



Diaspora engagement mapping

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Facts & figures

Terminology: While there is no dedicated diaspora engagement policy in Laos, the Constitution (amended in 2025) refers to its diaspora as “Lao citizens/people residing/living abroad” as well as “overseas Lao”.¹ In other official policies, the terms “migrant workers” and “youth migrants” have also been used.²

Political rights



Dual citizenship³



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad⁴

With restrictions



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **1.49%**

Remittances inflow (USD million): **246.59**

Voting from abroad⁵

At embassies and consulates



Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from [UNDESA \(2024\)](#) and remittances from the [World Bank \(2024\)](#).

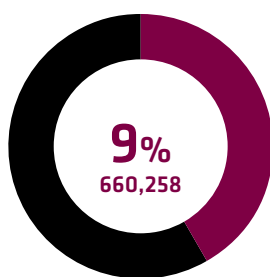
Emigration



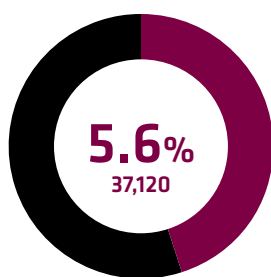
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 41.7%
♀ 58.3%



♂ 45%
♀ 55%

Top countries of destination



Thailand	285,819
United States	176,588
Bangladesh	118,769
France	36,591
Canada	13,292

1 Laos National Assembly (2025), [Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic \(Amended Edition, 2025\)](#).

2 Lao Statistics Bureau (2021), [9th Five-year National Socio-economic Development Plan \(2021-2025\)](#).

3 Lao PDR (1990), [Law on Lao Nationality](#).

4 Voting from abroad is allowed only for legislative elections. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2024), [Voting from Abroad Database](#).

5 Vientiane Times (2021), [Polling stations set up for Lao citizens to vote overseas](#).

Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2002** ● **Memorandum of Understanding between Laos and Thailand⁶** was signed to establish appropriate employment procedures, facilitate the return of workers after the termination of their employment contracts, implement proper labour control measures and prevent illegal migration, trafficking and illegal employment.
- 2016** ● **Vision 2030 and 10-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2016-2025** – Under Part III: “Policies, mechanisms and implementation measures” of the Vision 2030 and 10-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy, Laos aims to create labour migration policies to support the country’s development.
- 2020** ● **Decree No. 245 on the Placement of Lao Workers to Work Abroad⁷** came into effect in 2020 after many years of consultations and refinement. The decree aims to enhance protections for Lao migrant workers and improve the regulation of recruitment agencies that send them abroad. In 2025, a process was launched to align the provisions of the decree with the Employment Law (2023), which came into effect after the decree and sets out regulations for how Laotians can work abroad.
- 2021** ● **9th Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NESDP) 2021-2025** outlines Laos’ national development planning process, highlights the role that young migrant workers play in the country’s growth and recognises the need to invest in their health and education. The plan aims to expand the employment service network to address illegal migration to foreign countries, ensure measures for systemic migration, and address issues of employment among workers returning home from abroad. Under Outcome 2: “Improved quality of human resources to meet development, research capacity, science and technology needs and create value-added production and services”, Laos aims to create 392,197 jobs both locally and abroad.
- 2021** ● **National COVID-19 Recovery Plan** lists practical recommendations to help Laos recover from the effects of COVID-19, such as the unexpected return of Lao migrants from abroad and the subsequent loss in remittances, as well as increases in the poverty rate, inequality and unemployment. The plan recognises the lack of migration governance policies, reintegration frameworks, and high-quality data on migrants in the country. Migrant workers are the target group of several recommendations, including the strengthening of the system for sending Lao workers abroad to reduce irregular migration, the development of MOUs with key destination countries (e.g. Thailand, Malaysia), and the establishment of stronger data systems.⁸
- 2021** ● **Laos government decree No. 475 on visa issuance and stay duration in Laos for people of Laotian origin who now live abroad** issued in 2021 offers multiple-entry visas and extended stay duration for people of Lao origin who are residents in other countries, along with other family members, aiming to streamline visa and residency procedures to encourage returning nationals’ involvement in national development. According to Article 7 of the decree, the single-entry visa is valid for up to 60 days. The multiple-entry visa is valid for a maximum of 24 months, with permitted duration of stay for up to 90 days for each entry. Two extensions can be granted, for a maximum of 90 days each, if a person has a Lao national, entity or recognised organisation as a guarantor.
- 2022** ● **Ministerial Agreement No. 1050 on the Management of Employment Service Enterprise⁹** introduced a dispute resolution mechanism for migrant workers, providing them a place to report their grievances and seek support. As with Decree No. 245 on the Placement of Lao Workers to Work Abroad, a revision process was started in 2025 to align the Ministerial Agreement with Laos’ new Employment Law (2023).

6 ILO (2002), *Memorandum of Understanding between the Royal Thai Government and the Government of Lao PDR on employment cooperation*.

7 ILO (2025), TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note: Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

8 IOM (2023), *Migration in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic: A Country Profile 2023*.

9 ILO (2025), TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note: Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

- 2025 ● The **2025 revision of the Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** presented a major amendment to Article 47 by recognising Lao people living abroad as an indispensable part of the national community and upholding the protection of their lawful rights and interests. The amended article also “encourages, promotes and creates conditions for overseas Lao to protect and promote the cultural heritage of Laos, maintain good relations with their families and hometowns and contribute to national development”.

Practices

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Employment Permit System (EPS) 2023

Through the EPS, Lao migrant workers are able to work in South Korea for temporary labour migration. With the help of the Korean government, the programme coordinates the recruitment, training and oversight of migrant workers, and has proven helpful in reducing recruitment costs and the fees paid by them. The EPS allows them to work in Korea for three years, after which they can renew their contracts for another one year and ten months. Upon return to Laos, migrant workers can also reapply for more employment opportunities in South Korea. The use of the EPS is backed by an MOU between the two countries signed in September 2016.¹⁰

QR codes for sending money (2023)

In 2023, it was reported that Laos will start using QR code transactions to facilitate money transfers and payments by workers and tourists in neighbouring countries. The initiative was implemented to address the lack of effective channels to enable Laotians abroad to send money home to Laos. The pilot phase was conducted with Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia at the end of 2023. Once the system is fully in place, Laos hopes that it will enable citizens abroad to transfer money through the banking system and save transaction costs, helping them avoid risks associated with using informal and unregulated channels. The system will also help the central bank monitor remittances more closely.

Establishment of employment centres for returning Laotians 2022

In the aftermath of COVID-19, the Laotian government set up job centres in every province in the country to provide returning migrants with information on work opportunities. The new centres were also foreseen by the government as sources of monitoring and reporting data on employment policies, enabling the use of labour market information and the promotion of relevant skills in the country.¹¹

The Annual Gathering for People of Lao Race Living Abroad

On 12 November 2024, the Committee on Lao Overseas Affairs, in co-operation with the Lao Front for National Development, held the first annual gathering for people of Lao race living abroad in Vientiane, under the theme ““Love Homeland”” or ““Huk Ban Keud””. The event aimed at strengthening connections between the Lao diaspora and their homeland by serving as a forum for Lao expatriates to explore investment opportunities in the country's hospitality, education, and agriculture sectors, discuss their roles in the socio-economic development of Lao PDR and share their suggestions with the government.

10 ILO (2023), *Precarious pathways: Migration patterns and service needs of Lao migrant workers*; Lao News Agency (2023), *Laos, R. Korea discuss Lao worker export to Korea*.

11 The Nation (2022), *Skilled Lao labourers return to jobs in Thailand*.

Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand (PROMISE) Programme

Led by IOM, in partnership with UN Women, and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the PROMISE programme aims to improve employment opportunities for migrants in Laos through enhanced skills and social protection. The project successfully launched MitrThai.com, the first online migration information hub for migrant workers in Thailand – a top destination country for many Laotian migrant workers. The hub provides information (available in Lao language) on migration to Thailand, as well as living and working there.

>> Observations

The “Observations” and “Obstacles” sections contain additional information on the context of diaspora engagement that does not fit directly into the other sections. They are based on a combination of literature review and comments from the authors. New information is incorporated during the annual updates. Readers are invited to verify the relevance of the information at the time of reading, as the context may have evolved.

As the share of Laotians living abroad has been growing, mostly due to labour migration to neighbouring Thailand, the government has been increasing its efforts to sign memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with countries of destination,¹² as well as better monitor remittances sent by migrant workers. Despite this progress, efforts to engage with the wider Laotian diaspora (i.e. other than migrant workers) to attract highly skilled human capital and diaspora investments into the country appear to remain limited.

Emigration from the country is often pursued by young Laotians seeking jobs to support their families, as the country suffers from a lack of job security and low wages. The number of Laotians migrating continues to increase every year, especially to Thailand, where there is a high demand for low-skilled labour in the agriculture, infrastructure, manufacturing, and service sectors.¹³ Migration from Laos is also highly gendered, with an estimated 56% of emigrants being women. However, many of them obtain work abroad through irregular channels and therefore have fewer opportunities for decent employment and less access to protection and services in their countries of destination.¹⁰

Moreover, many political activists who hold anti-regime sentiments also continue to flee the country, mostly into Thailand, and have established diaspora groups that aim to promote democracy and political exiles' protection and resettlement into their countries of destination. Many of these government critics and activists are being targeted but have little to no protection.¹⁴

¹² ILO (2023), *Precarious pathways: Migration patterns and service needs of Lao migrant workers*.

¹³ ILO (2002), *Memorandum of Understanding between the Royal Thai Government and the Government of Lao PDR on employment cooperation*.

¹⁴ Walker, T. (2023), *Why are Laos activists being targeted abroad?*.



Obstacles

- **Lack of migration framework:** Policies to manage the migration of Laotians abroad and engage with them for development remain extremely limited. While the government has taken steps to pass legislation to protect migrant workers abroad, as well as implement initiatives to better harnesses remittances sent back home, it has yet to pursue the integration of migration into broader development policy planning.¹⁵
- **Remittance systems:** There are limited frameworks on the management and promotion of remittance transactions in Laos, despite their importance in the country's economy.
- **Dearth of data:** There is a need for Laos to improve its collection and management of data on migration, which could help inform policies concerning its diaspora. Many inconsistencies continue to exist in migration-related definitions and methodologies, and statisticians often use outdated systems to manage information.
- **Complex administrative procedures:** While MoUs with countries of destination, such as Thailand, have facilitated an increase in the number of Laotians moving abroad, admission through the MoU process still represents a relatively small proportion of Lao migrant workers. Due to costly, time consuming and complex procedures for recruitment, many enter countries of destination through irregular channels, increasing their vulnerability to labour rights abuses.¹⁶

¹⁵ IOM (2023), *Migration in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: A Country Profile 2023*.

¹⁶ IOM (2024), *An analysis of migration trends of Lao migrants for Lao People's Democratic Republic in Two Selected Provinces: Savannakhet and Xayaboury*; ILO (2023), *Precarious pathways: Migration patterns and service needs of Lao migrant workers*.

Annex: List of Actors

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 1967

Laos is a member country of ASEAN, where it often actively participates in dialogues and initiatives to promote safe labour migration in the region. To this end, ASEAN has put in place various strategies, including the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and the ASEAN Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers in ASEAN, among others.

- **National institutions**
 - At ministerial level

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) 1993

MLSW is responsible for leading national and regional efforts to regulate migration and negotiate cross-border agreements with countries of destination. The ministry also works to combat trafficking and implement victim protection programmes, as well as support repatriation efforts.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)

MOFA is responsible for representing Laos in international affairs and strengthening ties with other countries and with international organisations. It is organised into departments representing each major region (i.e., Asia, Pacific and Africa Department; Europe and America Department), as well as a Lao Overseas Affairs Department and a Consular Department. Laos' MOFA has seven missions across Europe, namely in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Lao Federation of Trade Unions

As Laos' only trade union, their Department of Labour Protection is responsible for protecting the rights of migrant workers. They assist in the resolution of conflicts between workers and recruitment agencies, as well as spread information about the realities of migration among the Lao population.

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Since nearly all the Laotian diaspora resides in Thailand, with some in the United States, at the time of writing in 2024, no Laotian diaspora organisations were identified in Europe.

Read more about diaspora organisations
in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)"

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