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UN Volunteer Chamrieng San (Cambodia) serves with UNODC. Here, he is conducting a survey on implications and possible solutions to illicit trafficking in the Kratie province, Cambodia, where women living in the border community were keen to participate and share their input.

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Volunteering to reduce the impact of illicit trafficking in Southeast Asian border communities

Fifty national UN Volunteers and UN Community Volunteers are serving with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) in Southeast Asia. They have been collecting first-hand information on the root causes, implications and possible solutions to illicit trafficking in vulnerable border locations in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The survey, carried out with financial resources from Japan, aims to provide a better understanding of needs and expectations in border communities, linked to the threats to security and wellbeing posed by illicit trafficking. People living in border communities, particularly in remote areas, tend to be less involved in the development of public policies, thus also benefit less.

Across the five countries, the UN Volunteers reached out to over 3,700 community members to capture perceptions of border communities on factors that influence and/or drive people to engage in illegal trafficking across land borders. In each country, the UN Community Volunteers were supported by a national UN Volunteer specialist, while in Viet Nam, all UN Volunteers were national specialists.

“ When addressing illicit trafficking, the focus on people is often eclipsed by the targeting of organized crime groups. Yet, these flows do impact communities in border areas. We need to better understand, at the granular level, what factors lead communities and their members to adopt a given attitude towards illicit trafficking flows. Without this, no response can be comprehensive. The support of the UN Volunteers has been crucial in this regard. --Mr Julien Garsany, UNODC Deputy Regional Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific

In Thailand, 11 UN Volunteers reached out to over 1,200 community members in 10 provinces through the survey.

“ Mine was a great experience, as I learnt about the issues local people are facing. Many people are desperate for sustainable and long-term solutions to their problems, and we cannot rely on the government alone to resolve them. Therefore, I truly believe that UNODC will be key to finding solutions, and I am proud to be part of this project as a UN Volunteer. --Teerin Chanwatana, national UN Volunteer Data Compiling and Translation Officer with the UNODC Regional Office in Bangkok, Thailand

One of the UN Volunteers conducting the survey has a disability, a testimony to UNV's efforts at inclusion among the talent it provides to UN partners.



UN Volunteer Nattaya Meepunga (Thailand) conducted the survey in Si Sa Ket province, Thailand. Here, she is seen with farmers, community leaders and villagers, who welcomed the initiative. ©UNODC 2021

“ I'm delighted to have been a part of this project. It allowed me to see different aspects of the prevailing conditions and hear genuine opinions from local people who have not felt heard before. -- Nattaya Meepunga, UN Community Volunteer from Sri Sa Ket, Thailand

Eleven UN Volunteers served across 10 provinces in Lao PDR. In conducting the survey, they liaised with village heads to go into their respective communities and collect information on illicit trafficking.

“ Working together with other UN Community Volunteers was a great experience. Through our team effort, we were able to reach out to a considerable number of people and use this opportunity to influence

“ youth positively. Once, I went to Sunghrng to conduct interviews, a teenager asked me about my assignment, and when I explained to her, she said that she hopes one day to volunteer for her community. --Malisa Sengdara, UN Community Volunteer in Vientiane, Lao PDR

In Viet Nam, five national UN Volunteers have so far reached out to over 430 people in nine provinces.

“ I have had an excellent chance to connect with local people in the border areas. Through different interviews, I understood their views on cross-border trafficking. This motivates me to contribute to alternative development and education for people in remote areas. I hope the survey results will enable UNODC to craft a comprehensive plan to combat illicit trafficking in border areas. I am really proud to have been a part of this research as a UN Volunteer. --Nguyen Trung Duc, national UN Volunteer for Research, Viet Nam

The situation is similar in Cambodia, where 11 UN Volunteers have so far reached out to over 390 people across 10 provinces.

“ There is a strong need to strengthen the mechanism to monitor illicit trafficking, and I believe this project will be instrumental in doing so. This will make a significant difference in the people's lives in the community, especially young people. I am proud to have engaged in this important task in my own capacity as a UN Volunteer. --Ros Keng, National UN Volunteer, Cambodia

In Malaysia, nine volunteers have so far reached out to over 450 people in 8 cities in 6 states.

“ The UN does great work globally, and I'm humbled that I've been given the opportunity to take part in any capacity. This assignment

“ required UN Community Volunteers to interact with local communities in their respective states across Malaysia to gather their insights. It was heartening to see that many of our respondents were ready and willing to offer their opinions in response to the issues raised in the survey. In a pandemic where everyone is expected to minimize contact and keep our distance from one another, I love the fact that this assignment allowed UN Volunteers to safely connect with the people around them. --KayLi Wong, national UN Volunteer Data Compiling and Translation Officer, Malaysia

Through the collaboration with UNV's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, the UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific will have more accurate information on the impact of illicit trafficking in more than 40 border provinces throughout the region. This will lead to improved responses to communities' concerns through tailored initiatives responsive to COVID-19 realities on the ground.



• COVID-19 • Coronavirus • UN Community Volunteers

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