

CAMBODIA

Due to the Kingdom of Cambodia's (Cambodia) lower-middle-income status¹ and proximity to wealthier nations, Cambodia has been recognised as both a source and destination country for all forms of human trafficking. Cambodian nationals are trafficked through sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced marriage, forced begging, or exploited as domestic servants, domestically and abroad.² Traffickers also frequently exploit persons with disabilities, the elderly, and children, forcing them to beg domestically or trafficking them across the border through organised criminal begging rings. Trafficking and sexual exploitation of children are also prevalent more in a clandestine manner in entertainment and retail spaces.³

Irregular migration significantly contributes to the trafficking of Cambodian nationals who often travel abroad for work due to a 'lack of sufficient employment opportunities available domestically'.⁴ The lack of job availability, coupled with porous borders between Cambodia and neighbouring nations, allows irregular forms of migration to occur, increasing vulnerability and risk of exploitation.⁵ The Cambodian Government and diplomatic missions proactively identify, assist and repatriate Cambodian survivors of trafficking back home with the financial support of non-government organisations (NGOs), including A21.⁶ The Cambodian Government has manifested its commitment to combat trafficking not only through specific anti-human trafficking laws,⁷ but also through the creation of the National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT). The NCCT is a national mechanism for coordinating and gathering information about the efforts of ministries, institutions, national and international NGOs, private sector, and other stakeholders to combat human trafficking. The NCCT is the oversight for the Provincial Committee for Counter Trafficking (PCCT) which effectively operates as provincial multidisciplinary teams (MDT) of relevant departments, institutions, national and international NGOs, private sector, and other stakeholders purportedly to coordinate and streamline anti-trafficking efforts in a particular region.⁸

COVID-19 Impact on Human Trafficking

Official reports on COVID-19 in Cambodia as of December 31, 2020, recorded 366 cases and zero deaths.⁹ At the beginning of the pandemic, Cambodia closed all borders, including major border crossings with Thailand,

which historically have been significant avenues for traffickers. Despite border closures however, economic hardship increased by COVID-19 resulted in Cambodian nationals continuing to use irregular means to cross international borders in search of employment. Intermittent closure of schools throughout the year, commencing in March 2020, forced children to conduct their schooling online and increased their vulnerability to online exploitation.



IRREGULAR BORDER CROSSINGS CONTINUE DURING THE PANDEMIC

During A21 Cambodia's presentations to at-risk communities in Northeast Cambodia near the Thai border, community members disclosed knowledge of other Cambodians using irregular means to travel abroad to seek work opportunities, due to the economic impact of COVID-19. Community members further disclosed a lack of subsequent communication from these friends or family members after leaving Cambodia to seek employment. While a necessary response to COVID-19, rather than halting migration, border closures merely made such migration untraceable, thereby increasing the migrants' vulnerability to exploitation. Moreover, survivors assisted by A21 Cambodia disclosed that after fleeing their traffickers, they used irregular border crossings during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to

return to Cambodia. In a 2020 report by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSaVY), discussing the impact of the pandemic in Cambodia, 63,793 vulnerable individuals and victims of human trafficking and exploitation (specifically 31,733 men, 25,580 women, 3,318 boys, and 3162 girls) were reported to have been deported from Thailand back to Cambodia due to being undocumented.¹⁰ The findings in the MoSaVY report are consistent with A21 Cambodia's observations of the increase of vulnerabilities to exploitation as a result of the pandemic's impact on the Cambodian economy. While not all irregular migration results in human trafficking, use of irregular channels certainly increases the risk of exploitation and trafficking.

RESTRICTIONS LIMIT CAPACITY IN SHELTERS

On January 31, 2020 the MoSaVY announced COVID-19 restrictions, limiting group gatherings and encouraging NGO staff to work from home when possible. Such restrictions also applied to aftercare facilities, and vocational training schools which were precluded from admitting new survivors into shelter-based care in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The restriction period made it very challenging for NGOs, including A21, to refer survivors to services including shelters and psychosocial services care due to their restricted capacity.

A21's Response

A21 initially began operations on the Thailand-Cambodia border in 2016 for the sole purpose of facilitating the safe repatriation of child-survivors from Thailand back to Cambodia. As a result of A21's initial work in the border town of Poipet, a key crossing point of the two countries, the need for A21 to become fully operational in Cambodia quickly became apparent. A21 opened its first office in Poipet in 2018, and later expanded operations to Siem Reap, by opening Cambodia's first Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) there in December, 2019. A21 Cambodia currently operates offices in both Poipet and Siem Reap, as well as provides support to other provinces, such as Battambang, Phnom Penh and Kampong Cham, in response to requests for victim identification and/or reintegration assistance.

A21 Cambodia pursues a three-pronged operational strategy in its anti-trafficking approach within the country: prevention, awareness and professional training to reduce the prevalence of trafficking; interventions through victim identification operations and the CAC; and restorative aftercare services and reintegration support for repatriated survivors. As the majority of human trafficking survivors in A21 Cambodia's Aftercare program are under the age of 13, A21 Cambodia employs a child-victim centred approach in all programs utilised by children. Throughout 2020,

A21 Cambodia regularly adjusted its programs to abide by government regulations in response to COVID-19, to ensure the continuous delivery of programs and services throughout the year. As the government implemented various lockdown measures in 2020, many service providers in areas where A21 also operate, either greatly decreased their activity or ceased completely for a variety of reasons. Consequently, A21 Cambodia experienced a greater demand for its services not only from the government, but also from other local organisations.



Prevention & Awareness

A21 Cambodia predominantly focuses its prevention and awareness efforts to vulnerable groups, including disadvantaged and rural communities and street children, as well as schools and partner organisations. Like most of the world, Cambodia closed schools intermittently throughout the year, and transferred classes online. In response to the resulting increased vulnerability to online exploitation, and requests from authorities for prevention material, A21 Cambodia, along with other relevant NGOs, provided online safety resources to parents and community members.

Strict government mandates resulted not only in school closures and restricted gatherings, but also the complete prohibition of any in-person events involving children. In response, A21 Cambodia shifted to training adults, including educators who would be able to provide prevention education to their students. In 2020, A21 Cambodia trained over 680 educators in 'train the trainer' style workshops to facilitate A21's Primary Prevention Program (PPP) pursuant to guidance from the Provincial Ministry of Education (MOE) to prepare educators when schools reopened. The PPP is designed to empower primary-age children (6-12) to protect themselves against human trafficking and other risks through child-centred and play-based activities. This program equips educators with powerful protection tools for children, and is shared with education professionals across the country. A21 Cambodia also contextualised, translated into Khmer and distributed prevention and awareness resources, including the PPP, A21 Parent Guides and Safe Employment Guides, and prevention comic

books which teach both children and adults to recognise human trafficking, as well as provide avenues to seek assistance. In 2020, A21 distributed over 1,500 print prevention materials directly to the community while following COVID-19 prevention measures. Responding to travel limitations throughout the pandemic, A21 Cambodia modified in-person presentations to an online platform, and conducted targeted awareness efforts online through social media in the local language.

In partnership with the PCCT in Siem Reap Province, A21 conducted prevention training specifically designed to strengthen the capacity of the local government to prevent human trafficking amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, to government partners across all 12 districts in the province. Participants included commune leaders, chiefs of villages, the MOE, local authorities, teachers, and the Cambodia Commune for Women and Children. Additionally, to address the continued use of irregular border crossings, A21 Cambodia conducted community prevention presentations and community-based after-care programs in villages close to the Thai border in North Eastern Cambodia, expanding from Banteay Meanchey Province, Siem Reap Province and Battambang Province. Finally, in an effort to reach the public during lockdown, A21 along with speakers from government counter-trafficking entities, delivered a presentation on human trafficking on a local radio station, which was broadcasted across Cambodia and shared to more than 10,000 people on social media channels.



Identification & Intervention Efforts

A21 Cambodia works alongside local authorities to conduct preliminary victim identifications¹¹ upon receiving reports of potential victims. Although A21 had initially anticipated that victim identifications would decrease due to COVID-19 restrictions and limitations with community outreach, A21 Cambodia's preliminary identification and outreach operations still resulted in numerous confirmed victims of trafficking.¹² In 2020, A21 Cambodia conducted 23 preliminary identification interviews, primarily of children, and more specifically 15 minor girls, three minor boys and five adult women. Fifteen of the preliminary victim identifications

resulted directly from 17 proactive identification operations conducted by the Siem Reap CAC in partnership with local authorities. Referrals of potential human trafficking and child exploitation cases to the Siem Reap CAC increased significantly in the second half of 2020, with 15 identification interviews in contrast to eight in the first half of the year. Those 23 interviews resulted in the identification of 17 survivors (13 minor girls and four adult women), with 12 survivors entered into A21's Aftercare program in the second half of the year in contrast to five in the first half. This increase of cases reported is likely the result of A21's continued partnership with the Cambodian Government and the coordinated efforts to identify individuals victimised by all forms of trafficking.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

In response to the interest expressed by local authorities in surrounding provinces in receiving training on human trafficking generally, and victim identification in particular, A21 regularly delivers training sessions to those working in frontline professions most likely to first encounter a victim or potential victim of trafficking. In 2020, these trainings were conducted with representatives from various government entities of the PCCT.¹³ A21's collaboration with the Cambodian Government recognises that strengthening government capacity in this area will result in increased identification and assistance of individuals being exploited and trafficked-throughout Cambodia.

These trainings encompassed, in part, recognising trafficking and the process of identification, conducting preliminary victim identification interviews, and survivor aftercare including understanding trauma, necessary services, and the availability of direct services to survivors in the region. A21 Cambodia conducted five such in-person training sessions with the Cambodian government to over 300 individuals, primarily frontline professionals. These trainings are fundamental to ensure that frontline professionals understand and apply a victim-centred approach in order to safeguard the identification process and support identified survivors. Additionally, these sessions also train frontline workers to create effective prevention programs, and assist in any ensuing criminal investigation and prosecution.

The proper investigation of a case and support of survivors can lead to relevant information resulting in the discovery of other trafficking victims, as well as other offenses committed by the traffickers. In conjunction with the Cambodian Government, A21 Cambodia also provided specialised training on interviewing and interacting with child-survivors, taking into consideration the important differences between a child and an adult, as well as the various stages of a child's development. This specialised training included amongst other things, employing a trauma-informed, child-centred approach, the importance of a child forensic interview in obtaining reliable information from a child, and the characteristics

of a child friendly environment. These training sessions provided to frontline professionals have been essential during this critical time of increased vulnerability for many Cambodian nationals. Trained government officials have then been able to apply this training to their work throughout 2020, as evidenced by the number of identified victims of trafficking.

THE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTRE

The CAC is a safe and child-friendly facility where a child is able to speak to a trained forensic interviewer about the exploitation that a child has experienced, and receive direct trauma-informed aftercare services. While trauma affects individuals of all ages, obtaining reliable information from children who have experienced trauma for purposes of criminal prosecution presents unique problems. In addition to providing a trauma-informed, victim-centred approach to interviews of children, the CAC offers a centralised system for all stakeholders, through the MDT. The MDT collaborates and coordinates services to minimise trauma to the child-survivor during any ensuing criminal investigation in addition to ensuring child-survivors receive the aftercare services necessary for restoration. Potential victims of trafficking are referred to the CAC by law enforcement, government partners, partner NGOs and from the general community. A21's Siem Reap CAC officially opened in December 2019 and remained open throughout most of the pandemic in 2020, except for limited periods of time consistent with government mandated restrictions. As the first CAC in Cambodia, the concept of child forensic interviews underlying A21's Siem Reap CAC being fairly new to Cambodian government officials, resulted in initially few interview referrals. However, after receiving specialised training about child-survivors and gaining familiarity with the interviewing technique, government referrals for child-interviews increased, resulting in successful child forensic interviews and the Siem Reap CAC quickly becoming a cornerstone for safeguarding children in Siem Reap and adjoining regions. Where potential child-victims located in more remote regions could not travel to Siem Reap to be forensically interviewed, A21 staff with specialised training in interviewing children would accompany government authorities to visit the child and conduct the interviews. As a result, children were properly interviewed in a trauma-informed manner, and government officials witnessed the proper process first-hand.

Collaboration and cooperation between government, NGOs, and other stakeholders, and continued training on current trends, are essential in order to effectively combat human trafficking and exploitation. In furtherance of these efforts, in 2020, A21 Cambodia provided training on the CAC model and its strategy to combat human trafficking at the first ever Cambodia Crimes Against Children Conference hosted by U.S. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the U.S.

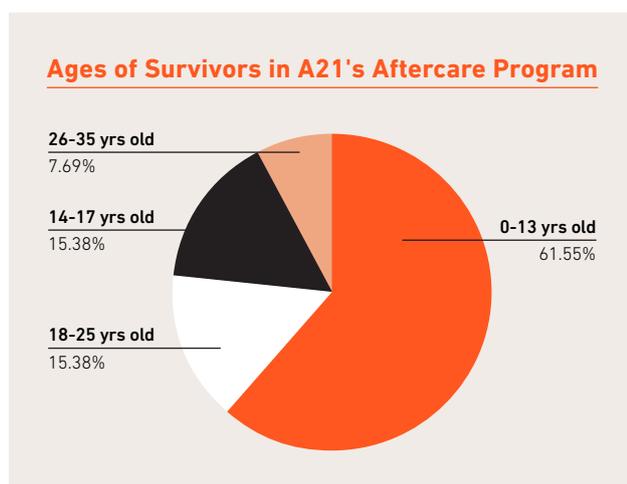
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which provided the government and local stakeholders with specialised training in the area of investigation and prosecution of crimes against children from experts in the field.



Aftercare Services

A21 Cambodia facilitates a community-based aftercare program which works with local service providers to provide individualised care and services for each survivor. Throughout the pandemic restrictions, A21 received ongoing referrals for direct services, evincing that victims were still being identified and referred, and that trafficking continued during the pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions promulgated by the Ministry of Social Affairs, however, precluded a number of existing shelters and foster care programs from accepting new survivors into their aftercare programs, resulting in increased referrals to A21. In 2020, A21 Cambodia supported 32 survivors of human trafficking and child exploitation, of which 17 were new survivors entering into the Aftercare program. Survivors who entered into A21's Aftercare program experienced a range of exploitation types including sex trafficking (24%), forced labour (16%), forced begging (48%), domestic servitude (8%) and other types of trafficking (4%). A21 Cambodia reported two core recruitment methods for the above, primarily being tricked, exploited, or sold by a family member (84%) and false job opportunities (16%). Victims of forced begging and forced labour were most commonly linked to recruitment from a family member, whereas a significant number of those victimised by sex trafficking and domestic

Consistent with prior years, all survivors who entered A21’s Aftercare program in 2020 were ethnically Cambodian, trafficked either domestically within Cambodia or repatriated after being exploited in another nation, substantiating Cambodia as predominantly a source country in A21’s experience. Fifteen per cent of these survivors were male, and 85% were female, whereas in 2019, 37.50% of survivors were male and 62.50% female. Minors comprised over 75% of survivors who entered into A21 Cambodia’s Aftercare program in 2020, with the majority being exploited through forced begging cases. Upon identification as a trafficking survivor and entry into A21’s Aftercare program, survivors have access to direct services. A21 social workers develop individually tailored case management plans according to each survivor’s needs and goals, which may include: education sponsorship (primary through to university); psychological services, by an A21 psychologist or partner organisation; safe housing through foster care sponsorship or assisted rent; A21’s life skills programs; dental and medical support; and other community-based care.



Due to COVID-19 restrictions, A21 Cambodia adapted its Aftercare programs to include online classes and computer training. Where survivors lacked electronic devices, A21 Cambodia purchased smartphones and laptops to facilitate remote services. To mitigate against pandemic related economic impact, A21 supported some survivors with small food cart businesses from their homes. A21 Cambodia also delivered essential items, food and care packages to survivors living independently in the community who were isolated during lockdown. Social isolation also proved concerning to survivors, who expressed an eagerness to connect regularly with A21’s social work staff. When COVID-19 restrictions eased, survivors preferred to meet their counsellor in person, or study online at A21’s CAC. A significant number of children enrolled in A21’s Aftercare program relied on the CAC as a safe place to receive support throughout the pandemic; many routinely requested to come to the CAC when schools, business and community centres were closed.

In 2020 compared to past years, A21 Cambodia observed an increase of children begging for money on city streets across the country. Eighty per cent of the street children interviewed during ‘CAC outreaches’¹³ reported that family members forced them to beg for money. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of job availability and financial security appeared to increase pressure for individuals to take extra risks to find employment. One new survivor in A21’s Aftercare program, repatriated back to Cambodia in 2020 after being recruited through a false job scheme and sex trafficked, amidst the pandemic contemplated returning to the same foreign country on another job prospect. Due to job losses, family members pressured the survivor to find employment regardless of the possible danger. Fortunately, A21 assisted the survivor to find job training in Cambodia and worked with the family to ensure the survivor’s safety and security.

SURVIVORS RECRUITED THROUGH FALSE MARRIAGE ASSISTED

Transnational trafficking of girls and women through use of false marriage is a prevalent recruitment method in Cambodia. These false marriage recruitment cases resemble the traditional false employment type of trafficking schemes. Brokers approach Cambodian women and girls with information about the availability of marriage to wealthy husbands in certain countries, who could financially support both them and their families in Cambodia. Upon arrival in the destination country however, the women and girls realise that they have been victimised and trafficked. In 2020, several new survivors trafficked through a false marriage recruitment scheme entered into A21 Cambodia’s Aftercare program for the first time. These scenarios, like most in such trafficking cases, showed signs of force, fraud or coercion.

Many survivors were sexually assaulted, manipulated and controlled, with some resulting in pregnancy and the birth of their abusers’ baby. Although these survivors escaped and returned back to Cambodia in 2020, their children remain in the custody of their abusers. These survivors were all referred to A21’s Aftercare program after local Cambodian authorities officially identified them as victims of human trafficking. A21 Cambodia has supported the survivors with community-based aftercare services, including psychological and medical treatment, sponsorship for salon vocational training, and support for small business establishments.

Criminal prosecutions involving two survivors in A21’s Aftercare program commenced during this time period as well. While fewer criminal cases were processed during the strict lockdown periods, local authorities maintained momentum in their prosecution efforts throughout the year.

Disclosure from a Child Forensic Interview at the CAC Results in a Successful Prosecution

In 2020, A21 received a call from local law enforcement requesting assistance with a severe case of child abuse. The young girl had grown up in a vulnerable community and was often placed in high-risk situations, and ultimately subjected to familial trafficking.

Although she escaped to an extended family member's house, when she reported her rape, her family attempted to force her to marry the perpetrator to maintain a positive reputation within the community. Local authorities became aware of her situation and after the child was identified, brought her to the Siem Reap CAC, where A21's trained staff conducted a recorded child forensic interview. A21 provided key information conveyed from the forensic interview to local authorities

who then conducted a further investigation, resulting in the successful prosecution of the perpetrator. The child is now safe and has entered into A21's Aftercare program where A21's social workers are working closely with her to develop and pursue her goals for the future. A21 has sponsored the child-survivor's return to school and provides tutoring from the CAC to help build confidence. As a result of this survivor's disclosure, A21's prevention staff subsequently partnered with the village leader of her home community to conduct human trafficking prevention and awareness training to educate other children in the community about human trafficking and child exploitation, as well as to provide them with prevention and awareness resources in order to strengthen safeguarding practices within the community.

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- ¹ The World Bank, Cambodia Overview, last modified October 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview>.
- ² United States, Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report 20th Ed. June 2020, 137-138, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.
- ³ United States, Department of State, 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Cambodia, last modified March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cambodia/>.
- ⁴ International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Australia Aid, TRIANGLE in ASEAN Programme Quarterly Briefing Note (2020), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_735105.pdf.
- ⁵ ILO (2020) COVID-19: Impact on Cambodian migrant workers. 4 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_752836.pdf (noting irregular Cambodian migrant workers paying to cross the borders both into and out of Thailand).
- ⁶ In 2020, the Cambodian Government reported that 220 identified victims of human trafficking were repatriated back to Cambodia and further assisted 1095 vulnerable individuals and victims of human trafficking identified through government bodies and NGOs. See Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (2021) Achievement report for 2020, last 12 months and next plan. Kingdom of Cambodia, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1A8XSTB1rzfdkE-KfjAP5x3agsk7GywS/view>.
- ⁷ The Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation (2008) criminalises sex and labour trafficking, and the Anti-Corruption Law (April 2010) along with the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) has been established to combat corruption. There is a prescribed penalty of seven to 15 years' imprisonment for offenses involving an adult victim and 15 to 20 years imprisonment for those involving a child victim. Office of the Ministry of Justice (2008), 'Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation', Kingdom of Cambodia, <https://data.opendatacambodia.net/dataset/law-on-suppression-of-human-trafficking-and-sexual-exploitation/resource/53298584-55e0-4e6e-83fa-7a5cf92e2e48>.
- ⁸ Each PCCT is comprised of the following six working groups: Prevention (led by the Provincial Department of Education); Protection, Recovery, Reintegration and Repatriation (led by the Provincial Department of Social Affairs); Law Enforcement (led by the Anti-Human Trafficking Police); Justice (led by the prosecutor); Migration (led by the Provincial Department of Labor and Vocational Training); and International Cooperation (led by the Provincial Department of Women Affairs). NGOs are encouraged to be members of each working group based on their program. A21 is a member of the Protection and Recovery, Reintegration, and Repatriation working groups, and participates as needed in the Law Enforcement working group.
- ⁹ World Health Organisation, COVID-19 Situation in WHO - Western Pacific Region: Cambodia (19 April, 2021). <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/345dfdc82b5c4f6a815fd54a05d18ec>.
- ¹⁰ Ministry Of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth (MoSaVY), 'Implementation of measures to prevent pneumonia followed by new coronavirus (covid-19) in centers, centers, associations and national and international organizations'. Kingdom of Cambodia, 2020, <http://www.mosvy.gov.kh/article/472>.
- ¹¹ The preliminary victim identification is a proactive effort to observe, ask questions and search for elements of victimisation in potential victim of human trafficking in order to temporarily presume a 'victim' status to that protection, support, and appropriate services can be provided in a timely and human manner, while waiting further investigation in accordance with judicial procedures. See The National Committee for Counter Trafficking in Persons, 2015, Guidelines on Forms and Procedures for Identification of victims of human trafficking for appropriate services provision, Kingdom of Cambodia.
- ¹² As A21 Cambodia was not fully operational in Siem Reap in 2019, A21 Cambodia can not provide a full comparison of the effect of COVID-19 on anti-human trafficking efforts in the region, but are basing its tentative conclusions on comparisons to pre-2020 operations generally.
- ¹³ A CAC outreach is a type of victim identification operation targeting child victims and potential child victims. In these 'outreaches', A21 staff travel to predominantly high-risk areas to conduct prevention presentations, distribute A21 resources, and screen for indicators of potential human trafficking and child exploitation.