The Mekong Region is one of the world’s main areas of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Cambodia ranks second behind the regional centre Thailand. CSEC has been widely known here since the start of the 1990s.

**Extent and forms**
The data are based on a limited number of studies and estimates by various organisations. According to UNICEF figures, one third of all 80,000–100,000 prostitutes in Cambodia are under 18. The main regions for child prostitution are Siem Riep, Sihanoukville, Phnom Penh and the provinces bordering on Thailand and Viet Nam. There has also been a sharp increase in the production, dissemination and use of child pornography, particularly over the internet and cell phones.

This primarily affects girls. They come from poor rural regions and urban slums, and are usually between 12 and 17. Young male sex workers are often street children working on their own account. The “clients” are Cambodians and pedosexuals from Thailand, China, Japan, Korea, USA and Europe.

Traffic in children is primarily domestic. Cambodia is, however, also a country of origin, transit and destination for international traffic. One third of the girls comes from Viet Nam and China. Very young Cambodian girls are primarily traded to Thailand. Other destinations include Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, the USA, Europe and South Africa. Relatives and friends are often involved in trafficking.

**Causes and context**
Cambodia is currently one of the poorest countries in Asia. Many families have virtually no sources of income. This encourages the “sale” or “rental” of children, often the oldest daughter.

After the Khmer Rouge dictatorship, prostitution flourished again during the civil war in the 1980s. The stationing of some 22,000 UN peacekeepers at the start of the 1990s led to a rapid increase in prostitution, primarily of girls. One of the results of this was a rapid dissemination of HIV/AIDS in Cambodia. Particular risk factors for CSEC today are a lack of education and ignorance of the situation, destruction of family structures by war, experienced violence (including sexual violence) in families, and gender-specific discrimination. The widespread belief that sex with ‘virgins’ has a rejuvenating effect and cures HIV infections is also having a devastating effect.

The corruption that prevails in the country is making criminal investigation considerably more complicated. The officials themselves are often involved in sexual exploitation.
Examples of approaches to prevention and rehabilitation

- The Government and international organisations implemented a legal reinforcement project involving national upgrading measures for police and court employees, establishing a hotline and TV commercials.
- The Cambodian Women Crisis Centre also offers refuge to minors who are victims of sexual exploitation, providing health care, life skills training and counselling.
- The NGO Social Service of Cambodia is developing a training programme for social workers to counsel victims.

National measures to combat the problem

Cambodia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992), the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2002), the Palermo Protocol against trafficking to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2005) and the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2006. The new Cambodian law extended the penal provisions against trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children, but implementation is not very effective. The convictions against pedophiles are decreasing, for reasons including a lack of protection for victims, lack of evidence and corruption.


Women’s and children’s rights organizations are key actors. There are various coalitions to protect children from CSEC such as COSECAM, ECPAT Cambodia and Chab Dai. Their activities include PR, psychosocial counselling, maintaining refuges and programmes for the economic and social reintegration of victims.

Internationale cooperation

The Government has signed a cooperation agreement with Thailand and Viet Nam on criminal prosecution and the return of trafficking victims. Every month, 400-500 children are returned to Cambodia from Thailand and Viet Nam with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and NGOs.

In 2004, Cambodia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the other five states in the Mekong Region, establishing a framework for regional cooperation in combating human trafficking through criminal prosecution, border controls, victim protection and return.


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www.gtz.de/nochildabuse

The GTZ convention project “Protection of Minors against Sexual Exploitation” is supporting partner countries on behalf of BMZ in implementing the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Further information is available from:

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH
Health, Education and Social Protection Division, Convention Project “Protection of Minors against Sexual Exploitation”
T +49 (0) 6196-79-1512
F +49 (0) 6196-79-801512
E nochildabuse@gtz.de
I www.gtz.de/nochildabuse