

## PROJECT

# POSSIBLE

**Project Possible will develop innovative counter-trafficking activities that address gaps to support LGBTQI+ populations that remain underserved and vulnerable to trafficking in Bangkok and Pattaya, Thailand. The project will conduct research to further understand the population and context and use that information to co-design, pilot, and refine activities that provide access to safe and sustainable future opportunities.**

### This Project

This research project will apply the Intervention Design Research (IDR) approach to designing activities, testing, and trialing with adult LGBTQI+ target populations in Bangkok province and Pattaya city in Chonburi province, and rigorously measure the impact of activities on individuals.

### Background & Rationale

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals often face considerable obstacles in accessing safe and equitable employment. In Thailand, LGBTQI+ people are estimated to make up more than the expected share of the people working in the country's sizeable informal economy.

Commercial sex is a part of Thailand's informal economy, with approximately 144,000 people in Thailand estimated to be involved each year<sup>1</sup>. The circumstances of these individuals differ widely, but the risk of trafficking of these marginalized populations to human trafficking and other abuses are undeniably present.

Research in Thailand with LGBTQI+ individuals involved in commercial sex revealed that key factors at individual, family, and society levels impacted their likelihood of being involved and different factors increased their vulnerability to human trafficking. More broadly, global research has shown that factors such as poverty, family violence, homelessness and under/ unemployment are connected with increased vulnerability to trafficking and that many of these vulnerabilities to trafficking are also commonly experienced by LGBTQI+ populations worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

Counter-trafficking programs in Thailand and globally have predominantly concentrated on cisgender women vulnerable to sex trafficking and cisgender men vulnerable to forced labor. Meanwhile, the needs of LGBTQI+ people who are vulnerable to trafficking remain largely unaddressed.

Furthermore, counter-trafficking programs also frequently seek transformational change without developing viable alternative opportunities that enable people to make a sufficient income to leave the risk of their trafficking situation.






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<sup>1</sup> National AIDS Committee (2018). Thailand AIDS Response Progress Report. [https://hivhub.ddc.moph.go.th/Download/Report/APR/2018/EN\\_GAM%202018.pdf](https://hivhub.ddc.moph.go.th/Download/Report/APR/2018/EN_GAM%202018.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Kavenagh, M., Stoeltje, M. & Dank, M. (2024). Practitioner Reflection: Reliance on Informal and Gig Economies Leaves LGBTQ+ Populations with Fewer Economic Choices and Greater Vulnerability to Trafficking, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2024.2310349>

## The Activities

The activities will be developed in a way that can be tailored to each individual participant and that:

-  Fosters physical and psychological safety with services that consider an individual's possible trauma experiences.
-  Provides access to new livelihood opportunities and alternatives to commercial sex by creating a wider mix of income options including both informal and formal options that are sustainable.
-  Addresses the individual-level impacts of structural stigma and discrimination.

Experts from New York University and University of Massachusetts, Lowell together with SWING Foundation, Equal Asia Foundation and Evident in Thailand will first broadly consult Thai stakeholders, including extensive discussions with people with lived experience, to adapt and design activities. We will then test and trial the activities with LGBTQI+ people involved in commercial sex and at high risk of sex trafficking to identify whether they enable the recipients to take on alternative work opportunities and reduces their vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking.

## The IDR Approach

Intervention Design Research (IDR) is a technique for designing programs that has previously been used in public health. The eighth round of the US State Department's TIP Office Program to End Modern Slavery (PEMS) is funding four consortia around the globe to apply the IDR approach to counter-trafficking programming.

IDR is a systematic, heavily evidence-based approach that creates, tests, refines, and implements activities that address specific challenges for a well-defined target population. The activities are developed closely in consultation and collaboration with the target population, aiming to understand their experiences.

## Expected Outcomes

Collection of robust data about LGBTQI+ people involved in commercial sex who are vulnerable to human trafficking and who are rarely considered directly in counter-trafficking programming.

Enhanced cooperation of service and support organizations for LGBTQI+ people involved in commercial sex who are vulnerable to human trafficking.

Evidence on the effectiveness of programming that can generate viable employment options and enable personal autonomy to choose safe work alternatives.

Provision of information about those results to improve programming responses by government agencies, international organizations, and service providers for LGBTQI+ people involved in commercial sex who are vulnerable to human trafficking.

## Consortium Partners

**Marron Institute** at **New York University**, in collaboration with the **University of Massachusetts Lowell**, is leading the research design, data analysis and providing overall project oversight.

**Service Workers in Group Foundation (SWING)** which has two decades of experience engaging with LGBTQI+ populations, will co-design and implement the activities in Bangkok and Pattaya, Thailand.

**Equal Asia Foundation** is a Bangkok-based LGBTQI+ think tank and innovation incubator that will co-design and implement parts of the activities related to accessing formal work opportunities in Bangkok and Pattaya, Thailand.

**Evident** is a social research company supporting the co-design and measurement of the research operations in Thailand.