

Document #2036233

USDOS – US Department of State

2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cambodia

CAMBODIA: Tier 2 Watch List

The Government of Cambodia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. These efforts included continuing to prosecute and convict traffickers; establishing a new five-year action plan to combat trafficking; and developing and utilizing new victim identification and data collection technologies. However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period. Authorities did not improve insufficient efforts to collect or share key information on law enforcement efforts. Corruption continued to impede law enforcement operations, criminal proceedings, and victim service provision. Amid insufficient government oversight and accountability measures, authorities did not investigate credible reports of official complicity with unscrupulous business owners who subjected thousands of men, women, and children throughout the country to human trafficking in entertainment establishments and in brick kilns. The government’s failure to establish and implement adequate judicial monitoring systems enabled many suspected traffickers to abscond prior to their trials, culminating in a high percentage of convictions in absentia. The government continued to misuse limited law enforcement resources to target non-traffickers and oppress individuals attempting to document the country’s trafficking circumstances, and it made no effort to reverse spurious and politically motivated trafficking charges filed in the previous reporting period. Authorities did not issue formal guidance allowing the use of undercover investigative techniques in anti-trafficking operations—a factor that continued to impede officials’ ability to fully hold sex traffickers accountable. Therefore Cambodia remained on Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Respecting due process, vigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses, and convict and adequately penalize sex and labor traffickers, including complicit officials, with significant prison sentences. • Authorize the use of undercover investigative techniques for anti-trafficking operations. • Increase funding to anti-trafficking law enforcement units and disburse it in advance of investigations, rather than by reimbursement. • Strengthen efforts to fully implement the nationwide protocol for proactive victim identification among vulnerable groups and train officials on its provisions. • Allocate increased resources to anti-human trafficking police to better facilitate the monitoring of defendants released under judicial supervision pending trial. • Increase unannounced labor inspections in high-vulnerability professions, especially at brick kilns, fisheries, and plantations, with a focus on identifying debt bondage. • Increase the availability of services for male victims, especially men and boys exploited in commercial fishing. • Implement a system for monitoring, collecting, and reporting data on anti-trafficking prosecution and victim protection efforts, and disseminate data among the relevant government agencies in a manner that protects victims’ identities and privacy. • Take steps to eliminate recruitment or placement fees charged to workers by Cambodian labor recruiters and ensure they are instead paid by employers. • Increase inspection and oversight of lending institutions, including private micro-finance organizations, to reduce vulnerability to debt-based coercion among economically disadvantaged communities. • Increase efforts to incentivize domestic and foreign victims’ participation in criminal and civil proceedings, including by establishing a victim’s fund and granting permission to work, temporary residency, or other relevant immigration status to foreign victims wishing to remain in country during proceedings. • Modify the law to allow restitution upon conviction of the trafficker and establish and train the relevant officials on standard operating procedures for calculating and granting restitution. • Establish and allocate resources to implement systematic procedures at diplomatic missions to assist Cambodian victims abroad, including in countries without Cambodian diplomatic representation. • Amend regulations on labor recruitment licensure and contract requirements to include strengthened language on worker protections and labor rights. • Strengthen efforts to inspect private labor recruitment agencies and their sub-licensed brokers for fraudulent recruitment and other trafficking indicators. • Increase public awareness on proper travel document application procedures to facilitate safe, legal migration. • Strengthen efforts to incorporate NGO input into the policy for formally transferring custody of child victims.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained insufficient law enforcement efforts. Endemic corruption continued to severely limit progress in holding traffickers accountable. Authorities continued to waste investigative and prosecutorial resources in pursuit of spurious law enforcement action against non-traffickers, including social media users, women

participating in surrogacy programs, and individuals attempting to document trafficking in the country. The 2008 Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of seven to 15 years’ imprisonment for offenses involving an adult victim and 15 to 20 years’ imprisonment for those involving a child victim; these penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. The Anti-Human Trafficking Juvenile Police (AHTJP) attempted to monitor and record information on the cases it investigated, but the government did not collect comprehensive data on overall law enforcement efforts, particularly among provincial courts. Where data were available, some government bodies were reportedly reluctant to share internally with other key interagency stakeholders.

Law enforcement bodies reportedly increased the number of investigations funded through internal police budgets. However, the government required the funding of all anti-trafficking investigative work to be conducted through reimbursement, forcing individual police units to personally cover relevant expenses. NGO contacts reported some officers waited months for this reimbursement, which was sometimes not repaid in full, and that the ensuing financial hardships made some police units more susceptible to corruption. Authorities included cases of surrogacy, rape, and other crimes outside the standard definition of trafficking in their reported law enforcement data; the true number of trafficking arrests, investigations, prosecutions, or convictions was therefore likely much lower than reported. According to government data, authorities arrested 26 Cambodian and foreign nationals in connection with 21 cases of “non-sexual human trafficking” (150 in connection with 39 cases in 2018) and 14 cases of sex trafficking involving 27 suspects (39 cases involving 21 suspects in 2018). Investigative judges reportedly processed 207 cases involving an unknown number of suspects, sending 63 to trial and continuing work on the remaining 144 at the end of the reporting period. Authorities reported prosecutors handled 199 cases, of which they referred 134 for formal investigation, and continued processing the remaining 65 at the end of the reporting period (421 total cases in 2018). As with prosecutions, conviction statistics were limited due to insufficient data collection methods. The National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT) reported the Phnom Penh Municipal Court processed 166 cases, of which it closed 63 with the conviction of 140 individuals (125 in 2018); 103 cases were in process at the end of the reporting period. The government again did not provide data on sentencing, but courts reportedly continued to convict suspects on lesser charges and conclude sex trafficking cases with monetary settlements in lieu of prison sentences. Victims whose families received out-of-court settlements from traffickers often withdrew from trials or changed their testimonies, further complicating prosecutions.

In conjunction with an NGO, Preah Sihanouk anti-trafficking police trained more than 1,100 lay monitors in the taxi, tourism, hospitality, and retail industries to detect and report incidents of trafficking; however, authorities did not report identifying or initiating investigations into trafficking cases as a result of this effort. Nationwide, law enforcement authorities often did not take appropriate action against suspected or convicted traffickers. Judicial police lacked the resources to monitor the increasing number of defendants released on “judicial supervision” pending trial, allowing many to flee prior to their trial dates. Authorities rarely issued arrest warrants for absconded defendants unless NGOs were available to assist in tracking and apprehending them. Further compounding this challenge, Cambodian criminal procedural code featured no guidelines, monitoring provisions, or language outlining specific law enforcement duties with regard to judicial supervision. Citing resource constraints, prosecutors and investigating judges did not advance all of the trafficking cases for which police had supplied evidence. Authorities abused law enforcement resources to detain, prosecute, and convict some individuals on politically motivated or otherwise spurious trafficking charges, further bringing into question the veracity of the anti-trafficking data—and the resource constraints—reported by the government. Two journalists from an international media outlet remained under judicial supervision awaiting trial for spurious trafficking charges at the end of the reporting period. A former National Assembly candidate and a former Secretary of State at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSAVY) were sentenced to 15 years in prison and ordered to pay \$50,000 for violating Cambodia’s trafficking law in a case that many NGOs believed to be politically motivated. Authorities also filed spurious criminal charges against civilians for non-trafficking offenses. During the reporting period, the government charged 11 women under trafficking legislation for their participation in an illegal paid surrogacy program. In December 2018, authorities extradited a Cambodian national from Thailand and charged him with “incitement” for having assisted a foreign media outlet in producing a documentary about child sex trafficking victims in Cambodia. In June 2019, the Phnom Penh Court of First Instance convicted him to two years in prison and ordered him to pay \$17,200 in compensation to the parents of two children featured in the film, despite the fact that he did not harm them or violate any privacy laws. In February 2020, authorities also charged a woman under the 2008 Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation for posting an image of herself they deemed to be sexually suggestive on a social media platform. Local experts continued to report that cases involving foreign suspects were more likely to result in trafficking convictions than cases involving Cambodian suspects, for whom charges were often reduced to less serious offenses.

The government maintained memorandums of understanding (MOUs) outlining cross-border anti-trafficking investigation with Thailand and Vietnam, as well as an extradition treaty with the former, but did not report investigating or extraditing any suspected traffickers under their auspices in 2019. Authorities continued to deliver donor-designed and -funded training on the implementation of anti-trafficking laws to police, prosecutors, judges, and other government officials. During the reporting period, the NCCT delivered 113 trainings to 3,712 law enforcement officers on anti-trafficking laws, investigative techniques, and evidence collection (234 trainings to 6,321 officers in 2018); for the third year, it did not report how many commune and provincial officials, judicial staff, and NGO workers participated in these sessions (7,689 in 2016). Despite these training sessions, many police—particularly in rural areas—were unaware of how to conduct anti-trafficking work, as most did not receive training on basic law enforcement techniques. Local organizations and some officials continued to stress an urgent

need for more sophisticated evidence collection techniques, including undercover investigations, to decrease reliance on witness testimony and improve efforts to detect and combat sex trafficking. The government approved undercover investigative authority for investigations into cases involving narcotics and corruption allegations. However, it did not grant undercover investigative authority to anti-trafficking police units, except in rare cases when requested for child sex tourism raids conducted alongside foreign law enforcement agencies. This lack of authority continued to significantly constrain law enforcement officers’ ability to address the increasingly clandestine nature of sex trafficking operations in Cambodia; as a result, police investigations were limited to more clear manifestations of the crime, including sex-on-premises establishments and cases in which victims were willing to self-report and testify.

Endemic corruption at many levels of government severely limited the ability of individual officials to make progress in holding traffickers accountable. The Cambodian national police maintained a mechanism for NGO workers to report incidents of corruption among anti-trafficking police, but it did not field any complaints during the reporting period. Local officials facilitated cross-border trafficking by accepting bribes for forging identity documents. One NGO noted law enforcement raids on sex trafficking establishments were sometimes unsuccessful due to advance warning from working-level police. However, some provincial police chiefs continued to minimize these leaks by turning over cases to the AHTJP, which conducted independent raids without notifying the local authorities until moments before they began. Some corrupt officials may have profited directly from establishments suspected of sex and labor trafficking. Authorities often overlooked labor abuses—including child forced labor—in factories and at brick kilns, and in several instances colluded with brick manufacturers to arrest, jail, and return indentured laborers who had attempted to escape. Contacts alleged prosecutors and judges accepted bribes in return for dismissal of charges, acquittals, and reduced sentencing. Corrupt officials often thwarted progress in cases where the perpetrators were believed to have political, criminal, or economic ties to government officials. Despite these trends, the government did not investigate, prosecute, or convict any government employees complicit in trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government maintained insufficient protection efforts. Despite retaining victim identification guidelines developed by MOSAVY in early 2017, victim identification, referral, and repatriation efforts remained disparate and underdeveloped across law enforcement agencies. Authorities did not provide complete statistics on the number of victims they assisted or referred. The government continued implementing a regulation barring NGOs from representing individuals seeking formal recognition as trafficking victims. Under this arrangement—which NGOs claimed severely intimidated victims and their families—victims were required to approach the Ministry of Interior for the formal identification needed to access protection services.

While conducting arrests during the first nine months of 2019, police reported identifying at least 66 victims of “non-sexual trafficking,” including 20 minors, and at least 76 victims of sex trafficking, including 26 minors (unreported in 2018). As with all law enforcement statistics, these figures likely included victims of crimes that did not meet standard definitions of sex trafficking or forced labor. With assistance from an international organization, the government continued to operate two transit centers in the border city of Poipet, where it screened for trafficking victims among the 11,806 migrants deported from Thailand in 2019 (70,225 in 2018). MOSAVY reported processing 262 Cambodian victims of trafficking returning from abroad—15 men, 209 women, and 38 children—along with 28 “other vulnerable migrants” at the Poipet center, the Phnom Penh Airport, and the Bavet border checkpoint. The total comprised 150 victims of forced labor and 112 individuals who may have experienced sex trafficking and/or forced labor in relation to forced and fraudulent marriage. During the reporting period, the NCCT attempted to improve victim identification procedures and data collection through the production and launch of a tablet application-based victim identification manual and screening tool for use at the Poipet Transit Center. Although observers were not able to independently verify the status or content of the application, NGOs believed the tool was also a source of service provider contact information for victims. However, some contacts noted a lack of privacy in the transit centers’ migrant intake areas might have made victims reticent to self-report through the new tool. Given the high vulnerability to trafficking among these populations and the lack of universal implementation of victim identification standards, many victims likely transited these facilities unidentified.

The government operated a temporary shelter in Phnom Penh for female victims of trafficking and other crimes, and it referred trafficking victims to donor-funded NGO shelters—most of which cared for victims of several forms of abuse—to receive further assistance. MOSAVY reportedly maintained guidelines outlining minimum standards for residential care of trafficking victims and continued to disseminate them among NGO shelters during the reporting period. The government continued to rely heavily on NGOs to protect trafficking victims; however, it did not facilitate formal transfer of custody for child victims, leaving organizations that accepted child victims vulnerable to court action. Ongoing custody issues reportedly dissuaded some NGO shelters from protecting residents’ freedom of movement, contrary to best practices. Provisions allowing for financial settlements in lieu of harsher sentencing further discouraged some families from consenting to temporary guardianship at shelters; absent family consent, government officials, at times, returned children to high-risk environments, leaving them vulnerable to re-victimization. Some anti-trafficking NGOs noted improved cooperation with the authorities, including through receipt of in-kind support, but continued restrictions on civil society hindered the operations of key anti-trafficking NGOs during the reporting period. Despite the prominence of male labor trafficking victims, assistance for this population remained limited. Although authorities reportedly increased overall attention to the fishing industry during the reporting period, service provider NGOs noted an acute lack of reintegration services and cultural stigma surrounding the experience of forced labor at sea catalyzed re-trafficking among fishermen returning home after escaping their abuses.

Cambodian diplomatic missions overseas continued to lack adequate funding and capacity to provide basic assistance or repatriate victims, despite government action in prior years to train diplomats on migrant worker protections. Victims identified in countries without Cambodian diplomatic representation had access to even less support. One study conducted by an international organization during a previous reporting period found only 21 percent of migrant workers sought assistance for labor abuses experienced abroad, including forced labor. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC), which bore the primary responsibility of aiding Cambodian trafficking victims identified abroad, reported repatriating and providing limited services to 32,235 Cambodians returning from nine countries, including 32,038 from Thailand, 77 from China, 58 from Vietnam, 49 from Malaysia, five from Singapore, three from Saudi Arabia, three from Indonesia, one from Laos, and one from Japan. However, as in the previous reporting period, authorities did not specify what portion of these returnees were trafficking victims (986 from nine countries in 2017). An international organization assisted in the majority of these repatriations. Observers believed these figures represented only a small fraction of the number of Cambodians subjected to trafficking abroad, particularly in the fishing industry. The MFAIC did not promulgate or implement standard operating procedures for the identification and referral of Cambodian victims abroad, nor did authorities allocate sufficient resources for such work, leaving many Cambodians without the assistance necessary to repatriate legally and safely. According to one NGO, some returned victims had been unable to secure assistance from Cambodian consular services overseas due to unattended hotlines and unresponsive staff; others subjected to forced labor conditions abroad, including in China and South Korea, were unable to convince Cambodian consular staff they were in need of assistance. Cambodia also maintained labor attachés at embassies in South Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand—the countries with the highest number of Cambodian migrant workers—but did not provide data on their involvement in identifying or assisting labor trafficking victims.

The number of Cambodian returnees who experienced forced labor and sex trafficking abroad was likely much higher than reported due to an increasing tendency among these groups to return via informal migration channels, and due to insufficient victim identification procedures. MOSAVY reported assisting in the repatriation of all 290 Cambodian victims of trafficking and “other vulnerable migrants” processed through the Poipet repatriation center, and it referred all 290 individuals to NGOs for additional protection services (222 in 2018). MOSAVY reported receiving an additional 563 victims, including 408 referred by NGOs, but did not specify if this figure was inclusive of or in addition to aforementioned 290. The ministry also reported providing reintegration and rehabilitation services to 968 Cambodian migrant workers returning from work abroad; some of these cases were identified in a previous year, and they included victims of other forms of abuse outside the standard definition of trafficking.

There were no legal provisions to offer work permits, temporary residency, or other immigration status to foreign victims wishing to remain in Cambodia to participate in civil or criminal proceedings. According to one NGO, some male victims of forced labor in the maritime industries did not report their experiences out of concern that they would be sent to a government shelter and prevented from earning a livelihood. The government required the repatriation of foreign victims, except in rare cases, and did not provide legal alternatives to their removal regardless of whether they would face hardship or retribution upon return to their countries of origin. MOSAVY repatriated nine Vietnamese trafficking victims during the reporting period (two in early 2018, three in 2017, and 13 in 2016). Insufficient victim identification efforts left many potential victims at risk of law enforcement action, including deportation without prior screening. Law enforcement often did not keep victims and perpetrators separated during interviews. During the reporting period, MOSAVY signed MOUs with several NGOs to enhance government capacity to assist victims of trafficking and related offenses. Contacts said this culminated in increased implementation of victim-centered approaches among anti-trafficking police interviewing child victims. However, provincial courts did not universally implement a child-friendly judicial program, initiated in 2016, allowing for video-conferencing technology as an alternative to direct cross-examination of victims in front of the accused. Cambodia’s weak and corrupt legal system and the lack of adequate victim and witness protection, exacerbated by a lengthy trial process and fear of retaliation by traffickers, hindered victims’ willingness to cooperate in many cases. Cambodian law outlined channels for victim restitution, and contacts reported an increase in the number of verdicts ordering traffickers to pay some form of financial recompense to victims. However, this restitution was extremely difficult to obtain due to a legal requirement delaying payment until after the completion of the trafficker’s jail term; convicted traffickers’ frequent abscondment further complicated this arrangement. Observers noted Cambodia lacked a standard operating procedure for determining how to calculate restitution or compensation. Victims rarely received the amount promised, and many victims’ families settled out of court with traffickers or accepted bribes to drop the relevant charges.

PREVENTION

The government increased some prevention efforts. An interagency committee and its secretariat coordinated anti-trafficking activities and promulgated a 2019-2023 national action plan that received praise from civil society partners. The government slightly increased its budget from 4.9 billion riels (\$1.21 million) to approximately 5.4 billion riels (\$1.33 million) to fund this interagency committee, but observers noted this figure was still insufficient. Subsidiary provincial anti-trafficking committees, which reportedly continued to receive modest central government funds and assistance from NGOs, coordinated efforts at the local level to mirror the activities of the national action plan. During the reporting year and with the help of international donors, one remaining committee created its own provincial-level action plan and submitted it to the government—ensuring all nine committees had such an action plan. The secretariat of the NCCT maintained a working group to monitor the efforts of the interagency committee, as well as those of its provincial subcommittees. Commune-level budgetary allocations for trafficking prevention increased during the reporting period; however, NGOs noted the provincial committees’ ad hoc reliance on insufficient surplus funds from General Social Services—rather than on their own annual budgets—undermined the

scope and sustainability of their work. The NCCT continued to produce an annual report documenting the government’s holistic anti-trafficking efforts; however, as in prior years, the report was not exhaustive amid insufficient data collection. For the third year, the government hosted an interfaith forum on combating trafficking attended by high-level government officials and thousands of clerical leaders.

The Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MOLVT) maintained a separate action plan aimed at reducing child labor and debt bondage in the service, agricultural, mining, and energy sectors by 2025 through awareness raising, legal action, and collaboration with civil society funded in part through the national budget. There was no ban on the imposition of worker-paid recruitment or placement fees. Observers noted the high costs, complex administrative requirements, and restrictive provisions inherent to the formal migration process drove a majority of Cambodian labor migrants to pursue informal pathways to working abroad. Unlike in the previous reporting period, the government reported investigating labor recruiters for illegal practices that may have contributed to or involved trafficking, although it did not provide relevant statistics. Officials and NGO observers noted labor officials’ insufficient inspections of private recruitment agencies, and the ability of these agencies to sub-license their names to independent brokers, continued to perpetuate widespread labor exploitation. Some of these agencies were reportedly directly involved in deceptive recruitment practices leading to trafficking. Adding to the vulnerability of popular migration channels, sub-decrees and regulations governing private recruitment agency licensure and contracting procedures did not include sufficient language outlining migrant worker protections or labor rights.

The government continued to carry out awareness-raising activities, including through more than 80,500 NCCT information “dissemination events” and nearly 80,000 public fora (33,000 and 25,000 in 2018, respectively). The General Department of Immigration issued nearly 76,000 border passes to Cambodians living in western border regions to incentivize safe labor migration to Thailand (over 92,000 in 2018). The MOLVT also reported providing pre-departure orientation to almost 48,000 Cambodians migrating abroad for work (69,000 in 2018). However, many Cambodians were reportedly unaware of how to apply for travel documentation or how much it should cost—leaving them at higher risk of travel through informal, more vulnerable means—and the government did not take sufficient steps to publicize that information. The MFAIC continued to implement consular screening measures to reduce the sex and labor trafficking of Cambodian women via forced and fraudulent marriages, including by assessing applicants against trafficking victim profiles jointly developed with China in 2016. However, the MFAIC did not report referring these potential victims to law enforcement or protective services. The government also continued implementing a regulation passed in 2018 requiring foreign men to pay a fee if intending to return to their home countries with a Cambodian spouse; because this regulation only applied to air travel, contacts reported an increase in the number of Cambodian women traveling through unsafe overland channels for marriage migration to China. The government maintained two labor recruitment agreements with Saudi Arabia, a domestic worker recruitment agreement with Hong Kong, and a bilateral cooperative agreement with India.

Following heightened public attention to labor abuses occurring within the brick industry, authorities reportedly increased some efforts to seek accountability and intervene in labor violations at the kilns. International law enforcement representatives noted some police were able to issue citations for obvious labor abuses, including illegal child labor and overtly poor working conditions. However, NGOs claimed police were often unaware that detection of crimes at brick kilns fell under their investigative purview. Observers also noted cumbersome registration requirements and government officials’ close affiliation with certain employers continued to obstruct labor inspectors’ access to brick kilns and prevented kiln workers from forming organizations to advocate for their labor rights. Authorities often conducted inspections with advance notification to the kiln owners, potentially enabling them to conceal abuses. In one widely publicized case in which a child suffered a serious work-related injury at a brick kiln, authorities publicly claimed they had fined and jailed the owner of the facility and shut it down permanently; in contrast, union contacts claimed the owner had faced none of these consequences and that the kiln was still in operation. The government also reported conducting a census of all 486 known operational brick kilns in the country in an ostensible effort to detect and issue fines for child labor offenses, but the census found “no evidence” thereof, raising significant questions about its accuracy and credibility. In response to increased local vulnerabilities surrounding new Chinese casinos and other commercial enterprises in Preah Sihanouk province, the government established an inter-ministerial task force to investigate alleged money laundering and human trafficking, but the task force had not issued a report on its findings at the end of the reporting period.

The Ministry of Tourism made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts through workshops for hotel staff and government officials on preventing child sexual exploitation in the hospitality industry, and it partnered with the NCCT in the continued production of billboards, signs, posters, pamphlets, and other materials targeting potential consumers of commercial sex with children. However, as in prior years, the government generally focused on deterring foreign involvement in child sex tourism, rather than targeting campaigns to the local population that constituted the main source of demand for commercial sex with children in Cambodia. Authorities reported arresting five foreign individuals suspected of engaging in child sex tourism (eight in 2018, five in 2017, and 12 in 2016) but did not report whether they initiated prosecutions in any of these cases. Local experts reported concern over the government’s ongoing failure to impose appropriate punishments on foreign nationals who purchased commercial sex acts with children.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit Cambodian men, women, and children in forced labor and sex trafficking in Cambodia and abroad. They also subject victims from other countries to trafficking in Cambodia, and they use Cambodia as a transit point to exploit victims from other countries to trafficking elsewhere

in Asia. Cambodian adults and children migrate to other countries within the region and increasingly to the Middle East for work; traffickers force many to work on fishing vessels, in agriculture, in construction, in factories, and in domestic servitude—often through debt-based coercion—or exploit them in sex trafficking. Migrants using irregular migration channels, predominantly with the assistance of unlicensed brokers, are at an increased risk of trafficking, although those using licensed recruiting agents also become victims of forced labor or sex trafficking. Companies operating under the auspices of the Japanese government’s “Technical Intern Training Program” have exploited Cambodian nationals in forced labor in food processing, manufacturing, construction, and fishing. Children from impoverished families are vulnerable to forced labor, often with the complicity of their families, including in domestic servitude and forced begging or street vending in Thailand and Vietnam. Undocumented Cambodian labor migrants working in Thailand—constituting at least 20 percent of the nearly two million Cambodians there—are at high risk of trafficking due to their immigration status, as are Cambodians deported from Vietnam. One study conducted by an international organization in 2017 found that nearly three quarters of all Cambodians traveling to Thailand for work do so through irregular channels known for trafficking vulnerabilities; additionally, only 14 percent of Cambodians emigrating to Thailand through regulated channels participated in pre-departure orientation outlining their right and protections.

Traffickers continue to recruit significant numbers of Cambodian men and boys in Thailand to work on fishing boats and exploit them in forced labor on Thai-owned and -operated vessels in international waters. Cambodian victims escaping from their traffickers have been identified in Malaysia, Indonesia, Mauritius, Fiji, Senegal, South Africa, and Papua New Guinea. Cambodian men working on Thai-owned and -operated fishing vessels report deceptive recruitment tactics, severe physical abuse, underpayment or nonpayment of wages, restricted access to medical care, and confinement at sea for years at a time without permission to come ashore. Traffickers recruit a significant number of women from rural areas under false pretenses to travel to China to enter into marriages with Chinese men. These women incur thousands of dollars in debt to brokers facilitating the transaction; the men force some of these women to work in factories or exploit them in sex trafficking to repay this debt. Cambodian women serving willingly as illegal surrogates for Chinese families are vulnerable to confinement and domestic servitude. Stateless persons, namely in ethnic Vietnamese communities, are at higher risk of trafficking due to lack of identity documentation necessary for access to formal employment, education, marriage registration, the court system, or the right to own land.

The proprietors of brick kilns subject more than 10,000 Cambodians, including nearly 4,000 children, to multigenerational debt-based coercion, either by buying off their preexisting loans, or by requiring them to take out new loans as a condition of employment or to cover medical expenses resulting from injuries incurred while working. An NGO study conducted in 2017 found nearly 100 percent of brick kilns surveyed throughout the country featured indicators of forced labor via debt-based coercion. An extensive, largely unregulated network of predatory micro-finance organizations and private creditors contributes to this arrangement by proactively advertising loans to families in vulnerable communities and connecting them with the kilns. Rural farming families are at higher risk of this form of forced labor due to economic hardships ensuing from climate change; unseasonal rain patterns and subsequent loss of crops push many farmers to take out large loans for new irrigation or pesticide systems, and brick kiln owners often purchase these loans as a means of securing and retaining their labor. Extended rainy seasons also delay the brick-drying process, reducing these bonded kiln workers’ pay and forcing many to become further indebted to the kiln owners. In order to dissuade workers from fleeing abusive conditions, some kiln owners reportedly allow only select members of family units to be absent for public holidays or to seek medical care at any given time. Some workers report continued confinement and forced labor in the kilns long after they have repaid their debts. Cambodian families may also experience conditions indicative of forced labor in the clay extraction process required for brick making. Traffickers exploit children as young as 13 in domestic servitude and labor on riparian and oceanic fishing boats, in karaoke bars, and on cassava plantations to pay off family debts accrued through this system. Communities displaced by illegal logging operations supplying the brick kilns with timber for fuel may be at elevated risk of trafficking, including in logging itself and elsewhere as a result of ensuing economic hardships. In previous years, North Koreans working in Cambodia may have been forced to work by the North Korean government. Pursuant to a 2017 UN Security Council resolution requiring the repatriation of all North Korean nationals earning income overseas by the end of 2019, subject to limited exceptions, the government reportedly repatriated all North Korean labor migrants covered under the relevant provision.

All of Cambodia’s 25 provinces are sources for human trafficking. Sex trafficking is largely clandestine; Cambodian and ethnic Vietnamese women and girls move from rural areas to cities and tourist destinations, where criminals exploit them in sex trafficking in brothels and, more frequently, clandestine sex establishments at beer gardens, massage parlors, salons, karaoke bars, retail spaces, and non-commercial sites. In recent years, the rapidly growing and largely unregulated presence of Chinese casinos, entertainment establishments, and other commercial enterprises in Preah Sihanouk province has led to an increase of local sex trafficking and forced labor among Cambodian women and girls. Cambodian men form the largest source of demand for children exploited in sex trafficking; however, men from elsewhere in Asia, Europe, the United States, Australia, and South Africa travel to Cambodia to engage in child sex tourism, increasingly facilitated through social media contact. Thousands of urban children left behind by families migrating abroad for work are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor. Vietnamese women and children, many of whom are victims of debt-based coercion, travel to Cambodia and are exploited in sex trafficking. NGOs report criminal gangs transport some Vietnamese victims through Cambodia before they are exploited in Thailand and Malaysia. Traffickers in Cambodia are most commonly family or community members or small networks of independent brokers. Some Cambodian orphanages purchase local children from economically disadvantaged families and subject them to malnutrition and unclean living conditions in their facilities for the purpose of attracting and profiting from charitable donations; some of these children are at

further risk of sex trafficking and domestic servitude, as a result of poor government oversight of adoption processes. Endemic corruption aids and abets trafficking crimes. Some police reportedly solicit commercial sex with children. Corrupt officials facilitate cross-border trafficking, thwart progress on investigations and prosecutions, and in some cases, profit directly from establishments suspected of trafficking.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on trafficking in persons (covering April 2019 to March 2020)

Country:

Cambodia

Source:

USDOS – US Department of State

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/cambodia/>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

25 June 2020

Document ID:

2036233

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum
Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

