

Provincial authorities have reported that many Lao people working in Thailand have returned home after flooding in Bangkok inundated their workplaces, mainly factories.

However, the authorities in provinces that border Thailand have yet to report the exact numbers of returnees as they are still collecting information.

Director of Champassak provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare Mr Khampeng Keovolavong told *Vientiane Times* yesterday that between 300 and 400 labourers who work in Thailand illegally are expected to return to Laos.

The returnees also include some 30 legal workers who had found work in Thailand through recruitment agencies, he said.

“They have returned to Laos because the companies or factories that employ them have closed down, so their employers have given them permission to return.”

Mr Khampeng said there are about 21,000 Lao people working in Thailand illegally, with many working in the provinces. Some work in factories while others are employed as servants or in the agriculture sector. About 1,000 people have found legal employment in Thailand through recruitment agencies, with most working in factories, particularly in food processing.

In Savannakhet province, the returnees could number many hundreds or thousands, Director of the provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare Mr Thanday Chansomphou said yesterday.

“We have observed that many people have returned to Laos after flooding in parts of Bangkok

where their factories or companies are located, but we still don't have the exact figures.”

The Labour Department has asked immigration officials to identify the number of returnees but it could take some time for this to be calculated. “Many people cross the border every day and we don't know who the returnees are,” Mr Thanday said.

About 40,000 people from Savannakhet province are working in Thailand, of whom only 300 use the proper legal process.

Meanwhile, in Khammuan, the provincial Department of Labour and Social Welfare has issued a notice asking district authorities to collect information about the returnees.

Labour officials said only 133 people have chosen to enter the legal process but many thousands of others have crossed the border to work in Thailand illegally. Officials also said some families were reluctant to tell authorities about their sons or daughters as they were afraid they would be fined for working illegally.

Authorities try their best to encourage Lao nationals seeking jobs in Thailand to use the legal channels, in order to steer them away from potential labour exploitation or human trafficking.

Laos shares a long border with Thailand and the two nations have a similar language and culture, making it easy for Lao people to work and communicate in Thailand, often clandestinely.

For this reason, it is impossible to establish the exact numbers of Lao citizens working in Thailand, but the figure is estimated to be in excess of 100,000 people.

Thailand is a key production hub for international companies, and the widespread flooding in Bangkok is not only affecting Lao workers.

Japanese firms have been particularly badly hit. According to an Asahi Shimbun report on October 29, about 440 companies in the automobile and electrical equipment sectors have been affected by the flooding. Exports of parts to Japan have stopped, leading to serious problems in the supply chain.

By Times Reporters

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