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USDOS – US Department of State

2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cambodia

Cambodia (Tier 3)

The Government of Cambodia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so, even considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Cambodia was downgraded to Tier 3. Despite the lack of significant efforts, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including continuing to arrest, prosecute, and convict traffickers, proactively screening for and identifying victims, and assisting in the repatriation of Cambodian trafficking victims and those vulnerable to trafficking abroad. However, endemic corruption continued to impede overall law enforcement operations, holding traffickers accountable, and victim service provision. Authorities did not investigate or hold criminally accountable any officials involved in the large majority of credible reports of complicity, in particular with unscrupulous business owners who subjected thousands of men, women, and children throughout the country to human trafficking in entertainment establishments, brick kilns, and online scam operations. Therefore, officials also failed to proactively identify trafficking victims among these highly vulnerable populations. The government did not provide adequate protection services for victims domestically or overseas and relied heavily on foreign donors and NGOs to provide much-needed care.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Investigate and prosecute trafficking offenses and convict, while respecting due process, and adequately penalize sex and labor traffickers, including complicit officials, with significant prison sentences.
- Increase funding to anti-trafficking law enforcement units and disburse it in advance of investigations, rather than by reimbursement.
- Fully implement victim identification guidelines and train officials in all areas of the country 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 or start unannounced labor inspections in high-vulnerability professions, especially at brick kilns, entertainment venues, construction sites, and plantations, with a focus on identifying debt bondage and holding business owners accountable to the law.
- Increase law enforcement efforts against online scam operations, including allegations of forced labor, and against officials complicit in such operations and associated trafficking crimes.
- Increase the availability of services for male victims, especially men and boys exploited in commercial fishing abroad.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Allow restitution upon conviction of the trafficker and establish and train the relevant officials on 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.
- Incorporate NGO input into the policy for formally transferring custody of child victims.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. 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. NGOs reported that, in practice, the government did not issue criminal penalties under the anti-trafficking law for labor traffickers; instead, it utilized the labor law to issue fines and/or short jail sentences of six days to one month, which did not represent sufficient punishment to deter future crimes or provide justice for victims.

The government did not maintain a centralized record or database of investigations and judicial proceedings, therefore overall law enforcement data was incomplete, precluding the ability to compare investigations, prosecutions, and convictions from previous years. Unlike in the previous reporting period, the police did not report comprehensive data on anti-trafficking investigations conducted in 2021. According to some media reports, authorities arrested 370 suspected traffickers, which included 332 labor brokers, but the government did not report an update on these arrests. In 2021, Ministry of Justice (MOJ) personnel manually collected prosecution and conviction data from each district court throughout the country. Nevertheless, as in the prior reporting period, judicial authorities may have included cases of rape and other crimes outside the standard definition of trafficking in their reported data; therefore, the true number of trafficking prosecutions and convictions was likely lower than reported. In 2021, the government prosecuted 109 suspected traffickers involved in 64 cases under the anti-trafficking law; four of these cases involved sex trafficking, 37 involved forced labor, and 23 involved unspecified forms of exploitation. The government convicted 38 traffickers, including one for sex trafficking and 35 for forced labor. Of these cases, in April 2021, authorities arrested and convicted a two-star military general and six other traffickers for exploiting 28 nationals from the People’s Republic of China (PRC); the court sentenced the military general to four years’ imprisonment. In comparison to this data, in 2020 the police reported authorities arrested 94 suspects—48 suspects involved in 37 cases of “non-sexual human trafficking” and 46 suspects involved in 21 cases of sex trafficking. The government prosecuted 348 cases of trafficking in 2020, but the government did not disclose the number of individuals prosecuted; it also convicted 440 traffickers. However, some of the cases reported in 2020 likely did not meet the definition of human trafficking under international law and also accounted for cases from prior years.

The pandemic continued to hinder government efforts to prosecute perpetrators and heighten awareness of trafficking among officials. Cambodian courts shut down between April and May 2021, temporarily halting judicial activity including anti-trafficking investigations, and then resumed operations at a reduced capacity for several months afterwards. The government reported it cooperated with the governments of the United States, Thailand, and the PRC on human trafficking investigations; it also maintained memoranda of understanding (MOUs) outlining cross-border anti-trafficking investigations with Thailand and Vietnam, as well as an extradition treaty with the former. The government continued to cooperate with the United States through a law enforcement task force dedicated to combating online child sexual exploitation and other child sex crimes. In 2021, the police arrested four individuals for online child sexual exploitation under the anti-trafficking law after U.S. law enforcement referred nine potential cases.

Nationwide, law enforcement authorities often did not take appropriate action against suspected or convicted traffickers. Judicial police lacked the resources to monitor defendants released on “judicial supervision” pending trial, allowing some to flee prior to their trial dates, which only left courts the option to convict offenders in absentia. 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. 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. NGOs reported law enforcement did not adequately respond to reports of trafficking allegations in remote or less developed areas of the country due to capacity limitations.

Endemic corruption at many levels of government continued to severely limit the ability of individual officials to make progress in holding traffickers accountable. In some cases, local or provincial authorities neglected cases of complicity, so national authorities intervened to investigate and prosecute such cases. During the reporting period, NGOs reported trafficking victims accused Cambodian officials of colluding with labor brokers to commit human trafficking crimes. NGOs alleged police and other officials were complicit in online scam operations that forced hundreds of PRC, Southeast Asian, and other foreign nationals to work in call centers in Sihanoukville and other locations. Observers 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 consistent credible allegations of complicity in

human trafficking crimes, the government did not prosecute or convict the large majority of complicit government employees. Law enforcement raids on sex trafficking establishments were sometimes unsuccessful due to advance warning from working-level police. Some police reportedly protected sex trafficking establishments in exchange for monthly payments from the business owners or sexual favors from the victims. Authorities often overlooked, denied, or downplayed labor abuses—including forced child labor—in factories and at brick kilns and colluded with brick manufacturers to arrest, jail, and return indentured laborers who had attempted to escape.

The government—in collaboration with and funding from NGOs and other donors—provided training to police, prosecutors, judges, and other government officials. These trainings included 256 sessions and workshops on anti-trafficking laws, investigative techniques, and evidence collection for 12,814 law enforcement officers and seven trainings for 286 participants on victim identification and protection guidelines. Despite these trainings, many police—particularly in rural areas—remained unaware of how to conduct anti-trafficking work, as most did not receive training on basic law enforcement techniques. Moreover, law enforcement and judicial officials lacked the necessary equipment to handle trafficking cases appropriately, including vehicles, computer and communications equipment, and forensic tools. Additionally, 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. Local organizations and some officials continued to stress an urgent need for more sophisticated evidence collection techniques—including more undercover investigations—to decrease reliance on witness testimony and improve efforts to detect and combat sex trafficking. MOJ officials reported their concern that revising the law or issuing new regulations to specifically authorize undercover investigation authority in trafficking cases could lead to abuse of power by the police.

PROTECTION

The government maintained limited victim protection efforts. Despite having victim identification guidelines developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSAVY) in 2017, law enforcement agencies’ victim identification, referral, and repatriation efforts remained disparate and underdeveloped. Due to insufficient victim identification efforts, authorities penalized potential foreign victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration violations. Nevertheless, the government identified a total of 364 trafficking victims in 2021 after screening for trafficking among 8,370 Cambodian migrants working abroad. In comparison, the government identified 417 victims in 2020. Similar to the previous reporting period, however, overall victim identification figures may have included victims of crimes that did not meet standard definitions of sex trafficking or forced labor.

MOSAVY continued to operate a migrant transit center in the border city of Poipet where transit center officials—including trained social workers—screened for and identified an unknown number of trafficking victims among adult and child migrants at the center. After transit officials screened migrants for trafficking, they provided an unreported number of victims with reintegration services or referred them to NGO shelters. In December 2021, the government opened a new migrant transit center in Battambang Province, but officials did not report how many trafficking victims they identified or assisted in this center. Government social affairs officials regularly accompanied police during law enforcement activities, such as raids, to provide assistance to identified victims; if they were not present, police were trained to screen for victims before referring them to a social affairs office. Local police sometimes referred victims directly to NGOs, who reported the overall referral process was quick and victims could access NGO-run shelters within hours of being identified. Despite this process, the government continued to implement a regulation barring NGOs from representing individuals seeking formal recognition as trafficking victims. Under this arrangement, victims were required to approach the Ministry of Interior (MOI) for the formal identification needed to access protection services. Some anti-trafficking NGOs reported a lack of cooperation with the authorities, which hindered the operations of key anti-trafficking NGOs.

MOSAVY reported it provided services to 404 Cambodian and foreign trafficking victims, including from the PRC, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia. In comparison in 2020, MOSAVY referred 220 Cambodian victims and “other vulnerable migrants” to NGO services. The government could provide trafficking victims with a food allowance, living stipend for three months, job training, and reintegration assistance, but—as in the previous reporting period—MOSAVY relied heavily on financial support from NGOs to cover these services. The government did not have the capacity or resources available to provide adequate protection services, including shelter, to trafficking victims; it therefore continued to rely heavily on donor countries, international organizations, and NGOs to provide or support provision of such services to trafficking victims. MOSAVY maintained guidelines outlining minimum standards for residential care of trafficking victims. MOSAVY also managed long-term care and other assistance for child trafficking victims who could not reintegrate into their communities. The government, however, did not facilitate formal transfer of the custody of child trafficking victims to NGOs, leaving NGOs that accepted child victims into their care vulnerable to court action. 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. The government authorized public health facilities to provide free medical services to all migrant workers in Cambodia, including foreign trafficking victims; this policy relieved NGOs of the financial burden of providing medical care to this vulnerable population. Despite the prominence of male labor trafficking victims, government assistance for this population remained limited, including shelters. However, the government continued to cooperate with an NGO to provide services to male victims exploited in the Thai commercial fishing

industry. The Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MOLVT) also provided vocational training and other programs to identify job opportunities for male trafficking victims from the commercial fishing industry, but it did not report how many victims benefited from these programs. Service provider NGOs noted that an acute lack of reintegration services and cultural stigma surrounding the experience of forced labor at sea catalyzed re-trafficking among fishermen returning home.

The government continued to provide basic care to or assist in the repatriation of Cambodian victims who were exploited abroad but relied on donor organizations to finance the repatriation. Cambodian diplomatic missions overseas also lacked adequate funding and capacity to provide basic assistance to or repatriate victims; some victims were reportedly unable to secure assistance from Cambodian consular services overseas due to unattended hotlines and unresponsive staff. Victims identified in countries without Cambodian diplomatic representation had access to even less support. In Malaysia, Cambodian officials repatriated 376 migrant workers back to Cambodia, 39 of whom officials identified as trafficking victims. The government finalized an agreement with Thailand to establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) on the repatriation and reintegration of Cambodian trafficking victims. In August 2021, the government—in cooperation with Thai authorities—identified and repatriated 21 Cambodian trafficking victims from Thailand; the government referred them for resettlement assistance. From January to September 2021, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) worked with PRC authorities to repatriate more than 300 Cambodian women who were recruited through false promises of work in the PRC and forced into marriages with PRC nationals; many of these women were likely trafficking victims. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC) facilitated the return of 10,406 undocumented Cambodian migrant workers from the PRC, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam; this compared to 10,574 returned Cambodian migrant workers during the previous reporting period. After MOSAVY conducted preliminary interviews of these returnees, it referred all of them to local NGOs for care and reintegration assistance, but—as in the previous reporting period—it did not report identifying any trafficking victims among them. The number of Cambodian returnees who experienced forced labor and sex trafficking abroad was likely much higher than reported due to insufficient victim identification procedures, as well as an increasing tendency among these groups to return via informal migration channels.

The government did not require trafficking victims to participate in trafficking investigations or prosecutions in order to receive protection services. 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. 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. While awaiting repatriation, the government generally allowed foreign victims temporary residence at NGO shelters. During the previous reporting period, MOJ instructed provincial courts to implement a child-friendly judicial program allowing for video-conferencing technology as an alternative to direct cross-examination of victims in front of the accused; it did not, however, report if courts universally implemented this program in 2021. As in previous years, Cambodia's weak and corrupt judicial 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. NGOs reported victims preferred out-of-court settlements over court proceedings as the fastest way to obtain monetary compensation. Cambodian law outlined channels for victim restitution, yet restitution through direct cash payments was commonly used as a method to settle criminal cases. However, restitution was difficult to obtain due to a legal requirement delaying payment until after the completion of a 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. Nevertheless, the government cooperated with two NGOs to secure \$83,200 in restitution for trafficking victims, including cases of child sexual exploitation, in 2021.

PREVENTION

The government maintained prevention efforts. The National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT) and its secretariat coordinated anti-trafficking activities, continued to implement a 2019-2023 national anti-trafficking action plan, and initiated a mid-year review of the action plan to evaluate its achievements and remaining challenges. The NCCT produced an annual report documenting the government's holistic anti-trafficking efforts. The NCCT chaired 274 meetings in 2021 with various ministries to elevate the importance of human trafficking within the government; it did not report how many meetings it conducted in the previous reporting period. The NCCT regularly invited trafficking survivors to attend meetings and workshops in order to improve policies through survivors' experiences and recommendations. The secretariat of the NCCT maintained six working groups to monitor the efforts of the interagency committee, as well as those of its provincial subcommittees. Subsidiary provincial committees to counter trafficking (PCCT), four of which continued to receive modest central government funds, coordinated efforts at the local level to mirror the activities of the NAP. Each PCCT maintained customized provincial-level action plans outlining how to report cases of trafficking to police, victim protection efforts, and prevention activities. The NCCT and various PCCTs—in cooperation with relevant ministries and NGO partners—conducted 156 anti-trafficking trainings for 5,720 government officials in 2021. A Monitoring Working Group (MWG) strengthened the work of the NCCT at the provincial level by meeting with provincial officials and assessing areas of improvement, but it did not report how many times the MWG traveled to the provinces or how many officials it engaged. The Minister of Women's Affairs and the NCCT Vice Chair co-hosted a bilateral meeting on human trafficking with a foreign government in October 2021, which was attended by senior Cambodian government officials. The government provided anti-trafficking training to Cambodian diplomatic personnel as a part of their orientation prior to deploying abroad. The NCCT provided anti-trafficking training to two units of

Cambodian peacekeepers before their deployment to Lebanon and the Central African Republic. The government did not report its anti-trafficking budget in 2021, unlike in 2020 when it reported a budget of approximately 2.2 billion riels (\$543,080). NGOs reported the government’s weak funding for anti-trafficking activities led some NGOs to cover the expenses of government activities.

The government—in collaboration with various donors and NGOs—disseminated information about trafficking laws, safe migration, child labor, and strategies to combat trafficking to law enforcement, other government personnel, and the general population. The government organized 192 anti-trafficking awareness raising campaigns across the country, incorporated anti-trafficking messaging in thousands of public events (such as town halls and community council meetings), and senior officials spoke publicly about human trafficking. In 2021, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports—in cooperation with NGOs—implemented a school curriculum to educate students and teachers about human trafficking. The Anti-Human Trafficking Juvenile Police (AHTJP) and MOI continued to operate a hotline for victims and witnesses to report human trafficking crimes; the government publicized the hotline on government websites and social media sites, required guesthouses and hotels in all 25 provinces to publicize the hotline, and worked with an NGO focused on child sex trafficking to place placards of the hotline number in taxis and tuk-tuks throughout the country. The government reported the hotline received 21 calls—the same number of calls during the last reporting period—but none of them were human trafficking cases. The AHTJP also continued to utilize its social media site for the public to report suspected incidents of human trafficking, but it did not report how many cases it received. The Ministries of Labor and Foreign Affairs operated hotlines for Cambodians working abroad to seek assistance and report cases of human trafficking; the Cambodian embassy in Thailand received 1,109 calls, the embassy in South Korea received 186 calls, and the embassy in Japan received 540 calls. However, the government did not report if any of these calls resulted in the identification of trafficking victims.

The government did not have a 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. The MOLVT held 75 training sessions for recruitment agencies and labor brokers on ethical recruitment practices to protect the rights of migrant workers. The government worked in cooperation with an international organization to conduct labor inspections of garment factories, but a COVID-19 outbreak in February 2021 suspended in-person inspections, and the government had to rely on virtual assessments for the remainder of the year. Nevertheless, MOLVT and MOI officials conducted 2,966 inspections at factories and other businesses where they found 28,863 foreign workers, of whom 466 were without legal work documentation; the government fined the businesses a total of 233 million riels (\$58,520) for labor violations. The MOLVT maintained offices at the provincial level to monitor recruitment agencies and address complaints from workers, including potential incidents of trafficking; however, it did not report how many complaints these offices received in 2021. The government also did not conduct inspections of recruitment agencies that were allegedly involved in trafficking crimes.

The MOLVT did not report providing pre-departure orientation to Cambodians migrating abroad for work, unlike in 2020 when it reported providing orientation to 20,360 Cambodians. 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. In 2021, the NCCT reported Cambodian soldiers and police along the Thai border prevented 3,581 Cambodian migrant workers from entering Thailand, 1,325 of whom were women and 131 were children; however, the NCCT did not report if it screened these migrants for trafficking or referred them to protection services. Officials provided food to 1,270 Cambodian migrant workers at risk of or identified as trafficking victims in Thailand and helped two workers resolve a labor dispute with a foreign employer. In South Korea, Cambodian officials made 87 visits to worksites with Cambodian workers and resolved 137 labor disputes, while in Japan Cambodian officials made 27 visits to worksites with a significant number of Cambodian workers and helped resolve 74 labor disputes. The government did not report if officials identified any trafficking victims among these labor dispute cases. 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. 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 the PRC in 2016. However, the MFAIC did not report identifying potential victims during these screenings. 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, observers reported an increase in the number of Cambodian women traveling through unsafe overland channels for marriage migration to the PRC.

The MOLVT maintained an 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. MOLVT officials continued to deny the existence of child labor—including forced child labor—and debt-based coercion within the brick industry. The MOLVT visited 170 brick kilns and sugar and cassava plantations where officials identified 350 cases of vulnerable children living on the kilns and plantations; it provided these children with educational opportunities and other forms of assistance, but it did not identify any trafficking victims. NGOs claimed police were often unaware that detection of crimes at brick kilns fell under their investigative purview; the AHTJP confirmed they viewed brick kiln inspections as under the MOLVT’s purview and would only investigate kilns if the MOLVT referred a case to them. The AHTJP did not report any such referrals during the reporting period. Authorities often conducted inspections with advance notification to the kiln owners, enabling them to avoid fines or conceal abuses by removing children from the kilns before an inspection. In 2021, the government—in cooperation with NGOs—led a study to identify the needs of

bilingual Khmer-Thai Cambodian children living in Cambodia’s Koh Kong Province and Thailand’s Trat Province; the goal of the study was to improve access to education for these children as they moved across the border with their migrant parents and to reduce the risk of trafficking and child labor. In July 2021, the government launched a new action plan to prevent and respond to online child sexual exploitation for 2021-2025, but the government did not report additional details about actions it took to implement the plan. The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with the NCCT, made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts through workshops for staff in the tourism sector and government officials on child sexual exploitation in the tourism industry; it also continued to produce public-facing materials targeting potential consumers of commercial sex with children. However, as in prior years, the government generally focused on deterring foreign perpetrators of child sex tourism, rather than targeting the local population that constituted the main source of demand for commercial sex with children in Cambodia.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Cambodia, and traffickers exploit victims from Cambodia abroad. NGOs and labor unions reported in 2020 that foreign labor brokers are fraudulently recruiting foreign migrants, including from Bangladesh, the PRC, and Nepal, to work in PRC- invested and other construction sites in Cambodia where some are indebted to recruitment firms and experience passport confiscation. In 2021, the media reported that traffickers also subject PRC, Southeast Asian, and other country nationals to forced criminality in online scam operations run by local PRC-organized criminal groups in call centers located in Cambodia. 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 service—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 service and forced begging or street vending in Thailand and Vietnam. Undocumented Cambodian labor migrants working in Thailand—who constituted an estimated 30-40 percent of the 1.5 to 2 million Cambodians there before the pandemic—are at high risk of trafficking due to their immigration status, as are undocumented Cambodians working in Vietnam. The pandemic affected established migration patterns and certain sectors in 2020, such as construction, which placed some vulnerable groups at greater risk of trafficking than in previous years. Between February 2020 to February 2021, more than 150,000 Cambodian labor migrants returned to Cambodia from other countries, primarily Thailand, due to industry closures caused by the pandemic.

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 Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, and South Africa. 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 women and some girls from rural areas under false pretenses to travel to the PRC to enter into marriages with PRC-national men. These women incur thousands of dollars of 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. Some parents reportedly receive between \$1,500 and \$3,000 from marriage brokers to send their daughters to the PRC for marriage. Cambodian women serving willingly as illegal surrogates for PRC 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 many of the more than 10,000 Cambodians living at such kilns, including nearly 4,000 children, to multigenerational debt-based coercion, either by buying off their pre-existing 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. NGO reports in 2016, 2019, and 2021 have confirmed cases of child labor—including forced child labor—in brick kilns, as children are forced to work alongside their parents through debt-based coercion. An NGO study conducted in 2017 found nearly all 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. 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 in brothels 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 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 PRC national-owned casinos, entertainment establishments, and other commercial enterprises in Preah Sihanouk Province led to an increase of local sex trafficking and forced labor among Cambodian women and girls, although Cambodia’s 2020 ban on online gambling and the subsequent shuttering of many PRC national-owned casinos and other entertainment establishments has reduced such trafficking. Cambodian men form the largest source of demand for children exploited in sex trafficking; however, men from elsewhere in Asia, Australia, Europe, South Africa, and the United States 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. The prevalence of child sex trafficking and child sex tourism reportedly declined in 2020 due to reduced international travel and pandemic-related quarantine requirements. However, NGOs and law enforcement officials reported the pandemic increased incidents of online child sexual exploitation in 2020, and incidents continued to increase through 2021. Vietnamese women and children, many of whom are victims of debt-based coercion, travel to Cambodia and are exploited in sex trafficking. NGOs report that 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.

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