



HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORKING GROUP

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NEWS REPORT

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AUSTRALIA might have been a key player in the decade-long effort to stamp out human trafficking in Asia, but the problem is worse and the criminal networks more sophisticated than ever, a new Unicef report finds.

Australia's anti-trafficking agreements with Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Thailand and its role as co-founder of the Bali Process on people-smuggling and human trafficking are laudable but Unicef believes it could be doing more.

In its report *Child Trafficking in East and Southeast Asia*, released yesterday, Unicef finds that while countries are willing to introduce laws on human trafficking, implementation and enforcement have been thin on the ground. It also argues Australia should be supporting preventive programs to protect vulnerable children in greater measure across the Asian region as a way to beat the criminal networks.

"We have a situation now where there are dozens of child trafficking programs in the region, but there are also dozens of child labour, sexual exploitation, child violence and neglect, and juvenile justice programs as well," the report says.

"The core vulnerabilities that put children at risk in these situations should really be addressed together rather than separately."

Unicef says child trafficking, where children are either bought or taken from their families and sold for cheap labour or sexual servitude, is one of the fastest-growing, and most lucrative, criminal activities in the world.

Children and their families are often unaware of the dangers of trafficking, believing better employment opportunities and safer lives lie in other countries. It notes some estimates put the number of people trafficked worldwide as high as 4 million a year.

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