

Modern Slavery in Cambodia

A collaboration of



CHAB DAI

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This Fact Sheet provides an overview of modern slavery in Cambodia, highlighting key figures, characteristics, drivers, and efforts to combat this grave violation of human rights.

Modern slavery refers to the various forms of forced labor, human trafficking, forced marriage, and exploitation that exist in contemporary society. Modern slavery affects vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, children, women, and members of marginalized communities.

The Magnitude of Modern Slavery in Cambodia

An estimated **83,000** people are currently trapped in various forms of modern slavery in Cambodia according to the 2023 Global Slavery Index Report.

According to the 2023 TIP Report, all of the country's 25 provinces are sources of human trafficking. And as arising concern, as early as 2021, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a report on Online Scam Operations related to trafficking, where victims are forcibly involved in online scams ([see report here](#)).

As for the common forms of modern slavery in Cambodia cited by credible sources include:

- Forced to work in online scam operations (OHCHR)
- Debt-bondage, bonded labor, and child labor in brick kilns (2023 US TIP Report)
- Forced marriage to neighboring countries (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crimes)
- Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (Cambodia National Council of Children)

The 2023 US Trafficking In-Persons (TIP) Report classified Cambodia as a Tier 3 country.

Cambodia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. The remained on Tier 3 for the second consecutive year.



Forms of Modern Slavery in Cambodia

Online Scams Operations

“Victims are forcibly involved in online scams.”

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Action: Online scams typically recruit people through seemingly legitimate job ads for roles like programmers and marketers, using elaborate methods including multiple interviews and skill tests.

Means: Survivors escaping scam operations reveal they were tricked into believing they were taking legitimate jobs, often found through social networks or reputable job sites. However, many ads are seen on popular social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Tinder, offering enticing conditions like high salaries, bonuses, and free accommodation and food.

Purpose: Victims in scam operations are exploited for forced criminality to profit criminal masterminds. They're coerced into committing online fraud through fake gambling sites, cryptocurrency scams, and romantic or financial deceptions, like "pig-butcher," using fake relationships to swindle users. These scams are sophisticated, with counterfeit websites displaying fraudulent data to lure targets with the promise of high profits ([see report here](#)).

US TIP 2023 Report Highlight on Brick Kilns

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 ([see report here](#)).

Online Sexual Exploitation of Children

According to a 2022 report, by the Cambodia National Council for Children and UNICEF Cambodia, 11 percent of internet-using children in Cambodia aged 12-17 had experienced clear examples of online sexual exploitation and abuse. This includes blackmailing children into engaging in sexual activities and non-consensual sharing of sexual images.

Among other concerning statistics, the report also revealed that 16 percent of children were subjected to sexual comments about them that made them feel uncomfortable, of whom 31 percent said it occurred on social media ([see report here](#)).

Forced Marriage to Neighboring Countries

Cambodian women and girls are coerced and forced into arranged and forced marriages through various means: some are deceived and promised a job in China; others are told they need a marriage certificate in order to be eligible for well-paid work (which is not the case); some are tricked and sold by their family members, relatives and acquaintances for a lump sum or the promise of a good marriage and better life in China.

In 2021, overland routes transiting Vietnam, and to a lesser extent Laos and Myanmar, remained the most common routes for Cambodian women smuggled or trafficked out of Cambodia to China for marriage. Once in Vietnam, some brokers obtained Chinese travel visas for Cambodian women, who then entered China by air ([see report here](#)).

A story of a Cambodian survivor of bride-trafficking to China.

"I had never experienced any moments of happiness; I always thought about earning income and seeking way to support family. While I was in China, I was forced to work and serve a Chinese family without received any money."

She added "I was surrounded by negative thought, having no hope or motivation to carry on my life. Fortunately, Hagar offer me a chance to learn and help to change my negative thoughts.

Hagar has provided me with food assistance and an opportunity to access skills that helps me to earn income. I am now happy because I have a source of income to afford milk for my baby and to live in better conditions."



Photo by Hagar International

The survivor is currently enrolled on a skills-training program

Combatting Modern Slavery in Cambodia

- **Legislation** - Cambodia combats human trafficking and modern slavery with the 2008 "Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation," criminalizing all trafficking forms. This law, periodically updated to meet international standards, is supported by sub-decrees and (prakas) ministerial regulations. However, concerns remain about its consistent enforcement.
- **Law Enforcement** - Effective combat against modern slavery requires specialized training for law enforcement, including police, immigration, and judiciary, to identify, investigate, and prosecute trafficking. Crucial inter-agency collaboration ensures cohesive government response. Law enforcement must treat victims as such, not criminals, requiring training focused on victim rights and well-being. However, challenges like corruption, limited resources, and lack of awareness can impede these efforts.
- **Victim Support** - Safe spaces for victim recovery are essential, offering medical, psychological support, and vocational training. Efforts focus on societal reintegration, including employment and family reconnection. Protecting survivors who assist in prosecuting traffickers is vital, as is raising awareness about trafficking risks and rights as a preventative measure.
- **International Engagement** - Cambodia has bilateral agreements with Thailand and Vietnam to fight cross-border trafficking and is a signatory to the UN's Palermo Protocol for a global anti-trafficking framework. These agreements aid victim repatriation and joint investigations. Cambodia also participates in regional efforts like the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) targeting Mekong region trafficking.

Continuing the Efforts in Cambodia

Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) like Chab Dai and Hagar International in Cambodia work to raise awareness, provide support to victims, and advocate for stronger legislation. These organizations play a crucial role in identifying and rescuing victims, providing legal aid, and assisting with survivors' rehabilitation and reintegration.



Photo by Chab Dai

The current recommendations outlined by the 2023 TIP report for Cambodia

Legal and Prosecution Measures:

- Prosecute Traffickers in Online Scams Operations: Ensure justice for traffickers in forced labor cyber scams, including complicit officials.
- Strengthen Trafficking Prosecutions: Rigorously investigate and prosecute trafficking, with significant prison terms for convicts.
- Eliminate Recruitment Fees: Mandate that labor recruiters in Cambodia don't charge workers fees, placing this burden on employers without loopholes.
- Restitution and Compensation: Provide restitution to exploited individuals upon trafficker conviction, with clear, safe, and rights-respecting procedures.
- Strengthen Labor Recruitment Regulations: Revise and enforce labor recruitment laws to enhance worker protection and rights.

Victim Identification and Support:

- Ensure Trauma-Informed Practice: Incorporate trauma-informed approaches in handling trafficking cases to prioritize the psychological well-being of victims.
- Implement Identification Guidelines: Utilize and train officials nationwide in victim identification guidelines for domestic and foreign suspects.
- Screening in Detention: Conduct trafficking screenings for everyone in immigrant detention or custody, with a focus on vulnerable groups like foreign workers, LGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities.
- Services for Male Victims: Expand services for male victims, especially those exploited in overseas commercial fishing.
- Incentives for Victim Participation: Motivate victim involvement in legal processes with incentives such as a victim's fund and benefits like work rights or temporary residency.
- Assistance for Cambodian Victims Abroad: Set up systematic aid at diplomatic missions for Cambodian victims overseas, including areas without Cambodian representation.

Kunthea, survivor of bride-trafficking from China

After completing her counselling sessions with Chab Dai's Community Based Client Care (CBCC) team, she decided to help other survivors and vulnerable girls and women. She joined the CBCC's Survivor Care Forum and continued to stay in touch with the team reporting issues she saw in her community. She asked for further support to identify other forms of trafficking and vowed to protect others from the same experiences.



Chab Dai counselor with a Survivor

Collaboration and Policy Integration:

- **Importance of NGOs:** Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) often have hands-on experience and direct interactions with victims of human trafficking. Their grassroots involvement provides them with a unique perspective on the challenges faced by victims and the gaps in existing policies. By incorporating their insights, policies can be more victim-centric and effective.
- **Specialized Expertise:** Many NGOs specialize in specific areas of human trafficking, such as child exploitation, forced labor, or sex trafficking. Their specialized knowledge can be invaluable in formulating targeted and nuanced policies.
- **Resource Sharing:** NGOs often have resources, such as research, data, and case studies, which can be invaluable in policy formulation. Collaborative efforts can lead to a pooling of resources, ensuring that policies are evidence-based.
- **Capacity Building:** Collaboration can also lead to capacity-building opportunities. Government agencies can benefit from training sessions, workshops, and seminars organized by NGOs, enhancing their understanding and skills related to combating human trafficking.

Monitoring and Oversight:

- **Funding for Anti-Trafficking Units:** Increase funding for anti-trafficking law enforcement units, ensuring that funds are available upfront rather than as reimbursements.
- **Monitoring of Defendants:** Allocate more resources to anti-human trafficking police to effectively monitor defendants released under judicial supervision pending trial.
- **Labor Inspections:** Intensify unannounced labor inspections in high-risk sectors, especially in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), brick kilns, entertainment venues, construction sites, and plantations, to identify labor trafficking and debt bondage.
- **Oversight of Lending Institutions:** Increase inspection and regulation of lending institutions, including private micro-finance organizations, to mitigate the risk of debt-based coercion in economically disadvantaged communities.
- **Data Collection and Reporting:** Implement a robust system for monitoring, collecting, and reporting data on anti-trafficking efforts, ensuring that data dissemination respects victims' privacy.
- **Inspect Labor Recruitment Agencies:** Strengthen efforts to inspect private labor recruitment agencies and their sub-licensed brokers for signs of fraudulent recruitment and other trafficking indicators.

Available Cambodian Anti- Trafficking Government Action Instruments

- Directive on the implementation of the principles of the national and international laws in force in relation to the protection of victims of a crime (2005)
- Guiding Circular No. 009 (MOSVY) (2007)
- Decision on Guidelines for the Protection of the Rights of Trafficked Children of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Decision No. 107 (2007) (Decision No. 107)
- Agreement on guidelines and cooperation between the relevant government institutions and supporting victim agencies in the proceedings in relation to human trafficking (2007)
- Guidelines on the Enforcement of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (2008)
- Policy on the Protection of Rights of Victims of Human Trafficking (Prakas No. 852), including Minimum Standards for Protection of the Rights of Victims of Human Trafficking (Prakas No. 857) (2009, Protection Policy and Minimum Standards)
- Standard operating procedures for the units specializing in suppression of human trafficking (2010)
- Standard operating procedures on the support of reintegration of men who are victims of human trafficking (2012)
- Minimum Standards on Residential Care for Victims of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (2014)
- Guidelines on Forms and Procedures for Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking for Appropriate Service Provision (2015)

This factsheet was prepared by



CHAB DAI

In Khmer, the Cambodian language, Chab Dai means joining hands: we are working together in Cambodia, the US, the UK and beyond to protect, educate, empower and stop human trafficking and other forms of abuse. The more community members who report and protect, the more local authorities trained in trauma support, the more survivors empowered to raise their voices, the more government bodies working to fight inequality and poverty – the bigger impact we can have, today and beyond.



Hagar is an international non-government organization (NGO) dedicated to the protection, recovery and community integration of survivors of human rights abuse; particularly human trafficking and gender-based violence. We do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to restore life in all its fullness; and partner with the not-for profit, government and for-profit sectors to achieve our mission.



Free the Slaves is in the vanguard of the growing global movement to end one of history's greatest human rights abuses. We work locally, in some of the world's worst trafficking hot spots, to generate global change.