



Laos

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Asia

Geography

Area 236,800 sq km. Narrow, landlocked country mainly between Thailand and Vietnam. Mountainous and 55% forested.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	6,436,093	1.82%
2020	7,650,708	1.71%
2030	8,853,949	1.37%

Capital Vientiane 831,472. **Urbanites** 33.2%.

Pop under 15 yrs 38%. **Life expectancy** 64.6 yrs.

Peoples

A complex mix of 143 groups, compounded by government classifications based on altitude of home environment.

Lao-Tai 59.2%. Lao 43.8%; Tai(15) 4.3%; Phutai 2.9%; Lu 2.6%; Phuan 2.0%.

Mon-Khmer 28.1%. Khmu(6) 10.9%; So 2.1%; Katang 2.0; Bru 1.3%; Kui/Suei 1.0%.

Hmong-Mien 4.0%. Hmong Njua (Blue Miao) 2.9%; Hmong Daw (White Miao) 1.1%; Mien 0.4%.

Tibetan-Himalayan 2.7%. Akha(12) 1.3%; Phunoi 0.7%.

Other 5.3%. Vietnamese 1.6%; Chinese 1.5%.

Literacy 68.7%. **Official language** Lao. **All languages** 89, also many dialects. **Indigenous languages** 84. **Languages with Scriptures** 5Bi 5NT 13por.

Economy

Subsistence agricultural economy accounts for 80% of employment. The Vietnam War and its aftermath combined to make Laos the poor relation of Southeast Asia. The Communist regime is opening up the country for investment and private enterprise, and economic growth is encouraging. Offsetting this development are

poor infrastructures, corruption and a very low economic baseline as a starting point. Other formidable obstacles include rapid deforestation and increases in illegal trafficking (persons and narcotics) and drug use.

HDI Rank 133rd/182. **Public debt** 144% of GDP. **Income/person** \$859 (2% of USA).

Politics

Independent from France in 1954. Lao and Vietnamese communist forces were in complete control by 1975. Anti-government guerrilla activity in the northwest has recently waned. The Communist Party is still in full political control despite economic liberalization. Dissent is suppressed and freedoms are limited.

Religion

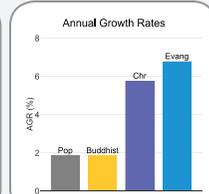
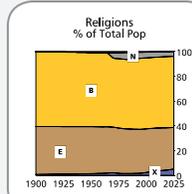
Communist persecution of Christians was especially harsh between 1975 and 1978. Restrictions eased afterward, but churches and Christians are still watched and targeted. Buddhism has regained much of its old influence, but is heavily syncretized with animism. Persecution tends to happen in cycles and is expressed on a local or regional level as much as on a national scale. In all cases, though, it can be intense and ruthless toward the Church.

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Buddhist	57.29	3,687,238	1.8%
Ethnoreligionist	34.70	2,233,324	1.7%
Non-religious	4.20	270,316	0.9%
Christian	3.38	217,540	5.7%
Chinese	0.30	19,308	-3.9%
Muslim	0.10	6,436	6.5%
Baha'i	0.03	1,931	10.4%

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	9	2.26	145,000	6.9%
Independent	1	0.44	28,000	5.9%
Catholic	1	0.67	43,000	2.0%
Marginal	5	0.01	1,000	11.8%

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Lao Evangelical Church	P	700	56,000	140,000
Catholic Church	C	119	25,000	43,000
Indigenous House Chs	I	233	7,000	28,000
Assemblies of God	P	5	90	1,800
United Pentecostal Ch	P	15	600	1,500
Seventh-day Adventist	P	3	667	1,400
Marginal Groups	M	12	350	700
Other denominations[4]		4	300	500
Total Christians[16]		1,091	90,007	216,900

TransBloc	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Evangelicals			
Evangelicals	2.6	170,215	6.8%
Renewalists			
Charismatics	0.8	53,535	10.1%
Pentecostals	0.1	3,300	3.7%



Answers to Prayer

1 **Rapid church growth**, despite restrictions and persecution. Almost all of the evangelism (and the churches that result) is led by indigenous Laotians. Growth is happening among several different peoples, in rural and urban areas, and throughout the country.

Challenges for Prayer

1 **Much of Laos remains unevangelized.** The remarkable growth of the church is still dwarfed by the size of the task remaining. Most peoples remain unreached, and the gospel has not easily crossed ethnic barriers. Buddhism and tribal religions are often blended together and prevail throughout; compare 5,000 temples to the 250 church buildings. Pray for the gospel light to shine throughout Laos and to draw many to Christ.

2 **The suffering Church** has recognized that persecution is one factor in its growth – persecution keeps them praying and relying on God. The situation has improved very slightly; but at the local and village levels, Christians still find themselves to be targets. Persistent social pressure and the prevention of building new church buildings are two primary opposition strategies. Persecution takes personal forms as well, with strong spiritual opposition compounding family and social pressures to continue practicing traditions. Pray for:

- Perseverance and grace** for those who must endure, especially those singled out by persecutors. Property has been seized, and ministers arrested and even killed.
- Increased openness to evangelism**, church planting and building – not illegal, yet still obstructed by the government. Much growth, by necessity, takes place “underground” in house groups, since the more formal congregations are watched and must be cautious. Pray for continued boldness to share the gospel.
- Discipleship, teaching and biblical literacy** for all who respond to Christ. Pray that believers will grow strong in faith and not fall away. Pray also that they become salt and light in their own society, and in a way that is truly Lao.
- A cross-cultural missions vision** in the church to reach the many ethnic minorities.

3 **The Lao Evangelical Church** is one of two recognized Protestant bodies (along with the SDA) wherein several groups have been forced by the government to amalgamate. It is the largest and most influential Church, and where most of the Christian growth has occurred. Pray for the LEC, in particular the pastors, that they might demonstrate unity, genuine love and humility; pray for wisdom to handle the growth and to deal with the situations in both established congregations and house churches. As the primary state-approved Christian body, the LEC itself struggles with issues of accountability, transparency in finances, and healthy relationships with smaller and newer denominations. Pray that God might expose any wrongdoing among church leaders and raise up faithful, humble and authentic servant leaders in the LEC.

4 **Leaders for the churches.** Over 90% of all trained leaders left Laos in 1975. Most congregations do not have a trained pastor, even as church growth increases the urgency of the need. The LEC now has a Bible school training programme, complemented by a Catholic seminary and an increasing role for TEE and module-based training. Just as pressing is the need

to develop reproducible training for lay leaders, in particular for the house church movements which, due to their unregistered nature, often lack the structures and resources for solid training.

5 **There are many needs** that Christian workers could help address, but missionaries are forbidden. Some believers are serving the nation through aid and development, bomb removal (dropped by the USA during the Vietnam War), business training and English teaching. Asian believers (from neighbouring China and Thailand as well as the Philippines and South Korea) have a major role to play. Pray that the foreign workers and churches would serve the Laotian people in the best possible way.

6 **Unreached peoples.** The sheer ethnic diversity is one of the greatest barriers to effective evangelization of the whole country. Pray for:

- a) **The Lao.** The nation's dominant people are described as gentle and peace loving. But anti-Christian bias in government and society, strong family pressure to conform and the passive nature of Lao culture are major obstacles to faith. There has been major growth among the Lao (>40,000 Christians), and they are key in bringing the gospel to the rest of Laos.
- b) **The Tai tribes,** speaking 15 languages. They are mostly unevangelized and have almost no resources in their dialects; but their close affinity to the Lao, linguistically and ethnically, affords them some opportunities to discover the good news.
- c) **The mountain-dwelling Hmong** are known for having resisted, sometimes violently, communism and government control. Most Hmong Christians fled Laos in 1975. Although the proportion of Christians is lower among them, the Hmong are the most responsive peoples in the country and significant numbers are coming to faith.
- d) **The northern peoples.** Many have responded to the gospel in China and Thailand. Political conditions have never allowed missionary work; pray that this will change.
- e) **The many small southern tribes** received the gospel for the first time between 1957 and 1963, but war prevented the planting of churches among most of them. They are deeply enmeshed in the fear of spirits; pray that they find freedom through Jesus.

7 **Christian help ministries.**

- a) **Media ministries** are very fruitful, including literature, cassettes, radio and resources on video, CD and DVD. The government's obstruction of both importing and producing materials nationally is a great need for prayer. Pray also for indigenous artists to write and perform Christian songs, and to develop effective evangelism and discipleship tools using stories, drama, music and other creative expressions of truth.
- b) **Bible and literature distribution.** The UBS and the Bible League distribute Bibles. AsiaLink is an agency deeply committed to literature ministry for Laotians. Hundreds of thousands of pieces of literature were hand carried into Laos. Pray for the free and widespread distribution of all Christian literature; pray also for the safety of those who carry in Christian materials.
- c) **Bible translation.** The local linguistic situation is highly complex. Several groups are looking into ways to address this challenge. There are 31 languages with a definite need for translation teams and possibly a further 26 languages will need them. Praise God that the Mien Bible has now been printed. Pray for the effective use of all available tools in speeding up the process of making God's Word available.
- d) **GRN** has prepared audio messages in 91 languages and dialects of Laos. This is a vital ministry in a nation where literacy is relatively low.
- e) **Christian radio.** FEBC and others broadcast 71 hours weekly in indigenous languages, including Lao, Hmong, Khmu, Tai, Akha, Lahu and Mien. Radio has great potential.
- f) **Christian media.** The JESUS film is available in Lao, Khmu, Hmong(2), Mien, Akha, Vietnamese and Chinese and is being produced in several more languages. The God's Story Project materials are also available in Lao.