

Working with the least-served people



Cambodian village-life is changing. From being small communities full of life and people, villages are nowadays quiet and home for elderly people and children. Youth and young people have left their village in order to seek jobs elsewhere. Migration for labour is happening at large scale, both within the country and to neighbour countries, and many young parents choose to leave their children behind, to be cared for by grandparents. Sadly, labour migration is being abused by middlemen and traffickers, and many migrants have become victims of human trafficking.

ICC's newly started anti-human trafficking project "Trafficking Response" has since May done research and tested how to reduce human trafficking in Preah Sdach district. ICC has been working in this district for years, and been witness to the increased labour migration happening - both legally and illegally. The main destination for migration out of the country is to Thailand, and most labour migration to Thailand is done illegally. A number of migrants have faced problems with the Thai authorities e.g. some have been arrested, sent to jail, etc. Also it is reported that some people from Preah Sdach district who have migrated to Thailand for work are lost, and no one know what has happened to them. Even as a high number of people from Preah Sdach district are migrating to Thailand, many villagers are still unaware of labour abuse and human trafficking connected to labour migration.

One of the main reasons for labour migration from Preah Sdach district is the change in rice-farming. As machinery is taking over from human labour, there is less need for people in the agriculture sector, hence less jobs available for young people. Also the district is next to the Vietnamese border, and lately Vietnamese business people are taking control of more and more markets in the district, making it harder for Cambodian farmers to sell their agriculture products. Because of this competition from Vietnam, Cambodian farmers are losing profit from their farming, as prices are pushed to minimum. Also a bad harvest means farmers loose profit, and farmers need to take loan, and/or cannot pay back the loan they already have, which also force people to mirage for jobs outside of the district.

ICC has learned, that labour migration also affect Buddhist institutions. Most of the pagodas in ICC's target areas in Preah Sdach district mainly have monks under 18 years old - *boy-monks*. They are from age 12 to 18, but some are even under the age of 10. It is a new trend that pagodas are now accepting boys as a majority of those who become monks. This due to the fact that younger men have migrated from the district, so in order to keep the pagodas operating, boys are accepted. Also, poverty pushes parents to send their boys to live in the pagoda, and to be cared for by monks, which seem to be at a larger scale now than in previous years. ICC has learned, that when boy-monks leave the pagodas, they leave because they need to find a job and provide for their families. A majority of the boy-monks migrate into construction work, factory work or seek to find jobs in other countries, like Thailand. Furthermore, boy-monks have low educational background and come from very poor families, hence migration for work is for many of the boy-monks the only option after end service in Buddhist pagodas.

Trafficking Response project is now teaching both Christian church leaders and Buddhist institutions about the risk of illegal migration and labour trafficking, in order to empower them to help protecting their communities. Also the project assists religious leaders to have access to information, so that they can equip villagers to do legal and safe migration for work.