

Foreword

International Organization for Migration (IOM) began working in Lao People's Democratic Republic since 2001 with various line ministries in the areas of Emergency and Post Crises Response; Immigration and Border Management; Labour Migration and Human Development; Migration, Environment, and Climate Change; Migration Governance; Migration Health and Migrant Protection and Assistance. In recent years, IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic has achieved significant milestones including the signing of the Cooperation Agreement between the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic and IOM, and IOM Country Strategy for Lao People's Democratic Republic 2022–2026.

IOM and the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic signed the Cooperation Agreement on 1 September 2021 which outlines the Privileges and Immunities for IOM to perform its work in the country as an UN Agency. To build on the success of the Cooperation Agreement, IOM completed the Country Strategy 2022–2026 to define a clear strategic pathway to work within the country, and enhance current and future collaborations with the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic, to guide its operations and strategic engagement with wider stakeholders in Lao People's Democratic Republic and in the region.

The Country Strategy was significantly developed through a series of consultations with government, UN agencies and development partners to ensure that it is aligned with the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) 2021–2025, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026 as well as SDGs. The targets set out in the documents is aligned to the development priorities of the country. In addition, the strategy draws on the IOM Strategic Vision, its corresponding IOM Asia and Pacific Regional Strategy (2020–2024), the Greater Mekong Subregion Human Mobility Strategy (2021–2024) and the IOM Strategic Results Framework which are anchored in the overall framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Migration.

Considering the recent migration context, Lao People's Democratic Republic experiences mixed in-and-out migratory flows. As a landlocked nation sharing borders with five countries, Lao People's Democratic Republic is best known as an origin country in migration, and to a lesser extent, a transit and destination country. Internal and cross-border human mobility is an important issue. With rapid regional and domestic infrastructure development, well-governed migration has become increasingly crucial in the country's development. Furthermore, a well-managed migration has the potential to contribute to realization of the 9th NSEDP and in fulfilling priorities set in the UNDCF. As the world including Lao People's Democratic Republic moves towards COVID-19 recovery, addressing the impacts on migration and mobility specifically in reference to migrants' vulnerabilities become important critical.

Therefore, this is an opportune time for IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic to further to strengthen the organization's technical assistance in the overall migration governance, and facilitate the safe, orderly, and regular migration through the implementation of the IOM Country Strategy for Lao People's Democratic Republic (2022–2026).

I am pleased to share the IOM Country Strategy for Lao People's Democratic Republic 2022–2026, which lays the foundation of our work for the next five years. The strategy envisages that by 2026, IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic will have developed a holistic approach, inclusive of government, civil society and private sector partners to improve migration management and the protection of migrants. The migration management response is outlined in the four strategic areas of (i) People's well-being; (ii) Inclusive prosperity; (iii) Governance and Rule of Law; (iv) Environment, climate change, and resilience with cross-cutting themes of right based approach, SDG targets, Global Compact for Migration, gender-mainstreaming, and build back better: COVID-19 Recovery.

IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic will work in partnership and coordination with all stakeholders including migrants, communities, government and non-governmental organizations, UN partners, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

Shareen TULADHAR
Chief of Mission
IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic

IOM Country Strategy for Lao People's Democratic Republic 2022–2026

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
1.1	About IOM	1
1.2	IOM in Lao People's Democratic Republic	1
1.3	Vision statement	2
2.	Context analysis	2
2.1	Economic growth	2
2.2	Human resource development	3
2.3	Well-being	3
2.4	Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction	4
2.5	Regional integration	5
2.6	Governance	5
3.	Strategic priorities	5
3.1.1	Strategic Priority 1 – People's well-being (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcomes 2 and 3)	5
3.1.2	Strategic Priority 2 – Inclusive prosperity (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcomes 1-3-5)	6
3.1.3	Strategic Priority 3 – Governance and Rule of Law (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcome 6)	7
3.1.4	Strategic Priority 4 – Environment, climate change, and resilience (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcome 4)	8
3.2	Cross-cutting themes	9
3.2.1	Rights-based approach to programming	9
3.2.2	Sustainable Development Goals and Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration	9
3.2.3	Gender-mainstreaming	9
3.2.4	Build Back Better: COVID-19 Recovery	9
3.3	Partnerships and coordination	9
4.	Institutional development	10
4.1	Policy capacity	10
4.2	Knowledge management, monitoring, evaluation and data	10
4.3	Communications and visibility	10
4.4	Innovation	11
4.5	Staff development	11
5.	The way forward	11

ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNDRR	UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UN-Habitat	UN Human Settlement Programme
UNICEF	UN Children's Emergency Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

1.1 About IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the UN's leading agency on migration and the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration, working closely with its key stakeholders – migrants and Member States – to promote humane, safe, and orderly migration. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants from an integral and holistic perspective, including links to development, to maximize the benefits and opportunities of migration and reduce its challenges. Established in 1951, IOM now has more than 170 Member States, offices in over 400 field locations and more than 14,000 staff – 90 per cent of IOM's staff being deployed in the field. In the Asia-Pacific region, IOM has 40 country offices. In Lao People's Democratic Republic, IOM has 17 staff with an office in Vientiane capital with field staff in Champasack and Savanakheth Provinces.

As recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, human mobility is indivisible from sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and the commitment to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind – will not be achieved without due consideration of migration. Additionally, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is grounded in the 2030 Agenda and promotes the principles of having a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to address this intrinsic link. This Strategy will support the Member States to achieve this, ultimately leveraging the potential of migration through a whole-of-government approach to achieve sustainable development outcomes for all. It is a direct contribution to the Decade of Action to fast-track progress for reaching the SDGs. It brings greater coherence and development impact to IOM's activities and allows for a joined-up approach to the way the Organization designs and delivers its operations, as called for in IOM's Strategic Vision (2019–2023).

IOM's Strategic Vision, presented to IOM Member States in 2019, spans the period of 2019 to 2023. The Vision articulates how IOM plans to meet its new and emerging responsibilities, including IOM's mandated role as the UN Migration Network Coordinator towards the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration. It sets out the 'direction of travel' for IOM, is forward looking and encourages "joined up thinking".

1.2 IOM in Lao People's Democratic Republic

IOM has been present in Lao People's Democratic Republic since 2001 and opened a project office in 2007 followed by a fully functional office in 2012. Lao People's Democratic Republic joined as the 171st Member State of IOM in June 2018. Since then, IOM's cooperation with the Government has been further strengthened in terms of thematic areas and geographical coverage. In 2021, the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic and IOM signed a Cooperation Agreement that increases opportunities for IOM to expand its work and mandate on migration management. The collaborative partnership envisioned under the Cooperation Agreement supports implementation of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2021–2025 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026, thereby contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the SDGs. It also provides further opportunities for IOM to assist the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to work towards its commitments under international and regional processes such as the Global Compact for Migration and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

This strategy is aligned with the UNSDCF and draws on the IOM Strategic Vision, its corresponding Asia and Pacific Regional Strategy (2020–2024), the Greater Mekong Subregion Human Mobility Strategy (2021–2024) and the IOM Strategic Results Framework, which are anchored in the overall framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Migration. As detailed in the UNSDCF, IOM works in partnership with UN agencies on joint programming. In particular, IOM will work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Labour Organization (ILO), on skills development and social protection for migrants; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), on migrant protection; and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on immigration and border control; and UN Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) and UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) on environment and climate change.

1.3 Vision statement

By 2026, IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic will have developed a holistic approach, inclusive of government, civil society and private sector partners, to improve migration management and the protection of migrants.

IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic inspires people to want to create a better life for migrants and their communities

2. Context analysis

As a nation sharing borders with five countries, Lao People's Democratic Republic is best known as an origin country in migration, and to a lesser extent a transit and destination country. In 2019, over 1.3 million Lao migrants were abroad with 69 per cent migrating to Thailand for work.¹ Internal migrants constitute a significant population in Lao People's Democratic Republic with 4 out of 10 people in Vientiane reported in the 2015 census to be internal migrants, of which 59.2 per cent were women.² IOM research shows that the main factors driving outmigration were better income prospects and the lack of job opportunities in the place of origin.³ As the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic drives efforts to move the country from landlocked to landlinked, internal and cross-border human mobility will become an increasingly important issue. Furthermore, well-managed migration has the potential to contribute to the realization of all six of the 9th NSEDP outcomes.⁴

2.1 Economic growth

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the impact that restricting human mobility can have on economic growth. National unemployment rates in Lao People's Democratic Republic increased from 9.4 per cent in 2019 to 21.8 per cent in 2021. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes that well-managed migration can support inclusive growth and sustainable development. Globally remittances as a source of capital are three times the amount of official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI) combined.⁵ This suggests that remittances could be an important part of Lao People's Democratic Republic's smooth transition from least developed country (LDC) status. World Bank data shows that remittances already represent 1.2 per cent of Lao People's Democratic Republic's GDP in 2020⁶ and research shows that informal remittance flows may add an additional 35–75 per cent to this figure.⁷

As Lao People's Democratic Republic moves from a landlocked to a land linked country through the rapid expansion of regional and domestic infrastructure, including the newly opened Vientiane-Boten railway, well-governed migration will become increasingly crucial to the country's socioeconomic development. The effective, efficient, and safe passage of goods and people will be critical, including swift and simple border clearance procedures to minimize delays.⁸ The country currently has 102 points of entry (PoE) with 31 of those being international border checkpoints and four international airports, 19 land border checkpoints, and 52 traditional checkpoints and will potentially need to open more as transport infrastructure is developed. Despite the increasing complexity of managing its borders, Lao People's Democratic Republic lacks a comprehensive training curriculum for border officials, procedures are not standardized, and most PoE do not have an automated Border Management Information System (BMIS) making it difficult to record, share and act on information. This poses challenges in managing increased cross-border migration flows.

¹ DESA, 2019. *International Migrant Stock*. [Online] Available at:

www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp.

² IOM, UNDP, UNESCO and UNHABITAT, 2020. *Overview of Internal Migration in Lao PDR*, Bangkok: UNESCO.

³ IOM, 2013. *Assessing Potential Changes in the Migration Patterns of Myanmar Migrants and their Impacts on Thailand*, Bangkok: International Organization for Migration; Asian Research Center for Migration.

⁴ (1) economic growth; (2) human resource development; (3) well-being; (4) environmental protection and disaster risk reduction; (5) regional integration; and (6) governance.

⁵ www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/remittances-matter.html.

⁶ Retrieved 3/01/2022 from data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=LA.

⁷ UNCDF, 2020. *Remittance as a Driver of Women's Financial Inclusion in the Mekong Region*, New York: UNCDF.

⁸ World Bank, 2020. *From Landlocked to Land-Linked: Unlocking the Potential of Lao-China Rail Connectivity*, Washington, D.C.

2.2 Human resource development

As noted in the 9th NSEDP, Lao People's Democratic Republic has the advantage of geographical proximity to neighbouring countries with good economic growth, which provides a stable basis for development and a source of employment for its young people, which can in turn contribute to national development. Lao People's Democratic Republic's workforce is younger than many of its neighbours, with 60 per cent of the population under the age of 25, which bodes well for Lao People's Democratic Republic's expanding economy in the long term. However, currently the economy is not able to absorb the number of people entering the workforce annually and rural–urban migration has placed pressure on the existing job market in places such as Vientiane Capital. The share of youth in the 18-30 age group not in education, employment, or training accounts for about 39 per cent for men and 45 per cent for women, and youth unemployment is also much higher than the national unemployment average.⁹ International migration can provide both employment and training opportunities that benefit migrants and the wider community during migrants' overseas employment and on return.

An estimated 55 per cent of migrants in Thailand arrive underqualified for the positions they hold.¹⁰ Under 5 per cent of migrant workers from the Lao People's Democratic Republic receive training prior to their departure, while 65 per cent receive on-the-job training in Thailand.¹¹ To date, Lao migrant workers have been predominantly employed in domestic work, construction, manufacturing, agriculture and entertainment work. However, projections show that while the majority of migrant workers are still likely to be absorbed into low skill jobs more gaps in medium to high-skilled jobs are projected due to the aging populations in the more developed economies.¹² Cross-regional skills recognition will be key to both enabling Lao migrants to secure good positions internationally, as well as to secure employment commensurate to their skills on their return. The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic has been in dialogue with Thai authorities and skills providers to strengthen skills recognition and certification for migrant workers in the broader region.

The growth of industry around the capital and along the Thai border, as well as large infrastructure projects, have spurred internal and inward migration. The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic has supported the development of special economic zones (SEZ) to encourage foreign investment in the country. As of 2018, the zones had attracted actual investment capital of almost USD5.7 billion and created 55,771 jobs, including 12,596 positions for Lao workers.¹³ While their potential to spur economic growth is recognized, a global World Bank review of the impact of SEZ points to the importance of ensuring that labour rights are respected, and that there are sufficient services and infrastructure for the workers drawn to the sites.¹⁴

2.3 Well-being

Making informed decisions about migration is an important step to help migrants' take control of their own well-being. Among Lao labour migrants in Thailand, only 4 per cent of those surveyed post arrival in Thailand had attended pre-departure training. Of migrants attending pre-departure, information on labour rights was said to be the most useful (32%), followed by laws and legal obligations (17 %), culture and customs (13 %), and money and remittances (12 %).¹⁵

⁹ Figures from NSEDP.

¹⁰ OECD/ILO, *How Immigrants Contribute to Thailand's Economy*, Paris, 2017.

¹¹ Harkins, B. L. D. a. S. T., 2017. *Risks and Rewards: Outcomes of Labour Migration in South-East Asia*, Thailand: International Labour Organization and International Organization for Migration.

¹² IOM, 2021. *Assessing Potential Changes in Lao Migration Trends and Patterns*, Vientiane: International Organization of Migration.

¹³ www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2020/02/06/special-economic-zones-in-laos-attract-huge-investments-and-create-jobs.

¹⁴ World Bank Group. 2017. *Special Economic Zones: An Operational Review of Their Impacts*. World Bank, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵ Harkins, B. L. D. a. S. T., 2017. *Risks and Rewards: Outcomes of Labour Migration in South-East Asia*, Thailand: International Labour Organization and International Organization for Migration.

A lack of knowledge makes migrants, whether internal or international, more at risk of exploitation and trafficking in person (TIP). This is compounded by the fact that many migrants are young, sometimes children, from rural and border areas. Other factors include high rates of irregular migration, unequal economic development, and limited law enforcement and prosecution of perpetrators. While Lao People's Democratic Republic remains on Tier 2, the 2021 TIP Report notes that there has been significant progress in investigating, prosecuting, and convicting traffickers, identifying and referring victims to protection services, and implementing measures to protect the rights of Lao migrant workers abroad. However, the report notes the increased risk of trafficking in SEZ, agricultural plantations, and large-scale infrastructure projects. Victim protection services were also shown to be insufficient, especially for male victims of trafficking. The investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of TIP cases were limited. Many of the recommendations made to counter TIP in the 2021 Report related to improving migration management.

Legal and policy frameworks in Lao People's Democratic Republic related to the social protection and health of migrants are limited, and unlike in neighbouring countries there is no overarching migrant health policy. Where there is legislation, there is often ambiguity in the use of the term “migrant” as to whether it refers to international or internal migrants. Although some bilateral MoUs or laws include provisions for social protection most migrant workers end up without these included in work contracts due to widespread gaps in the implementation of such regulations.¹⁶ Furthermore, migrants with access to social protection in their country of destination are generally unable to send back benefits that they may accrue, such as old age pensions. For internal and returning migrants, it is costly and time-consuming to move their residence registration/family book, leaving many migrants unable to access government social services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that regional integration needs to go beyond economic cooperation. The Asia region, especially the Greater Mekong Subregion, is characterized by epidemiological and ecological similarities in many respects, but there are also intraregional differences in health system capacities and disease prevalence which are linked by migration. Furthermore, economic commonalities in the region such as the prevalence of mega-development projects, or the high rate of regular and irregular migration also impacts the health profile of the region. For example, IOM found that cases of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) were reported to be increasing in areas around the Boten-Vientiane Railway construction sites.¹⁷ The link between health and migration warrants regional cooperation, which has been established for some specific health issues, for example malaria elimination, but there remain significant gaps in terms of health systems and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) approaches and their intersection with health.

2.4 Environmental protection, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction

As noted in the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (NSDRR) 2021–2030, as a landlocked country with low seismic activity and low population density, Lao People's Democratic Republic has not historically seen high impacts from disasters. However, the country is experiencing increasing losses from extreme weather and climate related disasters, notably as a result of floods, storms and drought. Disasters in 2018, including flooding and dam collapse, affected more than 600,000 people and 2,300 villages resulting in significant, and in some cases permanent, displacement.¹⁸ Environmental degradation is also taking place as a result of large initiatives such as hydropower projects, transport infrastructure, and natural resource extraction, which often also lead to migration and displacement. Additionally, the country's high reliance on natural resources and agriculture, as well as limited adaptive capacity partly owed to its LDC status, make Lao People's Democratic Republic highly vulnerable to climate change.¹⁹ Anticipated climatic changes across the Mekong region, including in temperature and precipitation, are expected to create several challenges such as worsening flood conditions and deterioration in ecosystems and ecosystem services. These in turn are expected to have several negative socioeconomic impacts on countries including Lao People's Democratic Republic, with potential implications for human mobility.

¹⁶ IOM and WHO, 2017. *Population Mobility and Malaria*, New Dehli: World Health Organization.

¹⁷ IOM, 2018. *Migration Health Impact Assessment*, Vientiane, International Organization for Migration.

¹⁸ Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021. *Nationally Determined Contribution*, Vientiane.

¹⁹ Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2021. *Nationally Determined Contribution*, Vientiane.

2.5 Regional integration

Recognizing the potential for intraregional migration to contribute to the economic development, the increased mobility of skilled migrant workers was included as a key policy measure for ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). To date, this has had limited impact in large part because the vast majority of the migrant workers involved in intra-ASEAN migration are employed in low- and medium-skilled occupations that are not covered by AEC's skills recognition arrangements. However, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 suggests additional mutual recognition arrangements may be developed to address the growing demand for low- and medium-skilled migrant workers in the region.²⁰ Expanding bilateral or regional agreements for low- and medium-skilled work would fill labour market needs and expand the channels available for Lao migrants to migrate legally, in line with the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration. The Mutual Legal Assistance among law enforcement officials between Lao People's Democratic Republic and key neighbouring countries needs to be strengthened to investigate the TIP cases where a suspect resides outside of the Lao territory.

Other regional and subregional platforms that impact migration management include forums such as the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program 2030 which provides a platform for cooperation in areas such as labour mobility and safe migration, education and skills, the Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants, the Colombo Process on protection of and provision of services to migrant workers, the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, and the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking.

2.6 Governance

Migration governance is a combination of frameworks, institutions and procedures covering aspects such as migrants' rights, to a "whole-of-government" approach, bilateral and regional cooperation, labour mobility aspects and mobility dimensions of crises, as well as how migration can be governed in a safe and orderly way. Currently the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic lacks an overarching coordination mechanism for migration governance. The Government participated in the Global Compact for Migration regional voluntary review in March 2021, however national consultations and coordination meetings are yet to take place. The UN Network on Migration has not been established in Lao People's Democratic Republic yet. However, there are existing forums dealing with aspects of migration, such as the Labour Migration Network established under ILO's TRIANGLE in ASEAN programme. Lao People's Democratic Republic is also part of the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour.

A major challenge for migration management efforts for technical specialists and policymakers in Lao People's Democratic Republic alike is the lack of data due to the sensitive nature of works, especially in terms of collecting personal data as it needs to be managed in a way that protects victims of trafficking. Additionally, most available data can only be accessed through offline modalities making it challenging to develop whole-of-government and whole-of-society responses to migration.

3. Strategic priorities

The strategic priorities described below outline the IOM Lao Democratic People's Republic contributions to the UNSDCF outcomes and the IOM Strategic Results Framework.

3.1.1 Strategic Priority 1 – People's well-being (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcomes 2 and 3)

To ensure that migrants and their communities will have more equitable and inclusive access to and will benefit from better quality social services and protection, including during emergencies IOM will focus on:

- leveraging the Organization's operational presence to respond earlier and more effectively to immediate needs during times of disasters;

²⁰ IOM, 2021. *Assessing Potential Changes in Lao Migration Trends and Patterns*, Vientiane: International Organization of Migration.

- increasing access to health care along migration routes and mitigating the risks that population mobility may pose to individual and public health.

IOM will directly and/or in partnership with authorities, UN agencies, and civil society groups assist people affected by disasters through the provision of non-food items (NFI), shelter, cash, emergency health, mental health and psychosocial support, and individual protection services, and other assistance as needed. IOM will continue to co-lead the Shelter and NFI clusters when they are activated under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Framed by guidelines developed under the Migration in Countries in Crisis Initiative (MICIC) and taking advantage of its presence throughout the region, IOM will work with Government and humanitarian actors to integrate migrant populations into climate change adaptation measures and disaster preparedness, response and recovery both in Lao People's Democratic Republic and countries receiving significant number of Lao migrants. IOM will ensure that mobility is adequately considered in communication and community engagement activities, and that migrants and mobile communities have appropriate information and opportunities to influence responses affecting them. IOM will work with other responders to strengthen data collection and analysis, including integrating the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) into responses where there has been significant displacement as well as disaster preparedness.

IOM will coordinate information-sharing between the Ministry of Health (MoH) and neighbouring countries on their national migrant health policies and use the existing Health Technical Working Group under the lead of MoH to develop a similar policy in Lao People's Democratic Republic. Working with the World Health Organization (WHO), IOM will support the Government to enhance existing disease surveillance systems, including community event-based surveillance, particularly among border communities, points of entry, migrant dense areas and displacement sites. IOM will assist the Government to embed public health emergency preparedness and response measures into border management process based on a solid legislative base, including supporting health measures through collecting and verifying Vaccination and Testing Certificates, Passenger Name Records and Advance Passenger Information. IOM will promote safe cross-border mobility at PoE by building capacity of front-line, immigration and border officials in infection prevention and control, disease surveillance, risk communication and community engagement, safe and effective screening, triage, and referral of cases. To inform health responses, IOM and partners will conduct periodic Migrant Health Situational Assessments and Population Mobility Mapping to correlate conventional information on epidemiology, the burden of disease, and health systems capacity with the various health risks associated with human mobility. IOM will provide capacity-building for community health workers, local authorities, and migrants on relevant health-related issues such as protection, identifying diseases, and prevention.

3.1.2 Strategic Priority 2 – Inclusive Prosperity (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcomes 1-3-5)

To ensure migrants and their communities benefit from more inclusive, and resilient, transformative, and sustainable socioeconomic opportunities to reduce poverty and inequalities IOM will prioritize:

- expanding sustainable channels for regular migration that are efficient, innovative and responsive to current and emerging human resources needs in Lao People's Democratic Republic and countries of destination;
- supporting authorities at the national and subnational levels in the implementation of relevant policies that allow migrants and their communities in Lao People's Democratic Republic and abroad to live in equitable, inclusive societies and access the services and social protection they need to thrive;
- ensuring that migrants and displacement affected populations, irrespective of gender, age, disabilities and legal status are protected from exploitation, and have their rights upheld according to national, regional and international laws and frameworks.

IOM will work with relevant ministries on facilitating regular migration, decent work and enhancing the positive benefits of migration. IOM will support bilateral and multilateral negotiations regarding the development of safe, regular migration pathways between Lao People's Democratic Republic and country of destinations through the provision of technical advice and support. To enable labour market efficiency, to ensure proper alignment of skills and knowledge to the needs of the private sector, and to reduce fraudulent and exploitative practices targeting migrant workers, information on the demand for different types of skills, existing market wages, workers' rights and obligations, and training opportunities will be produced and disseminated. Together with ILO, IOM will assist the Government to

work with countries of destination to develop compatible national prior learning and skills recognition frameworks and tools to facilitate the recognition of skills of people migrating for work. IOM will work in partnership with the private sector and Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers to improve their capacity and support for skills training for outbound and returning migrant workers, especially women, and facilitate migrants' access to official certification and effective job matching. Attention will be given towards greater digitization of skills and service provision so as to extend reach.

Migrant training developed in coordination with the Government, including pre-departure and post-arrival orientation, will include information to aid socioeconomic integration. Up-to-date information about migration will be available at Migrant Resource Centres, as well as through outreach to communities with high rates of migration such as border areas. Harnessing the reach of Government and civil society partners, outreach will target vulnerable groups such as children, youth, women and girls. IOM will conduct capacity-building of national and local authorities on migrant integration, especially in areas of high and rapid migration such as SEZ, sites of large-infrastructure projects, and voluntary relocation sites. IOM will work with Government authorities to remove impediments to migrants' access to social protection, especially as they relate to local registration procedures and international portability of social protection. IOM will share regional best practice to monitor remittance costs, expand access to formal remittance channels and support remittance receiving households and migrants to build household assets through improved financial literacy and access to migrant-friendly financial services. The Organization will apply IOM's integrated approach to reintegration of migrants at the individual, community and structural level.

IOM will work with the Government to develop interventions to increase the protection of migrants in countries of destination, including institutionalizing a curriculum for labour attaché and other consular officials on protection of migrants, and assisted voluntary return and reintegration. Together with ILO, IOM will continue to support the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare with the development of bilateral MoUs for the return and reintegration of victims of human and labour rights abuses and accompanying implementation action plans. IOM will support the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and civil society actors to increase the availability and sustainability of legal and protection-related services and assistance programmes for victims and expand these services for male victims through provision of training and equipment. Continuing the work of the [Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking \(CREST\)](#) initiative and based on the shared values outlined in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, IOM and UNDP will partner with businesses operating and sourcing in Lao People's Democratic Republic to address human rights and modern slavery risks in businesses' operations and supply chains through migrant-centred human and labour rights risk assessments. IOM will raise awareness about ethical recruitment practices, provide practical training and tools, and support ethical recruiters in accessing credible accreditation systems such as IOM IRIS Ethical Recruitment and other responsible recruitment markets based on the Employer Pays Principle.

3.1.3 Strategic Priority 3 – Governance and Rule of Law (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcome 6)

In supporting enhanced governance in Lao People's Democratic Republic, IOM will focus on the following priorities:

- advancing its work in supporting good migration governance, strengthening institutions to apply a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach and the implementation of policies that harness the potential of migration for sustainable development;
- expanding its work in support of migration dialogues and partnerships based on a solid evidence base;
- supporting the Government of Lao People's Democratic to prevent and counter transnational crimes associated with migration, such as trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants and document fraud in line with national and international laws and standards.

IOM will provide technical advice to the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to develop a whole-of-government/ whole-of-society approach to migration, including support to counter xenophobia and negative perceptions of migration. IOM will provide technical and logistical support to consultations amongst stakeholders at all levels, including introducing innovative methods such as using information and communication technology to solicit input from mobile and other hard-to-reach populations. IOM will monitor national and international migration policy developments and promote awareness and understanding of international migration law as relevant to the Lao People's Democratic Republic context. For example, IOM will work with the National University of Laos to raise

awareness among law students and will offer internships for graduates. The Organization in Lao People's Democratic Republic will contribute to the international migration discourse, tracking international meetings relevant to the nation's interests, and ensuring adequate representation of relevant government, academic and civil society representatives. IOM will continue to work with the Government to assess the comprehensiveness of national migration governance structures and providing a space for the government and other stakeholders to build a common understanding of challenges and to promote solutions, and to establish a Technical Working Group as a platform to discuss, coordinate and exchange data and information on migration.

In line with the NESDP aim of combating transnational crime associated with migration, the Organization and UNODC will promote integrated border management and effective immigration through technical inputs on policy formulation and its implementation, especially related to civil aviation, customs collection, legislation development and operational capacity-building for border staff. IOM will support the continued development and roll out of compatible digital national civil registration and border management information systems that will aid detection of transnational crime related to migration and generate actionable data. To help manage humanitarian flows Humanitarian Border Management capacity-building assistance will be provided to improve preparedness and establish adequate response mechanisms to protect nationals and foreigners crossing the border while ensuring that the security of the border is maintained.

The Organization will work with UNFPA and UNICEF to assist the Government to strengthen protections for migrants and communities vulnerable to trafficking and for victims of trafficking. IOM will provide support to develop and improve legislation, guidelines, and curriculums, among others to provide basis for implementing anti-human trafficking activities in the country. IOM will continue to co-chair the Anti Human Trafficking Working Group alongside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to bring together government, development partners, UN agencies, and civil society organizations (CSO) to discuss emerging needs and trends that impact the country's ability to address and respond to trafficking in persons and transnational organized crime. IOM will build the capacity of border personnel and other relevant government officials involved in processing migrants on victim identification and screening measures and victim referral procedures in line with the Anti-Trafficking Law and Operation Guideline to Protect, Support and Refer Victims of Trafficking. In coordination with other actors, IOM will conduct and disseminate research on current and emerging trends related to human trafficking and associated forms of exploitation and abuse. IOM will work in partnership with UN agencies, civil society actors and communities to ensure that emerging issues are quickly brought to the attention of the Government and will equip vulnerable populations with the information they need to migrate safely and access assistance. IOM will work with the Lao Women's Union, chief of villages, local authorities and others to ensure that confidential channels for reporting are available and linked to support services.

3.1.4 Strategic Priority 4 – Environment, climate change and resilience (aligned with 9th NSEDP Outcome 4)

Addressing the adverse drivers and risks of migration that contribute to vulnerability, IOM will seek to build national, community and individual capacity to prevent, mitigate, adapt, anticipate, and prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate change impacts and disasters through:

- preparing for higher numbers of people moving in and out of situations of vulnerability, stemming from a range of complex drivers including climate change, environmental degradation, poverty and exploitation, and addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience that ensure long-term progress and impact (the Humanitarian-Development Nexus).

Research will be undertaken to improve understanding and enhance data on linkages between climate change, disasters, and migration for use by policymakers and practitioners, including enhancing the understanding of trapped populations and those most vulnerable to climate impacts. Based on this evidence, IOM will work with UN-Habitat and UNDRR to support the Government to develop policies and effective responses to address the human mobility dimensions of climate change and environmental degradation, including in relation to migration, displacement and planned relocation.

3.2 Cross-cutting themes

3.2.1 Rights based approach to programming

IOM will ensure a rights-based approach to migration through the inclusion of the following: (a) activities aimed at acquainting Lao migrant workers, especially vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, youth and women, with their rights; (b) protective bilateral, regional or multilateral migration agreements; (c) access to formal migration mechanisms through the strengthening and implementation of formal bilateral migration mechanisms; (d) comprehensive medical services to ascertain whether migrants and family members are in reasonable health and to ensure adequate medical attention throughout the migration continuum; and (e) promoting normative frameworks, such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

3.2.2 Sustainable Development Goals and Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

IOM, as the UN Migration Agency, has made a commitment to help the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic to achieve the SDGs. The central reference to migration in the 2030 Agenda is target 10.7 under the goal "Reduce inequality in and among countries." It is a call to "facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies." However, migration and migrants are directly relevant to the implementation of all the SDGs and many of their targets. The SDGs, and the commitment to leave no one behind and to reach the furthest behind, will not be achieved without due consideration of migration. IOM will work to ensure that the goals linked to migrants' rights remain part of the Government's agenda, by strengthening national and regional capacities for collection, analysis and dissemination of migration data, with emphasis on data collection to access to rights of migrants.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration reinforces support for both the objectives and guiding principles which is rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Reaffirming the commitment of Lao People's Democratic Republic during the 2021 Asia Pacific Regional Review to the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration at the national level and IOM as the coordinator and secretariat of the UN Network on Migration will convene UN system-wide support working collectively in addressing migration priorities, including as regards upholding the rights and wellbeing of migrants and their communities.

3.2.3 Gender-mainstreaming

While migrants are at risk of being left behind generally, women migrant workers from Lao People's Democratic Republic face unique challenges due to discriminatory practices resulting from the intersection of their gender, ethnicity, migrant status and specific work. Women migrant workers face impediments to regular migration into low skilled sectors such as the domestic and entertainment sectors and often migrant irregularly limiting their access to protection. Domestic work is largely unregulated and may not provide access to social protection where these schemes are restricted to "employees" or "workers", distinct from "helpers", "nannies" or "maids". Exclusion from social assistance and insurance schemes compounds the vulnerability of these women migrant workers, particularly to health risks and harmful working environments. As a result, this strategy will have a strong focus on removing impediments to women travelling regularly and improving access to social and legal protection.

3.2.4 Build Back Better: COVID-19 Recovery

Socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have touched the entire population and included income and job losses, macroeconomic instability, and serious impacts among others on education, food security, women and girls and people with disabilities. The pandemic affected the Lao People's Democratic Republic economy through multiple channels including tourism, international trade, foreign investment, commodity prices, exchange rates, and lower remittances. IOM will work with its partners to "build back better". The focus of this will be on stronger, equity-focused health systems; strengthened social protection and public services; job creation for people-centred and environmentally sustainable economies; development of gender responsive economic policies, based on international solidarity and multilateral collaboration; and improved social cohesion and community resilience.

3.3 Partnerships and coordination

The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic's ministries and agencies will continue to be the key partners for IOM. IOM will continue to discuss the workplans with key ministries and relevant stakeholders for the effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects/programmes. On 1 September 2021, the IOM and the

Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic signed a Cooperation Agreement at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to further strengthen cooperation through capacity-building, advisory services and technical cooperation on migration issues. IOM regularly reports its activities to Ministry of Planning and Investment yet promotes a whole-of-government approach to migration management and governance by regularly engaging relevant government stakeholders. IOM is an active member of the UNCT in Lao People's Democratic Republic. The UNCT, under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, is responsible for the overall effectiveness and implementation of the UNSDCF contributions and results along with its partners. IOM will work in partnership with other UN agencies to develop and implement joint work plans and integrate these into its own programming documents. IOM is the co-lead of the UNSDCF Migration Policy Output, alongside ILO. The Organization is also the lead for the shelter and non-food items clusters. IOM aims to expand its role in UN joint projects to combine the expertise of UN agencies to the benefit of migrants.

IOM's civil society partnerships leverage the many areas of common interest and as well as complimentary expertise in policy and operational areas of migration. CSOs often have strong ties to the migrant communities, with strong capacities for community education and other community-based services, an aspect which complements and enhances the impact of IOM efforts. IOM will also seek to intensify its cooperation with trade unions and professional associations to strengthen their capacities to represent the needs and experiences of migrant workers, improve policy and legislation, and provide services to migrant workers where necessary. Civil society partners, including academic institutes, will strengthen IOM's ability to generate data and research to inform its own and other interventions. Given the preeminence of migration for employment, IOM will prioritize working strategically with private sector actors to improve the welfare of labour migrants, promote their rights and prevent exploitation. IOM will collaborate with businesses and associations both large and small to promote decent work, ethical recruitment, social compliance and sustainability in supply chains.

4. Institutional development

4.1 Policy capacity

IOM will seek to bring to bear the wealth of experience and expertise held across the Organization, with specific emphasis on incorporating learning and best practices from global and regional policy initiatives to Lao People's Democratic Republic. It will develop its own and partners' (a) analytical capacity to absorb and process information in all aspects of policy formulation, decision-making, implementation and evaluation; (b) operational capacity for leadership, shared vision, constituency building, policy research, and ability to develop an inclusive policy conversation; and (c) political capacity to identify other key stakeholders and understanding their essential interests and ideologies as well as the relationships among them.

4.2 Knowledge management, monitoring, evaluation and data

IOM is committed to delivering consistently high-quality and timely responses, assure high impact outputs vis-à-vis objectives, and continuously aims to incorporate learning to improve migration outcomes. Focusing on accountability to migrant populations, partners and donors, IOM ensures that its credibility is maintained and strengthened. Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF) objectives and principles are already embedded in programmes and activities within the country, with results-based management principles guiding both planning and reporting. During the strategy period, IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic will commit to utilizing and building monitoring and evaluation capacity to enable more critical analysis of its approaches to programming and for its collaboration with the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic and within the UNCT framework. This will ensure that learning informs a shared understanding of challenges and enables cooperative course correction going forward. To this end, IOM staff will participate in monitoring and evaluation training to enhance necessary skills and share respective experiences to enrich learning outcomes. IOM's data mechanisms, the DTM, Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), and the Regional Data Hub (RDH) will allow for data-driven programming, and improved advice and support to policymakers and partners.

4.3 Communications and visibility

In light of the multidimensionality and complexity of migration, strategies for inclusive and consistent communication remain key to informing perspectives, enabling critical debate and advancing the objectives of improved migration management. With its extensive operational reach, rich knowledge base and the global platform afforded to it as the leading migration agency, IOM is well-positioned to lead the global conversation on migration. Acknowledging this

opportunity, IOM Lao People's Democratic Republic will seek to improve its ability to effectively communicate and create visibility for key issues impacting upon migrants and societies, contributing to generating a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities while reinforcing positive migration messages. To this end, IOM will seek to develop the capacity of staff and partners, making use of multiple outlets to advance contextualized messaging and advocacy, including joint advocacy within the United Nations system through its role in the UNCTs. In an effort to reinforce the voice of migrants and their communities, IOM will endeavour to bolster platforms for migrants to share their experiences and work with an expanded range of migration partners.

4.4 Innovation

As a deeply operational and projectized organization, innovation is hardwired into IOM's daily activities. Indeed, IOM's ability to adapt is the highest form of innovation. In this strategic period, as digital connectivity in Lao People's Democratic Republic is steadily growing and many of the more remote parts of the country are beginning to gain access, IOM will focus on the digitization of its and its partners' information and services. The objective of this digitization is to improve effectiveness, governance, and efficiency of programmes targeting migrants through enhancing:

- Empowerment, evidence, demand management and personalization;
- Reliability, participation and cost effectiveness;
- Openness, transparency, accountability and autonomy.

4.5 Staff development

To achieve organizational objectives and maintain competence to meet expectations and challenges now and in the future, IOM recognizes the need to further invest in staff development. Indeed, as the Organization's single most important asset, IOM staff should be cultivated to ensure they can continue to perform in their roles and contribute to achieving the Organization's objectives in fulfilling commitments to migrant populations and the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic. As such, institutionalization of staff development must continue apace and be regularly upgraded to ensure staff efficiency, effectiveness, consistency, currency and confidence, and that potential weaknesses are addressed at an early stage. In Lao People's Democratic Republic, IOM will continue promoting a culture of learning and knowledge-sharing, skills development and investment in its staff.

5. The way forward

By 2026, IOM will have further consolidated its expertise and capacities within Lao People's Democratic Republic and expanded and deepened its cooperation and collaboration with a diversified range of interlocutors and partners. It will have progressed work under its Cooperation Agreement with the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic, contributing to advancing shared sustainable development and migration governance objectives. The Organization's voice and reputation as a pragmatic and principled partner will have been strengthened through the contribution within relevant national forums, demonstrated impact of its operations and policy expertise across a range of critical issues within the country, as well as its proactive approach to partnerships. In short, during the coming strategy period, IOM in Lao People's Democratic Republic will aspire to strengthen its position as the leading migration organization, remaining focused on improving migration outcomes for people and society. To this end, IOM shall invest in institutional development and strengthening, with an emphasis on developing staff capacity, realigning its capacity to adapt to emerging mobility dynamics while enabling strategic expansion of the Organization's partnerships.



INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)
MISSION IN LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

UN House, 3rd Floor, Lane Xang Avenue, P.O. Box 345, Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic

• iomlaopdr@iom.int • www.iom.int