act B.E. 2551 (2008)**. This legislation regulates:

- Requirement to hold a valid work permit
- Employer obligations
- Prohibited occupations
- Penalties for unauthorized

While the Alien Employment Act is intended to regulate migrant labour and protect domestic employment, dependency on employers for work permits and restrictions on job mobility may increase the risk of exploitation where employers misuse legal controls to exert pressure or coercion over workers.

Thailand provides several visa categories depending on the purpose of entry including:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, s139(2)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, s139(3)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, s141.

- Tourist Visa or Visa on Arrival – based on short-term visits
- Non-Immigrant Visas – for work, business, education, marriage, retirement or volunteering work.

Lawful employment generally requires both an appropriate visa and a valid work permit. Migrant workers who lack proper documentation or fall outside permitted employment conditions may be exposed to heightened risks of forced labour and trafficking.

Migration laws therefore form an essential component of Thailand’s broader legal framework addressing forced labour and human trafficking. Effective coordination between immigration, labour, and anti-trafficking systems is critical to reducing vulnerability, improving victim identification, and ensuring access to protection and remedies for migrant workers

## 6. Restitution and victim compensation

### Overview

Thailand provides a multi-layered framework for restitution, reparation and compensation for victims of human trafficking. Victims are able to make compensation claims directly against offenders through criminal or civil actions, or access state-provided assistance. Tortious claims are also available to victims, although prescribed limitation periods apply for this kind of action.

Thailand's prevention and suppression efforts are enhanced by the Anti-Human Trafficking Fund, which allocates financial resources to victim support, repatriation and proactive anti-trafficking initiatives.

### 6.1 Restitution and Reparation Schemes

#### 6.1.1 Restitution

Thailand provides restitution through both the Criminal Procedure Code and s 420 of the Civil and Commercial Code. Under s 438 of the Civil and Commercial Code, courts have the discretion to determine the appropriate manner and extent of restitution that is required to be provided to a victim based on the circumstances and the severity of the wrongful act. This includes the restitution of lost property.

Thailand also enacted the Victim Compensation and Restitution for the Accused Person Act in 2001, which established the Victim Compensation and Restitution Board (VCR). The VCR considers applications for compensation and makes recommendations to enhance the rights of victims.

Additionally, this Act prescribed that when compensation is not available from the perpetrator, the state should provide financial assistance to victims who have sustained physical or mental impairments, as well as to the family, specifically dependents, of those who have died or have become physically or mentally ill. The Act also extends restitution beyond the victim to accused individuals who have suffered a miscarriage of justice.

#### 6.1.2 Reparation

Reparation for victims of human trafficking is addressed specifically under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008). Under section 38 of the Act, foreign victims are entitled to assistance with safe and timely repatriation to their country of origin or a country they consider their permanent residence.

## **6.2 Compensation**

Thailand provides victims of human trafficking with access to compensation by allowing victims to make claims against their offender or by claiming state-provided services.

### **6.2.1 Claims against the offender**

Victims may seek compensation by filing a civil claim attached to criminal proceedings under section 44/1 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Such claims may be made where the trafficking offence has resulted in loss of life, physical or mental harm, deprivation of liberty, damage to reputation, or property loss.

The right to compensation is further reinforced under section 35 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, which authorises the public prosecutor to claim compensation on behalf of trafficking victims. Proceedings for compensation under this mechanism are exempt from court fees, reducing financial barriers for victims.

In addition, under section 14 of the Procedures for Human Trafficking Cases Act B.E. 2559 (2016) (the Human Trafficking Criminal Procedure Act), courts have discretion to award punitive damages, even in the absence of a formal compensation claim, where the offence involves torture, unlawful detention, physical injury, or seriously inhumane threats. This represents a rare application of punitive damages in Thai law and reflects the seriousness of trafficking offences.

### **6.2.2 Claims for state-provided services**

Under section 33 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, victims are entitled to receive comprehensive assistance from the State. This includes access to food, shelter, medical treatment, physical and psychological rehabilitation, education and vocational training, legal aid, and assistance with repatriation where applicable.

## **6.3 Tortious Claims and Other Legal Remedies**

In Thailand s 420 of the *Civil and Commercial Code* enables victims of human trafficking to pursue tortious compensation. Although, in accordance with s 448, the claim must be made within one year from the date the perpetrator became known to the victim or ten years from the day the act was committed.

Thailand also has the Justice Fund Act (2015), which establishes a fund that can provide financial support for legal expenses, medical expenses and damages for lost earnings. Victims of human trafficking can apply to the fund to receive this assistance, although there is currently no evidence of a victim using this fund for support.

## **6.4 Fund**

Section 42 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008) establishes an Anti-Human Trafficking Fund ('Fund'), whose role is to use allocated funds to prevent and suppress human trafficking in Thailand. The Fund receives its finances from the initial sum allocated by the Government, an annual subsidy received from the Government's budget, donations, interest accrued from the Fund's financial resources, money from the sale of the Fund's property and finances received through other laws.

The Fund utilizes the finances received from the above mechanisms in various ways, including providing the necessary types of assistance identified in section 33 and assisting in repatriation under section 38. The Fund attempts to achieve its objective of prevention by providing monetary rewards to human trafficking whistleblowers and investigators.

Additionally, the Anti-Money Laundering Act 1999 establishes the Anti-Money Laundering Fund, which seizes money and assets from trafficking crimes to enhance cooperation amongst agencies to prevent and suppress money laundering.

## 7. Thailand's multidisciplinary/interagency cooperation approach

### Overview

Thailand has several agencies and NGO's that work collaboratively across several disciplines, to combat human trafficking under the country's *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E 2551* (2008). This code is the primary framework requiring coordinated action on the 5 P's: policy, prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships.

### 7.1 Central Coordinating Bodies:

- The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) hosts the main national anti-trafficking operations center and coordinates with operational centers in other ministries daily.
- The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee (ATP Committee) is chaired by the Prime Minister and sets national policy and strategy, coordinating across ministries and supervising sub-committees (including on data and trafficking in the fishing sector).
- A Policy Committee on Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Fishing, also chaired at senior political level, and the National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee work alongside each other to align law-enforcement, labor, fisheries, child-protection and migration responses.

These bodies form the highest level of inter-ministerial coordination, covering policy development, budgeting, data-sharing and national planning

### 7.2 Key government actors in the multi-agency system

At the operational level, Thailand maintains a network of specialised agencies responsible for investigation, prosecution, protection, and enforcement:

- **MSDHS / National Operation Center on Anti-Human Trafficking (NOCHT)** – lead on victim protection, shelters, national database of victims, and coordination with international partners.
- **Royal Thai Police** – Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division (ATPD / AHTD) – specialist police unit investigating trafficking cases; cooperates closely with NGOs and IOs in rescues and victim identification
- **Department of Special Investigation (DSI), Ministry of Justice** – handles complex, organized and transnational cases; its Bureau of Human Trafficking Crime has an MoU with MSDHS, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and Royal Thai Police to build an integrated database of all trafficking cases.
- **Office of the Attorney General (OAG)** – Centre Against International Human Trafficking (CAHT) – coordinates prosecutions, develops legal cooperation with other agencies and across borders.
- **Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO)** – follows the money side of trafficking cases, using financial investigation to support prosecutions.
- **Ministries of Labor, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Fisheries, etc.** – run inspections, regulate high-risk sectors (fishing, agriculture, construction), manage migration and consular protection, and sit on national committees.

So, even before NGOs are added, the system is inherently multi-agency, spanning social welfare, police, justice, labor, migration and financial regulation.

### **7.3 Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) and referral mechanisms**

#### **7.3.1 What MDTs are**

MDTs are now a *standard operating procedure* for victim identification in Thailand. Interviews with potential victims are conducted by teams including police, social workers and psychologists from MSDHS, Interior officials and interpreters, and where needed NGO and international-organization representatives. USAID/Winrock research describes MDTs as a *core component* of the provincial response, covering victim identification, assistance, repatriation and long-term reintegration.

#### **7.3.2 Typical MDT composition:**

- social workers (MSDHS / provincial shelters)
- law-enforcement officers (ATPD/RTP, DSI, sometimes immigration)
- labor inspectors and fisheries officers (for labor and sea-based cases)
- health workers and psychologists
- legal aid / prosecutors
- interpreters and cultural mediators
- NGO/CSO representatives (especially those trusted by migrant communities).

#### **7.3.3 National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**

Thailand has developed NRM guidelines (with IOM) that describe roles of “first responders” (police, labor officers, NGOs, etc.), referral pathways to MDTs and shelters, and reimbursement of screening expenses from the Anti-Human Trafficking Fund under MSDHS.

In practice, this means that when a trafficking case is identified, the National Referral Mechanism and Multi-Disciplinary Teams provide the practical process through which government agencies and NGOs work together on the same case, from victim identification and protection to access to shelters, legal aid and longer-term support.

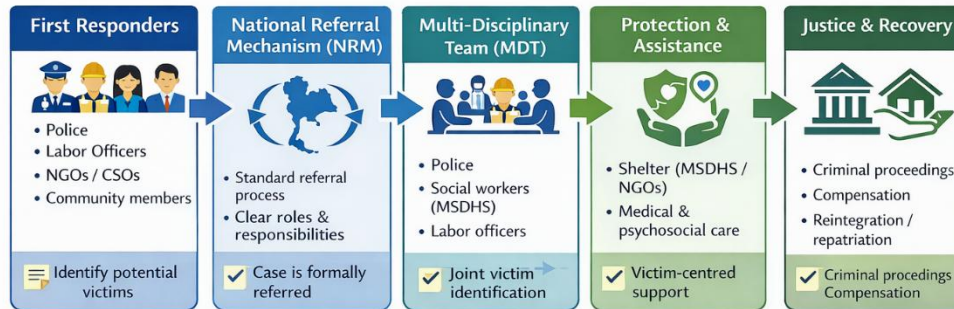
(MDTs + the NRM are the backbone linking ministries to NGOs at case level).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://thailand.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11371/files/documents/2024-03/trafficking-victim-identification-and-referral-for-assistance-training-manual-en.pdf>

## Thailand National Referral Mechanism (NRM):

— How trafficking cases are identified and referred for protection —



The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) provides a standardized process through which *first responders*, *government agencies* and NGOs work together to identify victims of human trafficking and refer cases to *Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs)*. MDTs coordinate victim identification, protection and access to services.

### 7.4 Roles of NGOs and International Organizations

There is a very dense NGO/IO ecosystem, much of it structurally connected to government.

#### 7.4.1 Service provision and casework

Directories by Safe Child Thailand, ASEAN-ACT and Freedom Collaborative list dozens of Thai and international NGOs working directly on trafficking, including: Foundation of Child Understanding (FOCUS), Labor Protection Network (LPN), World Vision Foundation of Thailand, International Justice Mission (IJM), Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF), Ronnasit Foundation, The Hug Project, The Mirror Foundation, Save the Children, Catholic Network Against Trafficking in Thailand, Stella Maris and others.

Their cooperation with government typically includes:

- **Joint victim identification and rescue operations** - with ATPD, DSI and provincial authorities, especially in sectors like fishing, factories, entertainment venues or online exploitation.
- **Shelters and aftercare** – some NGOs run their own shelters, others support MSDHS shelters with counselling, education, livelihoods and reintegration planning.
- **Legal aid and trial support** – NGO lawyers or partner firms co-represent victims, help prepare testimony and sometimes act as co-plaintiffs alongside prosecutors in trafficking cases.
- **Community outreach and first-line reporting** – many migrants and at-risk communities trust NGOs more than state agencies, so NGOs often act as the first point of contact, then refer cases into MDTs/NRM.

## **7.4.2 Capacity-building and system-strengthening**

- World Vision and other partners have run multi-year projects to strengthen provincial MDTs, delivering technical training, “lessons-learned workshops” and supporting district-level anti-trafficking committees.
- NGOs and IOs (e.g. IOM, USAID CTIP, Freedom Fund) help standardise victim-identification tools, develop curricula, and train prosecutors and first responders in trauma-informed, victim-centred approaches.
- The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Fund has financed NGO-run prevention and protection projects, giving civil society a formal place in the national response.

## **7.5 Inter-agency cooperation in practice**

Some concrete cooperation mechanisms:

### **7.5.1 Joint operations & inspections**

MDTs undertake unannounced joint inspections of high-risk workplaces (fisheries, factories, entertainment venues), pooling labor, police, social work and NGO expertise.

### **7.5.2 Integrated data & case management**

MSDHS maintains a national trafficking database that draws on police case data and victim-assistance records; DSI’s Bureau of Human Trafficking Crime has an MoU with OAG, RTP and MSDHS to integrate case databases for more effective coordination.

### **7.5.3 Hotlines and complaint mechanisms**

Government hotlines (notably MSDHS’s 1300 OSCC line, plus labor hotlines) operate 24/7 with interpreters; they feed cases into MDTs and shelters. NGOs run parallel or complementary hotlines and local complaint channels, often in migrants’ languages.

### **7.5.4 Provincial & district committees and networks**

Provincial Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committees and district-level networks bring together governors, police, labor officials, social workers and NGOs to coordinate local plans, joint trainings and referrals.

### **7.5.5 Regional and cross-border cooperation**

Thailand works with IOM, neighboring countries and donors through mechanisms like the COMMIT process and regional projects. Recent examples include cooperation with China and Myanmar on scam compounds that use trafficked workers, with new coordination centers being set up to jointly investigate and dismantle these networks.

## **7.6 Strengths and ongoing challenges**

### **7.6.1 Strengths**

- MDTs and the NRM give Thailand a relatively advanced, multi-sectoral victim-identification and assistance system, with NGOs structurally embedded in many steps
- National committees, specialized units and integrated databases have improved coordination and contributed to higher numbers of investigations, prosecutions and identified victims over time.

### **7.6.2 Challenges identified by research and partners**

- Bureaucratic and budget constraints limit MDTs' ability to respond quickly, forcing NGOs to cover costs for interpreters, travel and PPE in some cases.
- High staff turnover in government agencies means capacity-building must be repeated and institutional memory is fragile.
- Lack of standardized training for MDT members and interpreters leads to inconsistent screening and occasional mis-identification of victims.
- The current model of identification remains quite reactive, and systemic barriers (fear of arrest or deportation, employer retaliation, discrimination) still deter undocumented migrants from coming forward.