




SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

THE CAMBODIAN CASE

June 2020





This publication contains a study on sexual abuse and exploitation in travel and tourism focused on Cambodia. It is published as part of the project Say what you saw and was written by Joel Borgström and Christian Larsson.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sexual abuse of children occurs all over the world and global research indicate that risks for abuse occurring in the context of travel and tourism are increasing. No country is immune and new travel patterns and use of new technology provide specific risks for children. Cambodia has struggled with a considerable influx of foreign offenders but also has a strong track record in terms of protecting children with a highly professional child protection sector including both government, local organizations and international partners. As a result, there are unique insights and information available about the approaches and strategies used by traveling offenders which are also relevant beyond the kingdom's borders. Highlighting the Cambodian experience therefore provides valuable knowledge into key challenges related to stopping the traveling offenders as well as which strategies that have been most successful.

This report is the result of the project "Say what you saw" implemented by World Childhood Foundation, ECPAT Sweden in partnership with Friends International/ChildSafe Movement and is intended to provide updated knowledge on key dimensions of sexual abuse and exploitation in travel and tourism. The report describes the changing dynamics in Cambodia regarding child sexual abuse and exploitation in travel and tourism and provides a qualitative update of the current situation. Findings should be viewed as an indication of emerging patterns, scale and gaps rather than objective facts possible to generalize or seen as valid across the country. The report was developed combining a literature review and interviews with key informants. Through their work, the informants are well positioned to notice changes in the extent and forms of child sexual exploitation linked to travel and tourism. The main purpose is to document their experiences and perspectives and learn whether they see critical changes related to offender behaviors, their assessment of key gaps in response mechanisms as well as victim support interventions.

The report finds that the majority of known foreign offenders arrested in Cambodia have been based in and around the most popular tourism destinations in the country. Representing a considerable success for government and others in the child protection community, a key finding is that it has become considerably more difficult to abuse children in Cambodia. Success factors include the increasingly comprehensive response from both child protection organizations, authorities, and the government but also through a tourism industry taking responsibility to protect children.

But in response to more effective investigations, initiatives from the private sector and the growing network of child protection actors, there are signs that offenders are moving beyond the most popular destinations and into more remote areas to avoid detection. Previously, it was possible for traveling offenders to operate quite openly, accessing children on the streets, and bringing them into guesthouses and hotels. They now seem to apply more advanced approaches. Rather than accessing children openly, traveling offenders are increasingly embedding themselves in communities, taking on professional or volunteer roles in schools, residential care centers or NGO's working with vulnerable children and families and also use new technology to contact children. Stronger grooming strategies includes manipulation of children, families, and sometimes whole communities to build trust and avoid arrest. The use of long-term accommodation as opposed to hotels and guesthouses bypass existing policies and staff trainings. Many offenders are based in Cambodia or are frequent visitors. Access to children in brothels and karaoke parlors has largely disappeared although sometimes underaged youth victims are still encountered.



There have also been improvements in the scale and types of support interventions available for victims. Increased knowledge about sexual abuse of children in communities has resulted in increasing number of reported suspicions. Although there are many lessons to be learnt by these outcomes, several challenges remain. Increased reporting puts pressure on service providers with limited resources to help victims. Concerns are also raised about the use of technology to access and abuse victims. One example relates to the steep increase in confiscated child sexual abuse material and although response mechanisms are being developed, there is currently limited capacity to deal with risks for children online.

One central recommendation is that there is a need for new methods and initiatives built on previous efforts to protect children from traveling offenders. This is linked to the new forms of traveling described above but also new types of services and the increasing use of social media and other platforms. As illustrated by the increasing number of cases involving long-term residents and individuals doing “charity work”, these travel trends will be used by offenders to access children in places where awareness of, and response to, sexual abuse of children is limited. Existing initiatives should be expanded and include new stakeholders ensuring that they are involved, trained and aware of risks for children further increasing the ability to identify victims and offenders. The complexity of these crimes and the persistence of some offenders call for renewed efforts by governments, international and local law enforcement, donors, civil society and the private sector. All efforts are needed to stop offenders from moving between countries without being identified and punished.



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1

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse and exploitation of children occurs all over the world, also in popular tourist destinations. Tourism is itself not the cause of this but, but its infrastructure is being misused by offenders who travel to commit abuse.

Global research indicates that risks for sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism are increasing, reaching new destinations and out-pace efforts to respond. The landmark *Offenders on the move. Global study on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism* from 2016 notes that “no region is untouched by this crime and no country is ‘immune’”. In an increasingly interconnected world, more people are on the move and even the most remote part of the planet are now within reach, thanks to cheaper travel and the spread of the internet. As a result, the risks of child sexual exploitation are increasing.”¹

In February 2020, the Phnom Penh municipal court charged a 63-year old Swedish man for “purchase of child prostitution and sexual intercourse with minor under fifteen years”. The man was arrested by the Anti-Human trafficking police after investigating tips from a local NGO. The victim is an 11-year-old-girl. In the same case, a 33-year old Cambodian woman is suspected of facilitating the abuse. They are both held in pre-trial custody until the trial starts later this year.²

¹ *Offenders on the move. Global study on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism* (2016).

² APLE Cambodia (Feb 2020): “Cambodian girl discloses sexual abuse. Two offenders charged”.

Although sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism has spread to new locations, changed form and that risks for children has increased as a result of new travel patterns, the situation in Cambodia seems to have improved. Qualitative research indicates that an improved law enforcement response is the main reason for a significant reduction of children in commercial sexual exploitation establishments in Cambodia between 2000 and 2012.³ Improved investigations, increased awareness and a more effective network of professionals protecting children make it more difficult for travelling offenders to find their victims. But it has also resulted in offenders developing new strategies to avoid getting arrested when accessing and sexually exploiting children.

This report is published as part of the project “Say what you saw” with the intention to provide updated knowledge on key dimensions of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in travel and tourism. We have written it to shed light on the new approaches that traveling offenders are using as a result of new travel trends, new technology and increased awareness. Cambodia is used as a case study for reasons described below, but it’s important to remember that this is a global crime which also highlights the global responsibility to tackle causes, effects and the harm child sexual abuse leads to for individual children. All countries struggle with effective counter measures and although progress has been made in areas such as international cooperation and support, there is an urgent need for more efforts both to prevent offenders from visiting countries with lower risk of detection but also to improve systems in countries that struggle with high numbers of incoming offenders. The purpose of the report is therefore not to highlight weaknesses in the Cambodian system but rather to highlight challenges and particular gaps that can be seen in most parts of the world.

Two main factors have guided us in the choice to focus on Cambodia.

- 1** *The first is that Cambodia is known to be a popular destination for traveling offenders.⁴ Several Swedish citizens have been convicted for child sexual abuse in Cambodia.*
- 2** *The second is related to a fairly well-developed network of child protection organizations providing services and investments in social support. Government capacity to investigate and prosecute child sexual abuse and exploitation has been improved.*

As a result, investigations have become more effective and more offenders are identified and prosecuted. Services for at-risk children and their families are available in most tourist hotspots. Government commitment to prevent what used to be known as “child sex tourism” has been relatively strong and consistent.⁵

³ International Justice Mission (2013): “Commercial sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia. A venue-based application of time-space sampling to measure prevalence in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville”.

⁴ Offenders on the move. Global study on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (2016).

⁵ Although still in use, the term “child sex tourism” should be avoided since it may inadvertently give the idea that this is a legitimate form of tourism. The term also excludes many types of travelling offenders, such as business travellers, and does not describe what actually occurs, namely a gross violation of children’s rights. In this report, we use the term sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism, in accordance with The Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Luxembourg Guidelines.

The combination of these components with Cambodia's small geographical size has resulted in unique knowledge about the sexual exploitation of children. Simply put: there is a better understanding of sexual exploitation of children by traveling offenders in Cambodia than in most other countries in the world. Cambodia is therefore highly relevant for an in-depth study of changing patterns and new dynamics: how offenders groom and access children, how they avoid being brought to justice and how they are changing the ways they act in response to more effective investigations and higher awareness among the public.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a mixed methods approach consisting of a combination of literature review and interviews with key informants. This approach was chosen as the most effective way of compiling updated knowledge about changing patterns and key questions such as: how do offenders come in contact with children? Are their methods for accessing and grooming children changing? What is the situation for children and their families in terms of response from society? And are there gaps related to social support and legal services? The report does not attempt to provide representative evidence that is valid across Cambodia but is focused on a qualitative and in-depth description of emerging themes, changing dynamics and assessment of key gaps.



Interviews were undertaken with key informants who work with children who have been abused and provide support for children and families that live or spend time in high-risk environments. Several of the informants regularly participate in investigations related to child sexual exploitation and abuse involving both local and international offenders. Through their work, they are well positioned to notice changes in the extent and forms of child sexual exploitation. The informants were selected based on their expertise and as representatives of organizations that together reach most main hotspots for child sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism in Cambodia. The main purpose was to document their experiences and perspectives and learn whether they see critical changes related to offender behaviors and patterns, their assessment of key gaps in the response and prosecution mechanisms as well as victim support interventions. Eight experts from non-governmental organizations and one academic expert were interviewed in total. World Childhood Foundation and ECPAT Sweden have well-developed partnerships in Cambodia which helped facilitate the selection and access to key individuals. All quotes in the report come from in-depth interviews with these experts unless otherwise indicated. We have chosen not to disclose their full names and precise location of work to reduce risks for them and their organizations.

1.2 LIMITATIONS

This report provides a qualitative update of the situation in what traditionally has been one of the world's most popular destinations for traveling child sex offenders. The findings should be viewed as an *indication* of emerging patterns, scale and gaps rather than taken as objective facts possible to generalize or seen as valid across the country. In order to gather as much valuable information as possible within a short time frame, we decided to focus on key hotspots based on known cases and investigations. These limitations were compensated by a comprehensive desk review including analysis of cases from all parts of the country and the fact that the persons interviewed have long experience also with cases from remote parts of the country.

A key limitation is the relatively low number of persons interviewed and the fact that they are all working in the same field resulting in risks for biased findings and a lack of diverse perspectives. Children were not interviewed directly given the sensitivities associated with child sexual abuse and exploitation and that this type of research requires comprehensive ethical considerations and in-depth experience of child interviews. Existing studies focusing on children's experiences and strategies for avoiding risk and dealing with trauma adds very valuable information but was with this background seen as outside the scope of this report focused on the identification of overall trends. An additional risk with qualitative interviews is that informants may share anecdotal case studies with limited relevance for patterns and systematic change. This was managed in the selection process of the key informants where we made sure that they represented different agencies with different perspectives, areas of expertise and scope of work. Critical discussions of replies and cross-referencing were made as much as possible. Although the informants are working in the same field, they have different geographic focus areas, are responsible for different support programs and commission research on different aspects of the problem.

Verification of the collected information could be provided through more comprehensive research, including a higher number of informants, the inclusion of families and children and interviews with government bodies and law enforcement agencies. Recommendations for further research are developed in chapter nine.



2

CAMBODIA: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Population: 16 million

School Enrollment: 97%

Tourist Arrivals by 2018: 6.2 million

Main Tourist Nationalities:
Chinese
Vietnamese
Laotians



4.4%

Sexually Abused prior to Age 18

5.6%



The Kingdom of Cambodia borders Thailand, Laos and Vietnam and has a population of approximately 16 million people. Children represent about a third of the population. In April 1975 the communist Khmer Rouge forces overthrew the government and initiated one of the worst genocides in history resulting in at least 1,5 million Cambodians dying from execution and starvation. When Vietnamese forces liberated Cambodia in 1979, the country was in ruins with hundreds of thousands of people in refugee camps, shattered infrastructure, a heavily traumatized population and an almost complete eradication of people with higher education. A first UN-sponsored election was held in 1993. The current prime minister Hun Sen has been in power since 1985 making him the longest serving prime minister in the world.

Since the ousting of the Khmer Rouge, the country has slowly developed into a lower middle-income country, an economic development largely driven by tourism, development assistance and garment exports. Despite the rapid economic development, Cambodia still faces many challenges and remains one of the poorest countries in Asia. An illustration of this is that more than 20 percent of the national budget came from development aid in 2018 and that a large proportion of the population are still considered “near poor” (meaning that they may easily fall back into poverty). 32 percent of children under 5 years old are considered stunted due to poor nutrition. Primary education enrolment is high at 97 percent but only 57 percent remain in school long enough to complete secondary school in grade 12.⁶ A recent development is the rapid expansion of Chinese investments. Several large infrastructure projects are underway as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. One side-

⁶World Bank and CIA (Apr 2019): “Cambodia country overview”, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview>, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cb.html

effect of these projects is the near total transformation of some Cambodian cities, for example illustrated by the more than 70 casinos that have been built in the port city of Sihanoukville in less than two years.

The Government of Cambodia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992 along with other key human rights declarations and conventions. Several policies and laws have been developed to enhance protection of children. Violence against children in all ages is a major concern and children have been shown to be exposed to violence and neglect in both private and public settings. According to a national survey by UNICEF, more than half of all Cambodian children experienced some form of physical violence prior to age 18. Roughly a quarter of Cambodian children are emotionally abused while growing up and 4.4 percent of females and 5.6 percent of males experienced some form of sexual abuse prior to age 18.⁷ The perpetrator is often someone the child knows. Children from ethnic minorities, disabled children and street-connected children are at higher risk of being subjected to violence. Adult prostitution is illegal but tends to be tolerated in practice.

Cambodia does not yet have a comprehensive framework for protecting children and responsibilities are split across many different agencies and government departments complicating an effective response. Government commitment and international assistance is resulting in progress, however, with particular improvements in areas such as alternative care for children who cannot stay with their biological families and convictions of offenders of the more serious forms of abuse.

2.1 TOURISM IN CAMBODIA

Tourism has increased significantly in Cambodia over the last decade, mainly to the world heritage site Angkor. Approximately 500 000 tourists visited Cambodia in 2000, a figure that had increased more than ten times by 2018 when 6.2 million tourist arrivals were registered. The main nationalities visiting Cambodia are Chinese followed by Vietnamese and Laotians. Citizens from USA, UK and France are among the top 10 nationalities visiting Cambodia. Around 18 000 Swedish tourists visited Cambodia in 2017. A new trend is the rapid increase of regional tourists, especially Chinese. In 2017, the number of Chinese arrivals to Sihanoukville increased by 126 percent compared to the year before. Chinese nationals are now thought to make up almost 20 percent of the town's population. Cambodia continues to be a popular destination for western backpackers traveling in South East Asia with stops also in Thailand, Vietnam and Laos.

Cambodian authorities are planning for a continued increase of tourist arrivals, hoping for 12 million tourists yearly by 2025. Heavy investments in tourism infrastructure is expected over the coming years including new airports in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, new hotels and a new highway to the coast.

Although the Angkor temples are still the main attraction in Cambodia, many people are now visiting also for other reasons. It is possible to enjoy practically all forms of tourism with travel companies offering everything from all-inclusive package tours on the beach, bicycle excursions on the countryside, cultural heritage- and adventure tours, urban exploration and direct contact with local communities through voluntourism (i.e. holidays combining regular tourism with short periods of volunteering).

3

CAMBODIA - A TARGET COUNTRY FOR TRAVELING OFFENDERS

The vast majority of traveling child sex offenders in Southeast Asia are people from countries in the region. But many of these countries have also attracted offenders from countries further away. Arrested offenders of child sexual abuse in Cambodia between 2003-2019 represent as many as 30 different nationalities.⁷ Cambodia's reputation as a hot spot for traveling offenders has traditionally been explained by a number of factors, including easy access due to relatively low requirements for obtaining visas, large numbers of visiting tourists, significant poverty, low awareness about abuse and limited capacity in law enforcement resulting in low risks for perpetrators to be detected and convicted. Low travel costs and cheap prostitution has also contributed to Cambodia becoming a hotspot for sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism.⁸ Improved response to child sexual abuse in other popular destinations for traveling offenders such as neighboring Thailand is believed to have pushed offenders to Cambodia during the late 1990s.⁹

Arrested offenders of child sexual abuse in Cambodia in 2003-2019 represent

30
DIFFERENT
NATIONALITIES

⁷ UNICEF and MOSAVY (2014): "Violence Against Children Survey Cambodia".

⁸ ECPAT International (2018): Country overview Cambodia.

⁹ ECPAT International (2017): Regional overview: Sexual exploitation of children in Southeast Asia.



Overall factors that tend to increase children's vulnerability for abuse include poverty, weak child protection mechanisms, domestic abuse and cultural values that reproduce stigma and taboos related to sex and sexual abuse. Some children face multiple risks that together can put them in dangerous situations with high levels of abuse and exploitation. One example is how poverty and disability result in a higher risk of being placed in an orphanage where contact between children and unmonitored volunteers increase the risk of abuse and exploitation. Another example is ethnic minority children who live near major tourist sites where they are forced to beg or work directly with tourists.¹⁰

Sexual exploitation of children by traveling offenders in Cambodia has traditionally been understood to occur within three different categories that will be further analyzed in chapter four:



Establishment-based sexual exploitation, often occurring in brothels, karaoke places, beer gardens and massage establishments.



Street- and community based sexual exploitation, which is usually facilitated personally by a sex offender who approaches children directly on the street or in a community with the intention of starting a relationship with the child that will lead to sexual abuse.



Institution-based sexual abuse where perpetrators have been known to infiltrate institutions such as orphanages, schools, non-governmental organizations, churches, Buddhist temples or other charity institutions to access children.

¹⁰ *Offenders on the move* (2016).

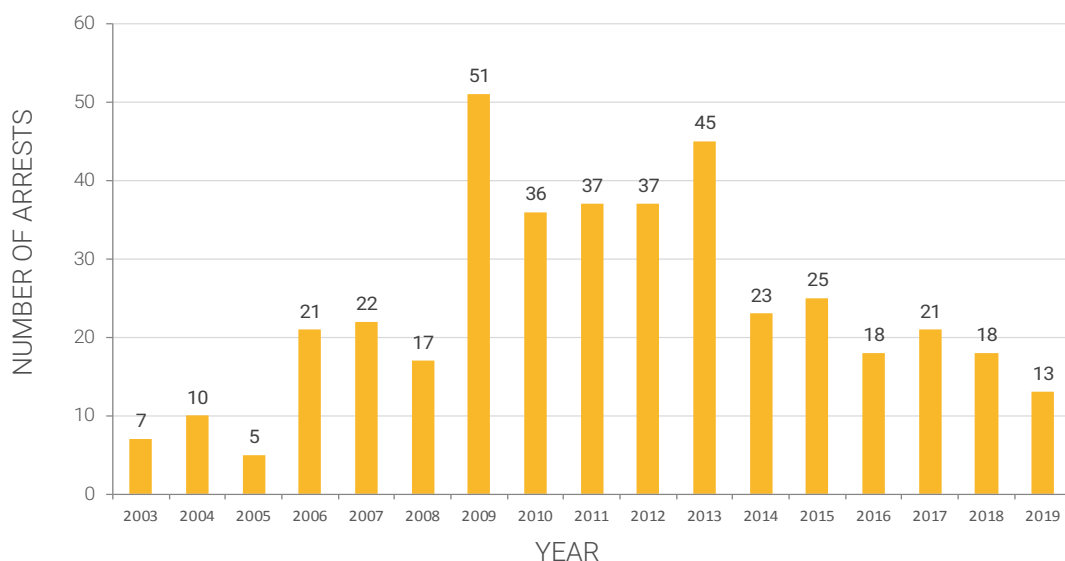
3.1 PREVALENCE AND ESTIMATING NUMBERS

The hidden nature of child sexual abuse and exploitation and the reluctance of victims to report make it very difficult to estimate the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children, regardless if this involves local or foreign offenders. This was described by one of the local experts interviewed for this report:

“It’s challenging to say if sexual abuse is increasing or decreasing. Our case load is constantly increasing but before nobody had awareness of the issue. So, there is a correlation of increased numbers of cases and awareness raising with communities. When we start working with communities there are few cases but afterwards there is an increase in referral from communities.”

The organization Action Pour Les Enfants Cambodia (APLE Cambodia) is a leading Cambodian expert on child sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism with long experience of investigations, victim support and legal processes. They have worked with the Cambodian police to identify and investigate traveling offenders since 2003 with an average case load of 1-4 cases per month between 2009 and 2018.¹¹

NUMBER OF ARRESTS FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (2003-2019)



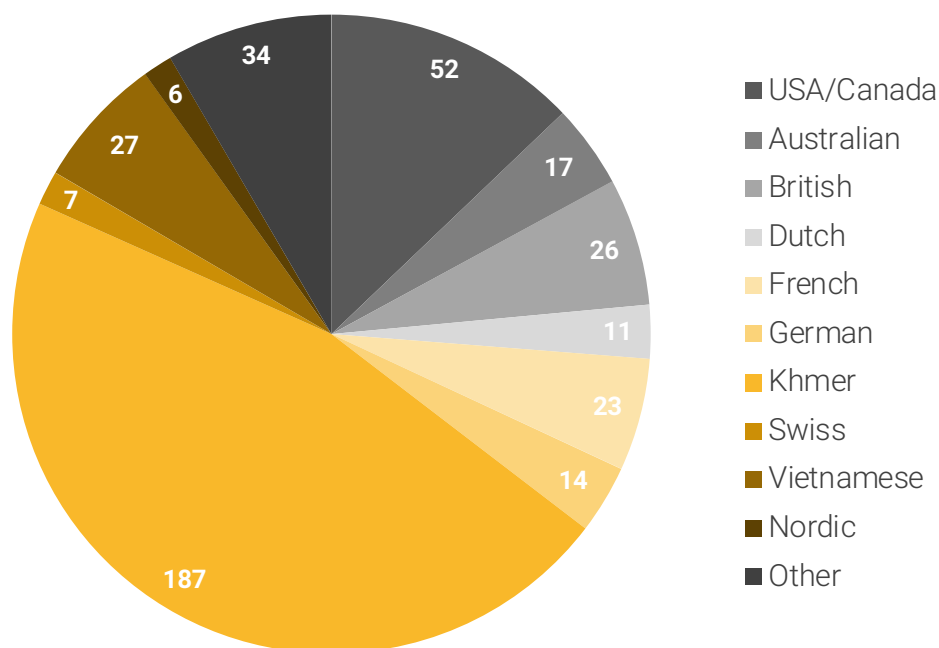
Between 2003 and 2019 they contributed to the arrest of 404 offenders of child sexual abuse. More than half of the arrested offenders (53%) were foreigners while the remaining 46 percent were Cambodian nationals. A majority of the foreign offenders came from USA, Vietnam, UK, France, Germany and Australia but APLE have also worked on investigations involving offenders from Denmark, Norway and Sweden.¹² All offenders were male while a majority of accomplices (when present) were female. 75 percent of those arrested were eventually convicted either in Cambodian or foreign courts.¹³

¹¹ APLE Cambodia (2019): Case file data (unpublished).

¹² APLE Cambodia (2014): “Analytical report on investigating traveling child sex offenders”.

¹³ APLE Cambodia (2019): Case file data (unpublished).

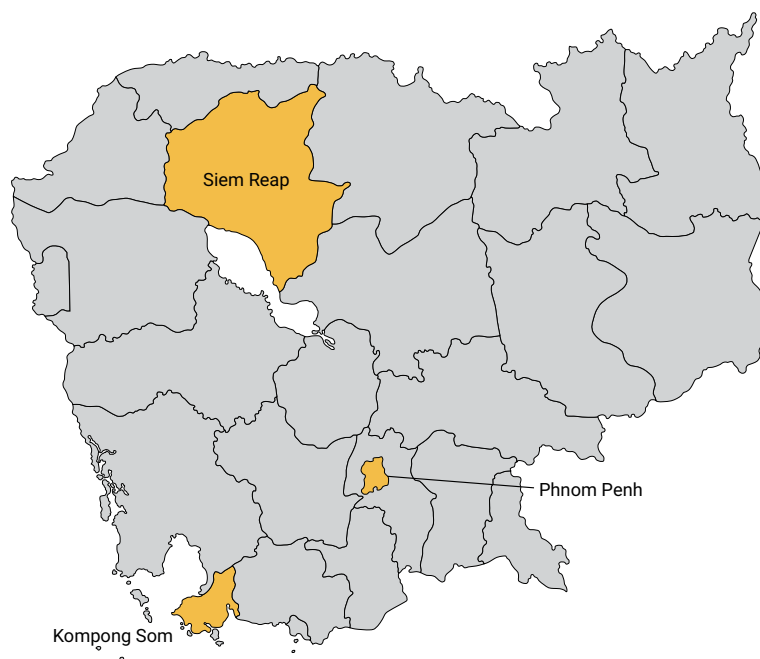
NUMBER OF ARRESTS PER REGION/COUNTRY (2003-2019)



3.2 TARGET DESTINATIONS: WHERE DO OFFENDERS GO?

The majority of known foreign offenders arrested in Cambodia have been based in and around the most popular tourism destinations in the country: Siem Reap province (home to the temple complex Angkor), Phnom Penh and Kompong Som (where the popular beach destination town Sihanoukville is located). It is also in these areas that adult prostitution is most common, although it can be found all over the country. At the same time, these are the areas with the highest concentration of organizations specialized in child protection. As a result of their work together with local authorities, services for vulnerable groups including children and their families have been established. Awareness has been raised through outreach and training sessions, street-connected children are identified and supported, and poor parents can get support to avoid sending their children into high-risk situations such as begging in tourist areas or placing children in orphanages. Law enforcement is overall both more responsive and empowered compared to more rural areas. Offenders based in these provinces are less likely to go unnoticed and are at higher risk of being reported. The explanation for the high number of arrests in these provinces is therefore likely a combination of an established system for identifying offenders and victims, higher awareness among the general public but also the fact that these areas see the highest number of visitors in Cambodia.

In the beach town Sihanoukville, local child protection experts report that the number of foreign offenders seems to have decreased over the last 5-10 years illustrated by a significant drop in reports from authorities, locals and visiting travelers. But the area is changing rapidly with a new influx of Chinese tourists and long-term residents contributing to a decrease of Western tourists. Although these changes bring considerable investments, local organizations working in the area are concerned that these changes will bring new challenges in terms of child protection and potential sexual exploitation of children.



In the two other main tourist destinations, Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, police and local organizations receive regular reports of suspected child sexual abuse by visiting foreigners.

In May 2019 Siem Reap provincial police arrested a 38-year old lawyer from USA, suspected of molesting four underage girls, all under 15 years old. The Cambodian police explained that the defendant abused the girls multiple times during that month, adding that the suspect offered each girl \$10 to \$50 each time he molested them. The victims told the police that the perpetrator would meet them at the Pub Street area in Siem Reap city before he invited them to his rental house in the city, where the abuse took place. The defendant had entered Cambodia twice, once earlier this year and on May 7.¹⁴

There are signs that offenders are moving beyond the most popular destinations and into more remote areas to avoid detection.¹⁵ Research done in the emerging tourist destinations Battambang, Kampot, Kep and Koh Kong validates these concerns and indicates that there is a lack of understanding of child sexual abuse among local authorities and parts of civil society. Kampot, Kep and Koh Kong in particular, are seeing an increase of foreign tourists as a result of the mentioned changes in Sihanoukville.¹⁷ Changing travel patterns also worried several of the interviewed experts with some expressing concerns over the lack of prevention and response mechanisms in place in emerging tourist destinations in Cambodia.

To avoid pockets where offenders can operate without being detected, child protection professionals across Cambodia are now prioritizing capacity development in areas with less awareness combined with the expansion of systems to protect children.

¹⁵ *Offenders on the move (2016): Regional report Southeast Asia.*

¹⁶ *APLE Cambodia (2018): "Current perceptions of child sexual abuse and exploitation in Cambodia: A study in five provinces".*

4

CHANGING METHODS OF TRAVELING OFFENDERS: HOW DO THEY FIND CHILDREN?

The methods used by traveling offenders to meet children have changed in Cambodia because of the new travel patterns, new technologies and increased awareness described above. Just as Thailand pushed some of its offenders out by improving law enforcement capacity and introducing stricter laws for sexual abuse, the same may be happening in Cambodia presently. But although the situation seems to have improved in Cambodia, this does not mean that the problem has disappeared. Payment for food and shelter, gifts, holidays and education are still used to groom children for abuse.¹⁷

Traditional services for tourists and travelers including different forms of accommodation, restaurants and other hospitality outlets are often used by offenders and can play an important role in terms of facilitating access to children. New arenas and tools such as volunteering with children, facilitation of shared-economy services (such as accommodation rentals) and new technology, such as apps and online communities, can be used by offenders to come in contact with vulnerable children and avoid detection. But all of these locations, services and technologies can also be used to protect children. In this chapter, key findings regarding trends and patterns are presented. It presents traditional ways that known offenders have used to contact children (and to some extent still use) as well as new strategies that have been described by the interviewed experts.



¹⁷ APLE Cambodia (2014): "Analytical report on investigating traveling child sex offenders".

4.1 THE ROLE OF ACCOMMODATION FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Child sexual abuse is a crime usually committed behind closed doors and traveling offenders often rely on the availability of hotel facilities, guesthouses, rented condos or other types of accommodation where they can operate without being reported. Previously, bringing children into hotels and guesthouses was usually not questioned by the staff working there.¹⁸

Although there are documented cases of traveling offenders committing abuse outdoors, this is not very common in Cambodia according to APLE and other experts. In interviews, 57 percent of children involved in investigations of traveling offenders stated that they had gone to the home of the offender (i.e. rented flat, hotel room or other form of accommodation) and about two-thirds of these had also slept there.¹⁹ Various types of accommodation for tourists and other travelers therefore play an important role in the protection of children from sexual abuse.

On 23rd February 2018, Siem Reap provincial court charged two British nationals aged 63, and 69 years, with Indecent Acts Against Minors under Fifteen Years of age, under the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation. Both men were remanded in pretrial detention to await further investigation. The Siem Reap Anti Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Police arrested the British men after they heard disclosures of sexual abuse made by eleven boys aged between 13 and 15 years. The initial report of suspicious behavior had come from a community member who had seen the men bringing boys to their rented house. During the investigation one of the men confessed to sexually abusing some of the boys and paying them for each encounter while the other was released without charge. According to a news report one of the men had been arrested for similar crimes in Thailand, by the Pattaya police 20 years ago.²⁰

Several projects and campaigns directly targeting hotels and other forms of accommodation have for this reason been implemented in Cambodia over the years. The two largest are The Code (short for “The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism”) with 19 members in Cambodia and ChildSafe Movement with more than 123 Cambodian member hotels, guesthouses, travel agencies and other businesses. Both initiatives require that licensed members train all staff on child protection and that they develop key policies and procedures to protect children. As a result, it has become considerably more difficult for offenders to bring unrelated children to their room in hotels and guesthouses which was also described by one of the interviewed experts:

¹⁸ APLE Cambodia (2016): “Expert paper Travelling child sex offenders in Cambodia”.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ APLE Cambodia (Feb 2018): “11 underage boys disclosed sexual abuse. Two British charged”, <http://aplecambodia.org/11-underage-boys-disclosed-sexual-abuse-two-british-charged/?fbclid=IwAR0FEki15wOC-sJEGSkuyH0pi3I9EkJtu1G2XtgttZP4TR1i-okyUW9vnl>.

“ It is a lot more difficult to access children in a simple way. It’s a lot harder to just pick up a child and bring to a guesthouse or hotel. The situation has changed a lot and tourism actors seem to have a grown understanding about the situation. There are laws for hotels and guesthouses that you cannot allow children inside. It would be very hard to bring young children to a hotel and guesthouse nowadays.”

The combination of travel and tourism companies taking responsibility for protecting children and strengthened law enforcement is often described as a key factor explaining why many offenders avoid organized group tours and mainstream hotels. But when pushed out of mainstream establishments, many offenders gravitate towards more informal accommodation with fewer rules and less control of guests. Options include homestays, longer-term rentals, smaller hotels and so-called “party hostels”. All these accommodation types are available in Cambodia and it is easy to make reservations even in more rural areas. Long-term options such as apartments and houses can easily be arranged in-country or online. But despite these improvements, some offenders still manage to use more traditional accommodation types such as hotels and guesthouses which was discussed by one of the interviewed experts:

“ It’s not very common to bring children to hotel or guesthouses anymore unless offenders live there long-term, using the rooms as an apartment or long-term rental. Then they pursue a similar advanced grooming process by being nice to and sometimes bribing guards and owners making them believe that they are genuinely trying to help children by letting them come to the room for showers and sleeping. Something the guards and others then seem to believe. Grooming techniques are really strong. Because of this approach, it creates a lot of confusion for children and communities that believe the foreigner is really a nice person.”

There are concerns that emerging “sharing economy models” where visitors rent accommodation directly from owners, through apps or via smaller agencies, will provide new opportunities for offenders who wish to operate without oversight from trained staff. These models operate in a legal grey zone and could potentially be taken advantage of by offenders.²¹

²¹ Offenders on the move (2016).



4.2 BROTHELS, KARAOKE BARS AND MASSAGE PARLORS

Children who are present in areas with high levels of prostitution such as red-light districts, massage parlors, K-TV bars and nightclubs are exposed to increased risks and provide opportunities for offenders to approach minors. Situational offenders (without a set sexual preference for children) are “less likely to distinguish between an adult woman and an adolescent girl when the venue appears to condone sex with any female”²². In the early 2000’s sexual exploitation of children in brothels, bars and karaoke places was described to take place at alarming rates in Cambodia. Although open sexual exploitation of children in these kinds of establishments has decreased significantly, it still occurs, and children are still present in red light districts. Several of the interviewed experts discussed concerns that changing regional travel patterns may result in increasing numbers of commercial sex establishments increasing risks for children.

In the early 2000s, around 14 000 women and girls were thought to be in prostitution in Phnom Penh, many of whom were tricked with false promises of decent labor.²³ Different estimates indicated that 15-30 percent of these were minors. A 2009 survey indicated that 75 percent of surveyed outlets offered children.²⁴ 3 000 women and girls were in the early 2000’s said to be trafficked into Cambodia from Southern Vietnam annually.²⁵ The Svay Pak area in Phnom Penh was at this time an infamous brothel area with widespread access to small children. The area figured in international news with reporters infiltrating brothels and meeting very young children available for sexual exploitation.²⁶ The population in Svay Pak is largely Vietnamese which at that time was considered a risk factor in itself due to discrimination, segregation and poverty. Vietnamese children have no access to birth registration or identity documents and are therefore not recognized as citizens in Cambodia.

Sexual exploitation of children in Cambodian brothels, bars and karaoke places took place at alarming rates in the early 2000s

By 2012, this had been reduced drastically with approximately

0.75%

of prostitutes in commercial sex establishments found to be below 15 years old²⁵



²² Offenders on the move (2016).

²³ UNAIDS best practice collection (2006): “Global reach: how trade unions are responding to AIDS.”

²⁴ CNN (Dec 2013): <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2013/12/world/cambodia-child-sex-trade/>

²⁵ International Justice Mission (2013): *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia*.

²⁶ See for example: www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1wtc0mO5Nk

CASE STUDY:

AMERICAN ARRESTED FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN SVAY PAK

In 2008, one of APLE Cambodia's local informers who had received training on child sexual abuse met an American national who was on holiday in Cambodia. Because of his friendly attitude, the informer started having conversations with him on several occasions. The American then told the informer that he had a sexual interest in young girls and was, at that stage, looking for small girls to abuse. The informer thereafter tipped-off APLE by calling the 24/7 hotline.

After a lengthy observation and surveillance, APLE learned that the American frequented a notorious, but closed, area for child prostitution in Kilometer 11 known as Svay Pak in Phnom Penh. During the surveillance, APLE also realized that the American was well connected with many known child abuse solicitors and facilitators in the area. This information, in combination with APLE's previous knowledge of his expressed sexual interest in young girls increased their concern and level of attention towards the potential offender.

APLE collaborated with the Cambodian National Police's Anti Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection police to perform a full investigation of the suspect. The investigation found that the American had already abused as many as 6 young girls, the youngest only 9 years old.

Eventually, the police arrested the American, assisted one girl and subsequently identified 5 other girls. Though the American denied sexual exploitation charges, the girls confirmed that the American sexually abused them on multiple occasions with the help of local facilitators. The girls were referred to proper support services while the case was concluded. The American was charged with "Purchase of Child Prostitution", an offense which is punishable with between 7- and 15-years imprisonment. The two facilitators were arrested for their involvement in recruitment and facilitation of the victims to perform sexual activities with the American.

US authorities requested that the man was extradited to the US where he was charged with international travel with intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor, engaging in illicit sexual conduct with a minor in foreign places, and commission of a felony offense involving a minor while required to register as a sex offender.

During the prosecution process, the victimized girls, five APLE personnel, and involved police officers and other individuals testified before a US court. In the end, the investigation and prosecution procedure took as long as 8 years. Finally, in 2016, the American was found guilty and was sentenced to 70-year imprisonment in the US. He was also ordered to pay 40 000 USD in civil compensation to his victims.²⁷

²⁷ APLE Cambodia case study (2018): "English teacher care; 70 years imprisonment for American".



A comprehensive prevalence study by the International Justice Mission found that the number of children for sale had significantly decreased in brothels, Karaoke bars and massage parlors by 2012. The study analyzed Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville and Siem Reap and found that 0.75 percent of individuals exploited in commercial sex establishments in Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville and Siem Reap were below 15 years old. 990 commercial sex establishments were identified in the three provinces catering to different customers. Karaoke bars and brothels were found to be used mainly by Cambodian and Asian men whilst massage parlors, existing all over Cambodia, were found to cater to both local and foreign customers. Overall, large, more expensive karaoke bars in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap that are popular with Cambodian nationals and Asian tourists had the highest number of minors exploited in prostitution.²⁸

These improvements were also reflected in the Svay Pak area mentioned above for its widespread commercial sexual exploitation of children. One of the interviewed experts works in Svay Pak and confirmed that the situation has improved significantly. It is now difficult to access children in the area. A specific concern remains about virgin sales, where girl children are sold for their virginity, a type of exploitation commonly associated with Asian perpetrators, who believe sexually exploiting a virgin will cure them from HIV and AIDS and bring good fortune.

No reports of Western traveling offenders attempting to abuse children in commercial sex establishments were recorded by APLE in 2018 which can be seen as a major success for the Cambodian child protection community. To a large extent, this can be explained by improvements in law enforcement and the development of a more effective system to protect children. Owners of commercial sex establishments are now at risk of being arrested and losing their business if they offer children for sexual purposes to their customers. Despite this, several of the interviewed experts believe that it is still possible to access children in commercial establishments although it is much more difficult compared to ten years ago. There are still ways to circumvent legal intervention such as providing fake IDs for minors. There is also a risk that these improvements are less prevalent in provinces where there are fewer interventions to protect children.

²⁸ International Justice Mission (2013): "Commercial sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia. A venue-based application of time-space sampling to measure prevalence in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville".

4.3 ACCESSING CHILDREN ON STREETS AND IN COMMUNITIES

Due to their lack of parental care, adult supervision and access to education, children in street situations are particularly vulnerable for sexual abuse and exploitation. Children in street situations have very limited access to support and if something happens, they tend not to be trusted and listened to.²⁹ In an interview study with 56 street-connected boys in Sihanoukville, nearly half (46 percent) indicated that they were aware of other boys who had been asked “to do sexual things” by foreigners.³⁰ In Cambodia, foreign offenders are overrepresented in street-based sexual exploitation of children while Cambodian offenders to a higher extent are represented in establishment-based exploitation (such as brothels and KTV-bars).³¹

Street-based sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia by visiting travelers used to be characterized by a bold modus operandi. A recurring pattern was to contact children directly in public areas to initiate a relationship. Street children would be approached and instantly offered money in return for sex. Some offenders would even show displays of affection such as hugging, kissing and touching children in public places.³²

In 2016, a 63-year-old Swedish man was convicted for sexually abusing six Cambodian girls, many of them 12-13 years old. The offender had visited Cambodia on numerous occasions between 2013 and 2015 and most likely also previously. Abuse of the children took place in hidden spots on the street or when bringing children on boat tours on the Mekong river. The children were paid approximately 10 US dollar by the man who forced them to masturbate in front of him. He also tried to convince them to perform oral sex on him. The man denied the charges against him but acknowledged that he did have contact with the victims. His explanation was that he wanted to support them by buying them food, clothes and paying for dental care. He was sentenced to 2 years and 7 months in prison in Sweden after an investigation that involved Cambodian and Swedish police together with Cambodian civil society organizations.³³

Although there are still cases where the initial contact between the offender and the child is made on the street, this is today less common. This follows an international pattern also visible in countries such as Thailand and the Philippines where it was previously common with even small children for sale in public areas. Measures to protect children have evolved and offenders attempting to approach children directly has become uncommon which was described by one of the interviewed experts:

²⁹ Consortium for street children (2019): “Submission to the report of the special rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material”.

³⁰ Davis, J. & Miles, G. (2015): “I want to be brave. A Baseline Study on the Vulnerabilities of Street-Working Boys in Sihanoukville, Cambodia”.

³¹ APLE Cambodia (2014): Investigating traveling child sex offenders.

³² APLE Cambodia (2016): “Expert paper Travelling child sex offenders in Cambodia”.

³³ Göteborg district court, verdict 2016-07-01, case no: B 13120-15.

“ It has become much harder to find children in the open and this goes for bars and restaurants as well. Police has also become a lot stricter and its more difficult since they will not allow children to sit there and be invited for drinks and food.”

According to some of the interviewed experts, these crude strategies have been replaced by more sophisticated grooming techniques to avoid detection:

“ Yes, offenders now have new strategies where they can build trust with organizations as volunteers or staff and have access to children. As accessing kids on the streets became more difficult, they use new ways to groom children/ families/ NGO etc.”

Some offenders take advantage of poverty and vulnerability in rural communities as a way to avoid detection. Urban areas are in general wealthier than rural communities and tend to have more comprehensive child protection services in place. Law enforcement in cities usually have more resources and are more well-trained compared to their countryside colleagues. Several of the interviewed experts confirmed that many offenders have adapted their strategies and explained how grooming strategies have evolved. An increasing number of cases now involve offenders targeting not only the children but also families and whole communities. Observed methods have included repairing or building houses, paying for other upgrades such as digging wells and other financial contributions to gain the trust of the community. Some offenders have been known to marry single mothers to get access to their children.³⁴ Children that have already been groomed by an offender are used to initiate contact with other children on the streets or in communities where they come from. Some of the experts meant that this is done to avoid being noticed when searching for new victims.



This trend is also connected with new travel trends where tourists are brought to remote parts of the country to see “the real and authentic Cambodia”.³⁵ Although this can be a positive experience both for the local hosts and for the visiting tourists, examples such as homestays can also provide new opportunities for offenders to initiate relationships with children. A child protection organization operating regionally in southeast Asia has expressed concern that many of the families in both Thailand and Cambodia who invite travelers into their homes are not aware of potential risks. In some cases, parents leave their children alone with strangers or use children as tour guides to local sights.

³⁴ *Offenders on the move (2016): Regional report South-East Asia.*

³⁵ O“What is community based travel?”, www.responsibletravel.com/copy/what-is-community-based-tourism

In April 2017 a 47-year-old Cambodian-American man was arrested for sexually abusing 17 underaged boys between the ages of 8 and 15 years old. The suspect was residing in a small village in the Takeo province where he had lived since 2002. He had left the U.S. and returned to Cambodia in 1997. In the community where he lived, he was known to many villagers because of his generosity. He built trust within the community and started grooming families in the community through lending them money and paying for holiday trips before ultimately taking the boys to his residence in a pagoda in Takeo. The Takeo provincial court sentenced him to 7 years imprisonment in March 2018.³⁶

4.4 ABUSE IN RESIDENTIAL CARE INSTITUTIONS AND SCHOOLS

Preferential child sex offenders tend to seek settings where they have easy access to vulnerable children.³⁷ Offenders have been known to use a lack of adult supervision to come in contact with children either in the streets or communities as described above but also through voluntary or professional positions in projects that involve children.³⁸ The lack of a safe and nurturing family environment with stable caregivers essentially makes children more vulnerable and children in residential care are often at increased risk for abuse both by visitors, by other children and by staff. Previous experiences of violence, neglect and sexual abuse is a common reason for placement in care and a known risk-factor for further abuse.³⁹

On November 25, 2018 the Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department arrested a British citizen on suspicion of child sexual abuse. The 57-year old man was arrested at his home in a community in Phnom Penh after victims disclosed that they had been abused. The man came to the attentions of the NGO APLE after sources reported that he had regularly been seen interacting with children in public places. He would buy them food, give them money and take them to a pool before bringing them to his home. The investigation further revealed that he rented a house for some of the boys and supported their study at a private school. Before the arrest, the Briton worked as an English teacher at a private school in Phnom Penh, prior to having volunteered at a child welfare NGO in the suburb of Phnom Penh. His work at the NGO was terminated due to misbehavior.⁴⁰

³⁶ APLE Cambodia (Apr 2018): <http://aplecambodia.org/cambodian-american-sentenced-to-7-year-imprisonment-after-sexually-abusing-17-underage-boys/>

³⁷ Sherr, L., Roberts K.J. & Gandhi, N., (2017); Sullivan (2016) and Better volunteering better care (2014).

³⁸ Independent Inquiry child sexual abuse (2020): "Children outside of the United Kingdom. Investigation report".

³⁹ Hallett (2015) and Browne (2009).

⁴⁰ APLE Cambodia (Nov 2018): "Boys rescued, British teacher charged for child sex crime in Phnom Penh", <https://aplecambodia.org/boys-rescued-british-teacher-charged-for-child-sex-crime-in-phnom-penh/>

In Cambodia, the number of registered orphanages increased by 75 percent between 2005 and 2010.⁴¹ A more recent study from 2016 that also includes unregistered orphanages estimates that the increase is even larger with as many as 48 000 children living in residential care in Cambodia. This represents one percent of all Cambodian children.⁴² As many as 79 percent of all children in orphanages have at least one parent alive and the main reasons for placement are poverty and the hope for access to better education.⁴³

The increasing number of volunteers and “voluntourism companies” that sprung up in the early 2000’s is thought to have both benefited from, and contributed to, an increase in the number of orphanages as well as the number of children living there. Tourists and other travelers visiting, volunteering or in other ways supporting orphanages are in this way a main driving factor explaining the quick increase in the number of orphanages in Cambodia. Voluntourism” is often described as an alternative and more ethical tourist experience when compared with traditional mass-tourism. It is, for example defined as “tourism in which travelers work to help communities or the environment in the places they are visiting”.⁴⁴ The drastic increase of volunteer opportunities is thought to be largely driven by changed expectations from travelers and a wish to both contribute to local communities but also do something unique while on vacation. Volunteer placement companies consistently report that direct work with vulnerable children in orphanages or school environments is the most popular placement type requested by their customers.⁴⁵

The fact that many orphanages allow visitors and volunteers to have direct contact with children, often without background checks further increase risks for abuse and exploitation. Sometimes, volunteers are allowed to bring children out of the orphanage without supervision and in some cases orphanage staff even let children stay overnight in the volunteer’s hotel.⁴⁶

An estimated
48 000
CHILDREN
*live in residential care in
Cambodia*



⁴¹ UNICEF Cambodia (2011): “A study of attitudes to residential care in Cambodia”.

⁴² Stark et al. (2017): “National estimation of children in residential care institutions in Cambodia”.

⁴³ Columbia University and National Institute of Statistics (2015): “National estimation of homeless children in Cambodia”.

⁴⁴ Collins Dictionary: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/voluntourism>. For an alternative definition, see for example Wearing (2001).

⁴⁵ Jonsson, Cecilia (2012), doctoral thesis: “Volontärerna. Internationellt hjälparbete från missionsorganisationer till volontärresebyråer”. <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=503&artikel=5549207>

⁴⁶ Lyneham & Facchini, Australian institute of criminology (2019): “Benevolent harm: Orphanages, voluntourism and child sexual exploitation in South East Asia”.

CASE STUDY: **RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASING NUMBER OF ORPHANAGES**

In 2013, global concerns about harmful consequences of orphanage tourism and volunteering resulted in an investigative piece by the Swedish public radio show "Kaliber". Journalists from the show contacted one of the leading international volunteer companies, also represented in Sweden, to ask them about what kind of precautions they take to ensure that children in the orphanages where they place their volunteers are protected. During their research, Cambodia quickly emerged as one of the most popular countries for volunteering in orphanages.

When interviewed, the company ensured that submission of criminal background checks is mandatory for all volunteers working directly with children and that they did not offer short-term placements at child- and youth projects, such as orphanages.

Following the interview, Kaliber contacted the company posing as a potential customer with a wish to volunteer in an orphanage in Cambodia. The journalists then receive entirely different information and are assured that it is possible to volunteer in a Cambodian orphanage for periods as short as two weeks. The company also states that "any attention and care is better than nothing". The company now confirms that the trip can be arranged with a very short notice. Five days later, having submitted a false CV, no police background check and fake references, the undercover journalist is able to travel to an orphanage in Cambodia. The company has made no efforts to contact the submitted references and has not followed up on the missing police background check.

Upon arrival in Cambodia, the journalist is placed in a small orphanage, with 24 children aged 4-18 years old. Only one adult is caring for the large group of children but even on the first day of volunteering the journalist is left alone to care for the children most of the day. One of the younger boys is so dirty and smelly that the journalist feels compelled to wash the child. On several occasions, the journalist is allowed to take children out on excursions by himself without questions or supervision from staff.

While in Cambodia the journalists interview several child rights organizations and investigate where the company is placing volunteers. They learn that the company has been sending volunteers to an orphanage where the director was arrested for sexually abusing the children and another one that was closed because children were being severely mistreated and potentially sexually abused. The volunteers placed at the orphanage had reported all these concerns to the company in Sweden but had seen no action taken.

⁴⁷ Swedish Radio (SR), Kaliber (2013): "Barnhem ny arena för sexförbrytare"

The drastic increase of children in Cambodian orphanages has for these reasons become a significant concern in Cambodia and child sex offenders have in several cases been observed to engage with social support providers to gain access to children. Examples include employment in schools, orphanages and organizations doing charity work with vulnerable groups of children.⁴⁸ Both local and foreign offenders have become involved with orphanages in different capacities and roles such as a volunteers or regular staff. In some cases, offenders have founded their own orphanages to create conditions with easy access to children in their care. The most recent example involves a 69-year old former Catholic school teacher from Australia who was arrested for child sexual abuse in Siem Reap in January 2019. He had six boys living in his house and actively fundraised to provide education, health care and other forms of support for these boys and their families.⁴⁹

In January 2019, a 40-year-old American was sentenced to life in federal prison in the U.S. for sexually abusing ten male victims aged 7 to 18 years old in Cambodia. The children had been living in an unregistered orphanage established and run by the perpetrator in Phnom Penh. The boys were repeatedly abused by the man between 2005 and 2013. Following the abuse, he would sometimes provide the impoverished children with food or small amounts of money. The orphanage was established with the help of funds raised from church groups in Oregon, Texas and California. While in custody awaiting trial, the perpetrator made multiple efforts to tamper with witnesses and obstruct justice. He contacted his victims online, encouraging them to lie and offering money and gifts. One message, sent via his relative's Facebook account to an adult in Cambodia, discussed visiting a victim's family and encouraging them to convince the victim to retract their statement, potentially in exchange for \$10,000. Another message explains the need for a victim to say they were under duress and "pushed by police" to thumbprint a document. After serving a 1-year sentence in Cambodia he was escorted to the U.S. by the FBI where he was sentenced to life in prison.⁵⁰

4.5 USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Little is known about the existence and scale of online child sexual exploitation in Cambodia and community awareness about risks is minimal.⁵¹ At the same time, internet usage in Cambodia has soared in the past five years.

⁴⁸ ECPAT International (2017): Regional overview. The sexual exploitation of children in Southeast Asia.

⁴⁹ Cambodia Daily (Feb 2019): "Australian teacher child sex arrest in Cambodia", <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/crime/australian-teacher-child-sex-arrest-in-cambodia-145306/>

⁵⁰ Dept. of Justice, Oregon, USA (Jan 2019): <https://www.justice.gov/usao-or/pr/icymi-oregon-man-sentenced-life-prison-sexually-abusing-children-orphanage-cambodia>

⁵¹ Geeks in Cambodia (Feb 2018): "Cambodia's 2018 social media & digital statistics", <http://geeksincambodia.com/cambodias-2018-social-media-digital-statistics/>

Nearly half of the Cambodian population was estimated to use the internet in 2017 according to the Freedom on the net report 2018. 96 percent of all Cambodians owned a mobile phone in 2016 with urban residents more likely to own a smartphone than those in the countryside.⁵² 99 percent of the population has access to 2G technology and 65 percent use 3G technology which covers around a third of the country.⁵³ Facebook is by far the most popular application with more than 6.8 million users in 2018 which is a 200 percent increase since 2013.⁵⁴ Many schoolchildren have smart phones that they use to access social media, primarily Facebook.⁵⁵

Some of the most popular applications and games among children and youth are Facebook, Messenger, Line, WhatsApp, Telegram, Bigo live, Minecraft, Fortnite, Rule of survivor, Tic toc and Tinder as well as a few other games created by a local company, Sabay. Live streaming, where youth publish live video of themselves, is also used for example to sell products online. Many of the experts interviewed for this report recognized the rapid technological development and reflected on the increasing popularity of new apps, programs and computer games among the children they meet in their support programs:

“ There is an increasing use of social media. Not only Facebook but also use of live streams. It’s very easy to access internet, you can get Internet for free in a café with a 50c coffee. Chinese smartphones are very cheap.”

The introduction of new technology brings many advantages but also leads to new opportunities for child sex offenders. New forms of grooming involve contacting children through popular social media applications where it is possible for offenders to conceal their identity. As described by one of the interviewed experts, some of the most popular apps are designed in a manner that presents complications in terms of protecting children since the communication is encrypted. There is an increasing number of cases globally where offenders watch livestreaming shows where children are abused and exploited remotely. So far, there are no known reported live-streaming cases in Cambodia but several of the interviewed experts expressed concerns about low risk awareness among children and guardians:


“ We know they [the offenders] use the dark web and the internet to share info and indecent images and to meet children online. They use all apps, Facebook messenger, Line, WhatsApp, Bego live and gaming platforms too – for example Fortnite. Offenders can make friends with children online easily in gaming.”

⁵² Freedom House (2018): “Freedom on the net”.

⁵³ Bangkok Post (Dec 2018): “Number of internet users up in Cambodia”, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/world/1589690/number-of-internet-users-up-in-cambodia>

⁵⁴ Geeks in Cambodia (Feb 2018): “Cambodia’s 2018 social media & digital statistics”, <http://geeksincambodia.com/cambodias-2018-social-media-digital-statistics/>

⁵⁵ World Vision (2014): “Sex, abuse and Childhood – a study about knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to child sexual abuse, including in travel and tourism in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam”.



25%

OF INTERVIEWED CHILDREN
*reported personal or second-hand
experiences of online-facilitated
child sexual abuse online*

The border between offline and online child sexual abuse and exploitation is increasingly blurred due to the rapid expansion and use of new technologies described above for Cambodia but also globally. Online exploitation and abuse can therefore no longer be seen as a separate form of abuse. Internet is simply put one of many arenas where abuse takes place, and/or a tool for committing abuse. Child sexual abuse where parts of the grooming process takes place online can with this background be described as “online-facilitated child sexual abuse”.⁵⁶

Just as in most parts of the world, online-facilitated child sexual abuse is also thought to be increasing in Cambodia which was mentioned by the interviewed experts. According to the National plan of action to prevent violence against women (2014-2018) there is an increasing number of cases with child sexual abuse material online and online grooming of child victims. In a recent Cambodian study, 25 percent of interviewed children reported personal or second-hand experiences of online-facilitated child sexual abuse such as grooming or sexual advances by adults online.⁵⁷ Evidence from other parts of Asia, indicate increasing use of apps and social media among women in prostitution which results in grey zones with less insight and control of age as compared to women working in bars and other public establishments.⁵⁸

With the rapid expansion of internet use, there is growing concern that offenders will take advantage of the low risk and rights awareness among children and their caregivers.⁵⁹ A cybercrime law with provisions on sexual crimes such as online grooming, child sexual abuse material, live streaming of child sexual content is still pending.⁶⁰

One of the experts interviewed for this report has first-hand experience of traveling offenders using new technology. In some cases, offenders have, after contacting children on the streets, provided them with mobile phones and they have also been observed connecting to their victims on Facebook where they have continued to connect to friends of the initial child they met. Children in these cases were as young as 10-12 years old. There is still no known case where the first contact between the victim and the offender was made online, however.

⁵⁶ Interagency working group on sexual exploitation of children (2016): “Terminology guidelines”.

⁵⁷ CCambodia national council for children et al. (2020): “National study on the nature and extent of online child sexual exploitation in Cambodia”.

⁵⁸ Medin (2018): “Welcome to sin city. Swedish male sex tourists in prostitution industries abroad”.

⁵⁹ NGO coalition on the rights of the child (2018): “Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cambodia submission for the Universal Periodic Review of the human rights situation in Cambodia”.

⁶⁰ Economist intelligence unit (2019): Out of the shadow: Shining light on the response to child sexual abuse and exploitation. Cambodia country profile.

4.6 TRAVELING OFFENDERS AND CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIAL

There is a need for more research on the correlation between consumption of child sexual abuse material⁶¹ and hands-on abuse. No such studies have been made in Cambodia but some international studies indicate that 50-85 percent of consumers of child sexual abuse material also commit hands-on abuse themselves.⁶² Many traveling offenders that have been arrested in Cambodia have consumed and/or produced child sexual exploitation material themselves, sometimes in large quantities.

On the 20th of April 2017, a Dutch National was arrested in Siem Reap, after 19 underaged boys had disclosed that the 53-year-old man had paid them to pose for nude photographs. A camera found in his backpack contained almost 1,300 images of naked boys. The man drew pictures for the boys, who were between 11-15 years old, of how he wanted them to pose and paid them between 2-5 U.S. dollars depending on the pose. The higher rate would be paid if the boys agreed to be upside down or on their backs with their legs in the air. Although it was not known how often the man had visited Cambodia, he was able to speak adequate Khmer and had built up a relationship with people in the village where the boys come from.⁶³

There has been a rapid increase in reports about suspected child sexual abuse material in Cambodia. Based on information collected from the interviewed experts there had been 93 318 such images reported in the first eight months of 2018 which was a steep increase from 2013 when only 370 images were reported. Reports from the US-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children indicate a 490 percent increase of Cambodian child sexual abuse material between 2017 and 2018. Nearly one third of the identified material (29%) was thought to be newly produced, indicating an increase not only in circulation of existing material but also in production of new child sexual abuse material.⁶⁴ A lack of capacity and resources in key Cambodian agencies result in few pictures or videos being properly assessed and registered which makes it impossible to know how many of the reported pictures are newly produced and how many are recirculated images already registered in other countries. In a recent study, no teachers were aware of child sexual abuse material as a risk for children, while children from all participating communities described this as a key risk for children online.⁶⁵

At this point, it is illegal to produce and distribute child sexual abuse material in Cambodia while possession and downloads without the intention to distribute is still legal. An additional challenge is that Cambodian law, just as in many other countries (including Sweden) does not require Internet service providers to report sexual abuse and exploitation content to authorities.

⁶¹ Increasingly used to replace the older term “child pornography” that is broadly seen as obscuring the fact that this is not related to pornography but rather represents documented child sexual abuse, or child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

⁶² Netclean (2016): “The Netclean report 2016”.

⁶³ APLE Cambodia (Apr 2017): “Dutchman paid 19 boys to take their naked photographs, police say”, <https://aplecambodia.org/dutchman-paid-19-boys-to-take-their-naked-photographs-police-say/>

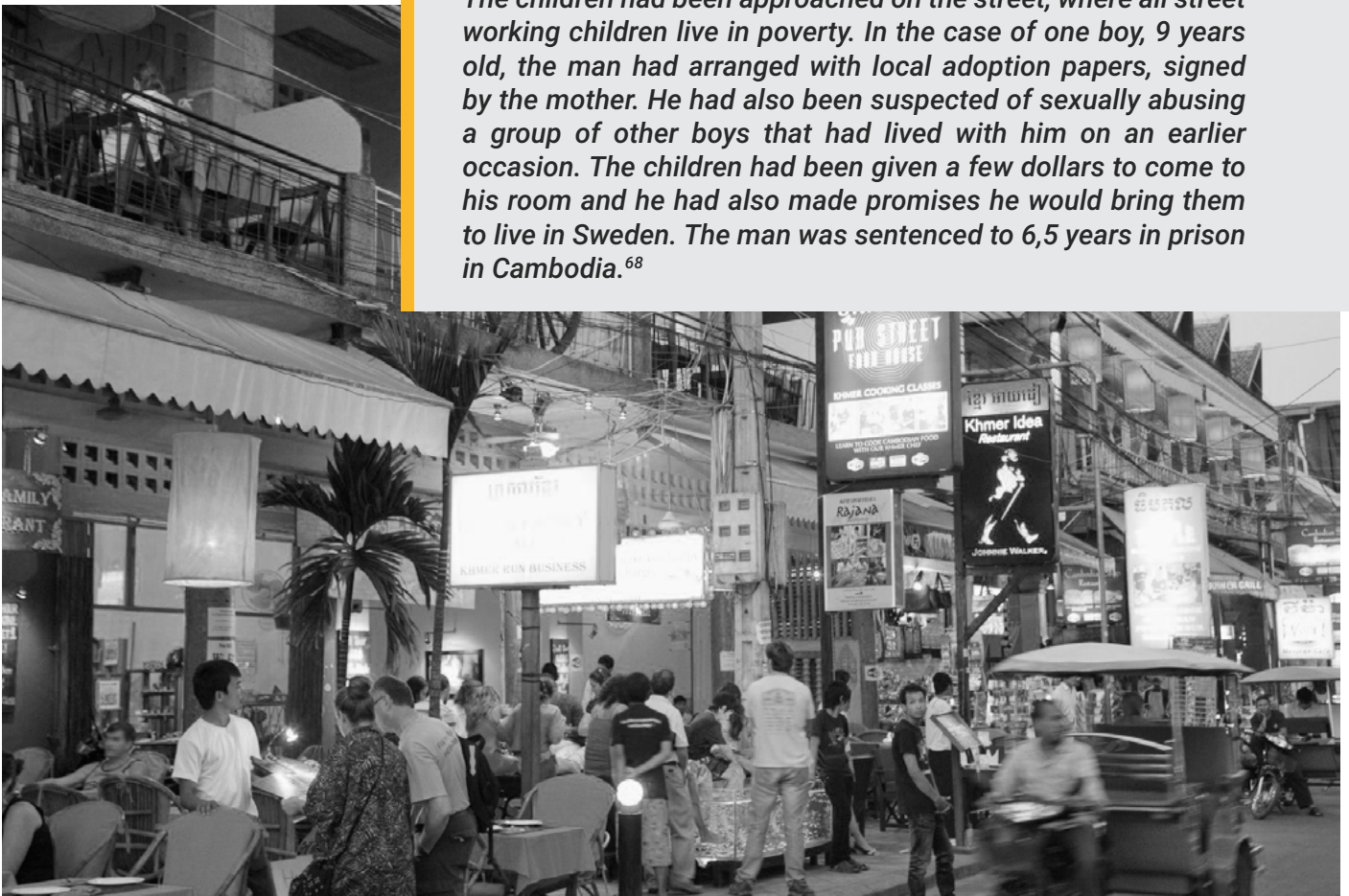
⁶⁴ Cambodia national council for children et al. (2020): “National study on the nature and extent of online child sexual exploitation in Cambodia”.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

4.7 SEXUAL ABUSE OF BOYS

Emerging data reveal that boys, children from minority groups and young children are far more vulnerable than what has previously been known, including abuse committed by traveling offenders. Recent research indicate that there is a “widespread incomprehension about the potential for sexual violence against boys” and that this is “mirrored in denial, embarrassment amongst caregivers, community members and boys themselves combined with disbelief by authority figures, all contributing to under-reporting and social isolation”.⁶⁶ In some countries, such as the Czech Republic and India, traveling offenders are reported to mainly target boys. As previously mentioned, boys for example seem to be subjected to abuse in street situations as compared to girls who tend to be exploited in more traditional commercial sexual exploitation establishments such as brothels, bars and night clubs.⁶⁷ Overall, there are considerable gaps regarding boys and sexual abuse and exploitation and there is a considerable need for a better understanding of the specific ways boys are both targeted and affected by abuse.

A 62-year-old Swedish man was sentenced for sexually abusing several boys in Cambodia between the years 2007 and 2010. The children had been approached on the street, where all street working children live in poverty. In the case of one boy, 9 years old, the man had arranged with local adoption papers, signed by the mother. He had also been suspected of sexually abusing a group of other boys that had lived with him on an earlier occasion. The children had been given a few dollars to come to his room and he had also made promises he would bring them to live in Sweden. The man was sentenced to 6,5 years in prison in Cambodia.⁶⁸



⁶⁶ Veitch et al. (2020): “Freedom at a price: Caring for boys affected by sexual violence. A synthesis of primary research in Cambodia, India, Nepal and the Philippines”.

⁶⁷ Offenders on the move (2016).

⁶⁸ Phnom Penh Post (Jan 2010): <https://phnompenhpost.com/national/swedish-paedophile-found-guilty>



We do know that girls and boys are affected differently by stigma and shame, for example illustrated in the common belief in Cambodia that boys are not emotionally affected by abuse, or even that they cannot be sexually abused at all. This is contrasted by the high number of boys abused by traveling offenders. About 25 percent of interviewed street boys in Sihanoukville disclosed that they had been sexually exploited by adults in exchange for money, food or other benefits. APLE Cambodia report that 61 percent of the 495 victims involved in their cases between 2003-2013 were boys. One explanation for this is APLE's focus on street-based exploitation which means that they have more contact with boys than girls (since a majority of street-connected children are boys). Research from Lao PDR indicate that many Lao boys who identify as homosexual or transgender travel to popular tourist destinations in Thailand where they become involved with street- or bar based prostitution. Offenders are mainly older westerners. There are some indications that Asian nationals are more likely to target girls while Western offenders to a higher degree target boys.

⁶⁹ First Step Cambodia (2019): "Caring for boys affected by sexual violence" and Hilton (2008): *I thought it could not happen to boys*.

⁷⁰ Davis, Miles (2014): "I want to be brave: A baseline study on the vulnerabilities of street-working boys to sexual exploitation in Sihanoukville, Cambodia".

⁷¹ APLE Cambodia (2014): "Analytical report on investigating traveling child sex offenders".

⁷² Offenders on the move (2016): *Regional report Southeast Asia*.

⁷³ ECPAT International (2017): *Regional overview. Sexual exploitation of children in Southeast Asia*.

5

IDENTIFYING OFFENDERS AND SUPPORTING VICTIMS - THE CAMBODIAN RESPONSE

During the interviews, several of the experts emphasized that the ability to protect children in Cambodia has improved considerably with increased knowledge and capacity among the general public, in government agencies and among civil society organizations. In many parts of the country, officials have a better understanding of their responsibility to protect children and how to work together with social workers. One concrete example is how police officers previously would not recognize that boys could be sexually abused and refused to respond to cases but now take official complaints seriously and respond properly. There is also improved knowledge about foreign offenders and how they operate. The police have developed their capacity to discover suspicious behavior and tell-tale signs. Efforts have been made to introduce child-friendly interview rooms for victims of sexual abuse. Training on interview technique has resulted in more child-friendly interviews with less secondary trauma for victims.

Coordination between different government agencies has improved through various mechanisms facilitating cooperation. Six inter-ministerial working groups and provincial committees have been established to address areas such as protection, prevention, migration and international cooperation.⁷⁴ The cybercrime unit in the Cambodian national police is a welcome addition to the work against online crimes since they bring knowledge about forensic investigations of computers. Two government committees, the National Committee for Counter Trafficking and Provincial/Commune Council for Women and Children respond to child protection cases and a comprehensive network of child protection organizations have improved coordination through initiatives such as the Partnership Program for Protection of Children (3PC).⁷⁵ Foreign law enforcement agencies, have increasingly worked together with Cambodian police to investigate crimes committed by offenders from other countries. Many countries, including the Nordics, have permanent liaison officers in Cambodia or regionally responding to cases involving foreign nationals.

Laws such as The Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation adopted in 2008 represent significant legal improvements and provide increased protection against sexual exploitation, including the visual depiction of children engaging in sexual activity and the procurement of minors for sexual activities.⁷⁶ The current Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children 2017-2021, outlines strategies for protecting boys and girls against sexual violence.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ ECPAT International (2018): *Cambodia Country Review*.

⁷⁵ 3PC is a tripartite partnership between the Cambodian government, UNICEF and Friends-International bringing together nine additional civil society partners to provide child protection services at the field level.

⁷⁶ Kingdom of Cambodia (2008): "The Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation".

⁷⁷ Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Women's Affairs (2017): "Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children".

5.1 SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES – GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Child sexual abuse and exploitation is a crime which takes place behind closed doors. Many victims are confronted with considerable stigma if the abuse becomes public. Due to discriminating attitudes towards victims and power imbalances between victims and offenders there are limited incentives for victims to report abuse to responsible authorities. One consequence is that children and families might only be identified once their problems have escalated and the child, for example, has been separated from his/her family, ended up on the street or in an orphanage, been picked up by the police or been abused by a traveling offender.

In general, increased awareness about sexual exploitation tend to result in increased reporting but this also leads to increased need for qualified professionals to support the victims. There are too few and qualified social workers (both from NGOs and government) in Cambodia which represents a key challenge for effective child protection. Psychosocial rehabilitation services for victims are mainly concentrated to a few urban areas and run by NGOs. Existing social workers are sometimes not able to spend the time and resources needed to build trusting and positive relations with children, families and communities because of the heavy workload and large number of cases.

Investigations involving traveling offenders tend to be long and demanding, in part because of the international aspect of the crime with different legal jurisdictions but sometimes also because of the strong, and long-term grooming processes mentioned above, where whole communities sometimes become dependent on a single offender. This also complicates direct work with abused children since the offender has created a situation where it is extremely difficult for the child to disclose what has happened. When cases are dismissed, the offender will sometimes remain in the same village or commune which presents further obstacles for families considering formal complaints to authorities. Taken together, this can negatively affect the legal process and prevent disclosure which was discussed by one of the interviewed experts:



“Some of the offenders are very skilled in grooming techniques. They groom families and communities and children. Even social workers will have a hard time accessing the children. Once they do get access to the children, they often learn from them that they’ve been manipulated in different ways not to speak about the abuse. People in their surrounding have told them that if they say anything the perpetrator will be arrested, and they will then be in trouble”.

Response to online sexual abuse and exploitation presents significant challenges both for the police and other actors providing social support services. Abuse and exploitation with online elements is a new and evolving issue and there are limited skills, technical support and budget for the police to handle these cases.



15%
**OF 54 INTERVIEWED
CHILDREN**
*(or their parents) had been
encouraged to settle out of court.*

5.2 LEGAL SYSTEM – GAPS AND CHALLENGES

The Cambodian legal system has improved but is not fully equipped to respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation. Several challenges associated with the judicial system were raised in the interviews. One practical obstacle is that it is not always possible to remove a child from his/her family even if the child is assessed to be at great risk at home. Out of court settlements, a practice where compensation is determined by the family and the perpetrator with the help of a middleman also remains a problem. This practice essentially lets the perpetrator escape justice and remain in the country by paying the family of the abused child. One interview study with 54 children about their experience of the Cambodian justice system found that 15 percent of the children (or the parents) had been encouraged to settle out of court.⁷⁸

In some cases, police or judicial officials initiate formal investigations on their own but this usually only happens if the victim's family submits a formal complaint. Since many families do not want the abuse to become known (for example due to stigma, fear or their dependence on the offender as mentioned above) many cases never enter the legal system.

One of the interviewed experts discussed weaknesses in the justice system which negatively affects legal processes. One inherent challenge is that child sexual abuse cases in Cambodia and many other countries often rely on the existence of credible witness statements. Several cases of Cambodian courts being reluctant to believe children in street situations when they testify about sexual abuse, directly claiming that they are lying were mentioned in the interviews. In some cases, courts have argued that the child's credibility is weakened if they have been sexually abused on several occasions and by different offenders. Judges and prosecutors have in some cases accused children of taking advantage of innocent individuals with the purpose of making money.

Some of the interviewed experts mentioned a growing reluctance on behalf of the victims' families to accept legal support from NGOs specialized in legal procedures. Their assessment was that this usually is the result of the strong dependence on the offender developed in the grooming process. The offender can in this way maintain a strong degree of control over the victims and his/her family despite prosecution and being under arrest until the trial.

⁷⁸ Hagar International (2015): "A system just for children".

CASE STUDY: PREVIOUSLY CONVICTED OFFENDERS

On 14th February 2017, the Siem Reap Provincial Court convicted a 44-year-old Dutchman on two separate charges involving indecent acts against minors under 15 years and for producing child pornography. He was sentenced to 5 years in prison. He had, in 2004, been arrested in the Netherlands and sentenced to a one-year-imprisonment for molesting a 12-year-old boy while he worked as a sailing instructor. The court also banned him from working with children, since he was considered to represent a serious risk for children with a high chance of reoffence. But he later fled to Cambodia and in 2009 he was found in Siem Reap running an orphanage claiming to help poor children with food and schooling and was suspected of abusing the children living with him on the premises. Prior to that he had been volunteering in an NGO providing support services for vulnerable children. The collected information was shared with the police and he was later arrested by Siem Reap Anti human trafficking and juvenile protection police for allegedly abusing five minors. He was released while awaiting trial. This enabled him to return to the community and restart his relationship with the victims which led to retracted complaints and reversed statements. Due to lack of evidence he was then acquitted from all charges. Back in the community the offender continued to rent a small room, not far from the place of his former victims and made efforts to re-establish a close bond with children and their families. Children would be invited to his room to play on his computer and he would claim his innocence when communicating with neighbors telling them that he had been framed by the police and the NGOs. However, continued suspicious behavior warranted another police investigation and in 2013 he was arrested again for alleged sexual abuse of two of his previous victims and one new child. He was detained and although the evidence against him was strong the charge was dismissed by the investigating judge. He was set free and again continued to live in the same village. At this point, he changed his story and admitted to his neighbors that he did sexually abuse a child in the Netherlands but had promised he would never do it again. He managed to rebuild trust with his neighbors and children would again start visiting his home which prompted yet another investigation. In 2014, a Dutch lawyer brought a criminal complaint against the man in the Netherlands on behalf of two Cambodian victims, which initiated a collaboration between the Dutch and Cambodian authorities to bring him to court. In August 2016, Siem Reap Anti Human Trafficking Police conducted the third arrest of the man after three victims disclosed abuse against them. Although the victims again withdrew their complaints during the court proceedings, he was found guilty on all charges and was sentenced to five years imprisonment. Despite being found guilty, he was not deported at release illustrating concerns by local child protection organizations regarding measures to protect children from repeat offenses by known offenders.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ APLE Cambodia (2017): “Notorious Dutch child abuser finally convicted”. <https://aplecambodia.org/serial-dutch-child-abuser-convicted/>

Cooperation with international law enforcement agencies has improved but is still a challenge. A common problem is offenders with previous convictions in their home countries traveling to Cambodia to abuse children. Interpol coordinates an international alert system, with “green notices” issued for individuals who are considered to be a “possible threat to public safety”. These alerts can be used to notify foreign governments of individuals with a history of child sexual abuse and exploitation intending to visit other countries. However, this system is not used by all countries and areas that see significant numbers of visiting offenders such as Cambodia do not have sufficient resources to monitor convicted foreign sex offenders crossing its borders. One example is a 64-year old Norwegian man who was convicted for sexual abuse of four boys between 11-14 years old in Siem Reap in 2010. He had previously been convicted twice in Norway for possession of child sexual abuse material.⁸⁰ Another example involves a 66-year old American, convicted in mid-2018:

On the 28th of May 2018 Battambang provincial court found an American 66-year-old guilty of Indecent Assault under the Criminal Code and was sentenced to three years in prison and deportation. The crime was committed against the 5-year-old daughter of his Cambodian girlfriend both of whom he was residing with. In 2002 he had been convicted for sodomy and indecent acts with a child under the age of 16 in Texas, USA. In a similar manner he had abused the daughter of his girlfriend while she was between the age of 7 and 12 The man had applied for a job to teach English at an international school in Battambang and was reported by the principal who had found information on the perpetrator's earlier accounts of abuse.⁸¹

The National Plan of Action to prevent and respond to violence against children (2017-2021) identified significant legal gaps and a strong need for increased capacity in responsible government agencies and service providers regarding child sexual abuse and exploitation with online elements.⁸³ In an index measuring response to child sexual abuse in 60 countries, Cambodia ranks particularly low on legal framework related to online grooming and internet protection and technology industry engagement.⁸³ Challenges also include an overall need for updated knowledge about how children and offenders use new technologies, increased investigative resources and a stronger connection with tech companies and expertise. The proposed anti-cybercrime law will address some of these gaps but has not been approved despite being discussed and drafted since 2012.

⁸⁰ Aftenposten (March 2010): “Jager pedofile i Kambodsja”, <https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/1ByaX/Jager-pedofile-i-Kambodsja>, <https://www.tv2.no/a/9087982/>

⁸¹ APLE Cambodia (2018): “Convicted American child sex offender sentenced to 3 years imprisonment in Battambang”, <https://aplecambodia.org/convicted-american-child-sex-offender-sentenced-to-3-year-imprisonment-in-battambang/>

⁸² Cambodia national council for children et al. (2020): “National study on the nature and extent of online child sexual exploitation in Cambodia”.

⁸³ Economist Intelligence Unit (2019): “Out of the shadows. Shining light on the response to child sexual abuse and exploitation”.



6

KEY FINDINGS

The key informants interviewed for this report all work with central components of the Cambodian child protection system. They have substantial insight into how the system works, including its strengths and its weaknesses. Using their broad experience and knowledge about the Cambodian system combined with a comprehensive review of existing research has led to the following findings summarizing the information presented in the previous sections of this report. One theme that emerged in the interviews was that offenders are adjusting their destinations of choice and the ways in which they approach children in response to the introduction of stricter rules, policies and procedures, increased awareness among key stakeholders as well as among the general public and improved international cooperation.

6.1 CAMBODIA REMAINS A TARGET COUNTRY FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSERS, BUT THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE NUMBER OF TRAVELING OFFENDERS VISITING CAMBODIA IS DECREASING

Although traveling offenders are still recognized as a serious threat to children, several of the interviewed experts report a perceived decrease in their presence in Cambodia. Combined with information available from other countries, as well as global trends, there may therefore be reason to believe that offenders who previously went to Cambodia are choosing other countries with less effective mechanisms for identifying and prosecuting traveling offenders. Once seen as a safe haven for “child sex tourists”, it is now more difficult to approach children directly on the streets or make contact in establishments such as brothels and karaoke places. Offenders are facing a greater risk of being arrested, prosecuted and convicted in Cambodia which was mentioned by one of the interviewed experts:

“A better understanding of the issue within communities has also led to an improvement in the protective factors for children. There are still a lot of cases of foreigners, but it seems to have decreased. We are seeing less cases of foreigners and a lot more of local and young local perpetrators.”

Although these findings would need to be verified by more comprehensive studies, this would represent a major breakthrough and evidence that the hard work of a range of different stakeholders has paid off. One concern is that the perceived decrease could represent changed strategies and that offenders have adjusted to higher risks of detection by contacting children in new ways. A worrying trend illustrated by several recent cases is how offenders have started to embed themselves in communities and become long-term residents.

In Sihanoukville, a significant decrease of traveling offenders has been observed and the most recent cases have involved foreigners embedded in the community rather than short-term visitors. This can most likely be accredited to interventions by local child protection organizations, local authorities and the work of local and international law enforcement over the past 13 years which seems to have functioned as a deterrent.



6.2 BUT TRAVELING OFFENDERS REMAIN A SERIOUS ISSUE THAT NEEDS ATTENTION ...

Despite the perceived decrease, the number of reported cases and the number of arrests remain significant although there are regional variations across Cambodia. Methods for approaching children seem to be shifting from a bold direct approach on the streets, to a more careful approach based on longer and more advanced grooming strategies. A key trend is that offenders have been observed to settle in communities in order to build dependence of whole communities including children and their families. With a fairly comprehensive child protection system established in Cambodia's three main tourist destinations there are concerns that offenders are seeking out new areas with less awareness and fewer services. In line with this, child protection systems need to be expanded and improved in all parts of the country.

Most of the cases reviewed for this report, either supplied by stakeholders or covered by various media outlets between 2016 and 2018, reveal that the vast majority of suspected and/or convicted perpetrators were male, long-term residents and/or returning visitors to Cambodia. Some of them were involved in direct work with children as teachers, managing schools or orphanages while others were running local businesses.

Nowadays, children are seldom found in establishments such as brothels, bars and karaoke establishments in tourist areas. But concerns remain that children can be found in these establishments in provinces where there is less stringent implementation of laws. Changing travel dynamics with a drastic increase of local and regional individuals is another area of concern and something that may shift the nature, types and incidence of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the context of travel and tourism which was described by one of the interviewed experts:

“*Foreign offenders are still a pressing problem. There is a level of decrease, but this can also be related to the changing strategies of perpetrators since they may be harder to detect. We are for example seeing less approaches directly on the street with street children but are experiencing that perpetrators have stronger grooming strategies.*”



6.3 THERE IS A NEED FOR NEW METHODS AND INITIATIVES BUILT ON PREVIOUS EFFORTS TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM TRAVELING OFFENDERS

A number of initiatives implemented over the years have contributed to increased opportunities to identify offenders and prevent children from being abused. Partnerships with the private sector, not least companies in the travel and tourism sector, have been successful in training staff and introducing policies in larger hotels and companies who come in direct contact with travelers.

However, new forms of traveling, with a stronger focus on independent arrangements and focus on “unique” experiences present new risks for children. In many cases, this trend brings tourists to more remote parts of Cambodia and can include activities such as homestays and school visits. Arranging your own accommodation or using “shared economy” type services provides an opportunity for traveling offenders to avoid being detected when exploiting children. Volunteering and local employment bring people with good intentions to the country but also provide opportunities for offenders to access children through orphanages, schools, churches and organizations where they can build relationships without raising suspicion about their intentions. This trust can then be further exploited to develop dependence by families and communities where the children are from.

As illustrated by the increasing number of cases involving long-term residents and individuals doing “charity work”, these travel trends will be used by offenders to access children in places where awareness of, and response to, sexual abuse of children is limited. Existing initiatives should be expanded and include new stakeholders ensuring that they are involved, trained and aware of risks for children.

There is therefore a continued need for new initiatives and methods that protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse and further increase the ability to identify victims and offenders. These should build on existing efforts and campaigns, while adjusting approaches to new travel patterns, new technology and knowledge about the modus operandi of known offenders. Continued and increased investment is needed in both proactive- and responsive services for children and families that are at risk of ending up in high-risk environments which attract both traveling and local perpetrators.

The complexities of the crimes and the persistence of some offenders call for renewed efforts by governments, international and local law enforcement, donors, civil society and the private sector. All efforts are needed to stop offenders from moving between countries without being identified and punished.

6.4 TRAVEL AND TOURISM ACTORS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PREVENTING PERPETRATORS FROM ACCESSING CHILDREN BUT CAN AT THE SAME TIME PROVIDE ACCESS TO CHILDREN THROUGH THEIR SERVICES



The hospitality industry has been a key partner in the work against child sexual abuse in Cambodia. Notable initiatives include The Code and the ChildSafe Alliance that recruit and train community-based informants and train and certify travel and tourism businesses for the protection of children. As a result, it is now more difficult for offenders to use services offered by travel and tourism operators to abuse children. It is, for example, considerably more difficult today to bring an unregistered minor to your hotel if you are staying in guesthouses or hotels in Cambodia than previously. A number of campaigns have been directed at travelers both in their countries of origin and in popular destinations in Cambodia contributing to better awareness thereby increasing the chances that offenders are detected.

Expanding the reach of successful initiatives such as the Code and ChildSafe would be of clear benefit in strengthening the protection of children within the tourism industry.

6.5 THE USE OF INTERNET & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN CAMBODIA IS A CONCERN THAT NEEDS MORE ATTENTION

There is very little information available about how offenders use new technologies to access children and there is a need for more data about the link between online abuse and hands-on abuse and exploitation. Anecdotal evidence from cases presented above indicate that offenders have adjusted to the increased risk of being detected in part by using new ways to communicate with other offenders and by using apps and social media to contact children. There is, for example, some evidence that offenders are buying phones for their victims and continue communication online, using certain apps. The increasing quantity of child sexual abuse material found online and the limited capacity among Cambodian law enforcement to investigate online crimes indicate that this is a major challenge both for law enforcement and other child protection actors.

The rapid increase of internet use combined with low risk- and rights awareness and limited capacity in local law enforcement leads to an enabling environment that could make direct contact with children both easy and low risk.



7

FURTHER RESEARCH

It is evident that the sexual abuse and exploitation of children by traveling offenders in Cambodia has changed in many ways. Cambodia is no longer an environment where offenders can operate undisturbed directly on the streets or in establishments where prostitution is available. However, a number of challenges remain and there is a need for further research, policy development and broadened actions by key stakeholders both in Cambodia and internationally.

A few themes have repeatedly been highlighted as key gaps during our work with this report and would benefit from further research. One area is related to prevalence and although the considerable number of traveling offenders that have been arrested provides an indication of how many offenders visit Cambodia, we know less about other parts of the world. Acquiring improved data is challenging but would make it easier to design countermeasures and also help the allocation of resources to areas where they are most needed. One example is that although the existence of children in brothels and other establishments seem to have been reduced significantly there are concerns that changing travel patterns and offender strategies may lead to alternative methods to access the children. Since the demand for children to abuse is unlikely to have decreased we also need more information about issues such as the use of new technologies to ensure that risks for children are addressed. With increasing number of cases involving volunteers and staff in orphanages, schools and after school settings, there is a need to further understand how volunteer work is linked to child sexual abuse and exploitation including motivations of individual volunteers, companies and receiving orphanages. Initial findings from one study, for example, indicate a lower demand for orphanage placements than expected in a few countries which could highlight the role of aggressive orphanage marketing by volunteer placement companies.

So far, main efforts to prevent abuse of children have focused on traveling offenders from the “global North” and little is known about Asian offenders. Given some data suggesting different modus operandi and different preferences as compared with Western offenders, this is an area which needs more attention as intra-regional travel becomes more accessible. Another area that would benefit from further research is abuse of boys including both prevalence, trauma and impact. One example includes how offenders may use the silence and specific stigma around sexual abuse of boys to ensure that boys do not speak up.

Related to this is the need for effective ways countries can share information when convicted offenders travel. Travel restrictions is one measure which has gained traction in recent years with countries such as Australia, UK and USA introducing measures to prevent convicted offenders from traveling to other countries where it is easier to avoid detection. Interpol’s Green notice system makes it possible to flag high-risk individuals after they have completed their sentence but is not used by all countries including Sweden. Although controversial in many countries, maintaining registers and “flagging” convicted offenders who are thought to present considerable risks for children, have been presented as one way to support efforts in less developed countries and is something that needs further research. More knowledge is also needed about the quality of assessments estimating the risk of recidivism, if treatments for child sexual abuse offenders are effective and how these restrictions would affect basic human rights related to integrity, freedom of movement and basic legal principles.

⁸⁴ Veitch et al. (2020): “Freedom at a price: Caring for boys affected by sexual violence”.

8

ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATIONS

8.1 WORLD CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION



WORLD CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION
FOUNDED BY H.M. QUEEN SILVIA OF SWEDEN

World Childhood Foundation (Childhood) works to inspire, promote and develop solutions to prevent and address sexual abuse and exploitation as well as all related forms of violence against children. Childhood works in 14 countries worldwide providing strategic and financial support to local organizations who work directly with children and their families. Childhood also conducts awareness-raising activities and initiates campaigns. All activities are based on the same vision:

To ensure that all children are free from sexual abuse and exploitation as well as all forms of violence.

8.2 ECPAT SWEDEN



ECPAT Sweden is a child rights organisation working against child sexual exploitation. This is done in many ways. We provide information and expertise on the subject and work with prevention. We advocate for change and collaborate with government agencies, the private sector and other organisations. ECPAT Sweden also operates a web-based Hotline to which the public can anonymously report suspected child sexual exploitation.

8.3 CHILDSAFE MOVEMENT



Initiated by Friends-International, the ChildSafe Movement works to ensure that everyone can best protect children.

From grass-roots community networks to the global arena, ChildSafe Movement raises awareness about our shared responsibility to protect children and provides concrete tools and tips to do so for travellers, businesses and other relevant stakeholders.

ChildSafe has also trained more than 6,000 local Agents to be the eyes and ears of child protection within communities. By integrating into the model information on how to handle suspected foreign perpetrators, ChildSafe Agent actions and reports will greatly enhance information reaching the Swedish police.

8.4 REFERENCE GROUP

8.4.1 NATIONAL OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT/SWEDISH POLICE



The National Operations Department (Nationella operativa avdelningen) is responsible for assistance to the police departments in Sweden, national operations and international police cooperation. This responsibility includes investigations of traveling offenders and crimes against children abroad.

8.4.2 GENDER EQUALITY AGENCY/NATIONAL TASKFORCE AGAINST PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING (NMT)



The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is responsible for the national coordination against prostitution and trafficking in human beings in Sweden including the National Task Force against Prostitution and Human Trafficking (NMT). Regional Coordinators assist victims of trafficking, Assisted Voluntary Return Program for victims of trafficking managed by IOM Finland, webtools and a helpline. NMT offers operational method support to municipalities, governmental authorities and NGOs in human trafficking cases through its Helpline: 020-390 000 and through their website www.nmtsverige.se.

8.5 FINANCIAL SUPPORT: SWEDISH POSTCODE LOTTERY



Sweden's largest lottery and the funder of the project. The Swedish Postcode lottery generates money for the non-profit sector with an overall vision for a better world.



9

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"Say what you saw" is an initiative implemented by World Childhood Foundation, ECPAT Sweden and the ChildSafe Movement with an overall goal to reduce and prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of children in travel and tourism. The project will contribute to increased awareness among individual travelers and key stakeholders, improved protection and support for children in three high-risk countries and improved policies enabling effective investigations, identification of offenders and reduce risks for children. It is supported by the Swedish Post Code Lottery, builds on previous efforts and is implemented in partnership with the Swedish national police and the Swedish national coordination against human trafficking at the Gender equality agency. It is implemented between 2018 and 2021.