



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Cambodia

Cambodia – KHM39904 – Sex work –
Employment options – Employment as a
hairdresser – Risk of harm for
entertainment workers – State protection
for women
7 March 2012

Please provide information about:

1. Deleted.

2. Whether poor women in Cambodia without education and skills may be forced to work as a sex worker to survive; and whether they have other employment options.

Reports indicate that poor women in Cambodia without education and vocational skills may be prompted to undertake sex work because of either unemployment or insufficient income. A 2007 report published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) observed that, in Cambodia:

Women are at a considerable disadvantage in the labour market due to the gender disparity in educational opportunities. Lack of basic skills for literacy and numeracy makes it more difficult for them to participate in skills training... Another issue is the nature of training that has reinforced gender stereotypes by providing traditional skills considered to be “women’s work,” such as hairdressing and sewing. These factors push women into the informal economy and micro vending and increase their vulnerability to engage in sex work.¹

Research by the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) found that, during the global financial crisis of 2009, women entered the sex trade following declining working conditions in other sectors, such as garment manufacturing, where they had experienced long working hours and low pay. Exploitative brokering activities had not, however, been found to have increased.²

Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA carried out research in Cambodia in 2009 for the ILO. That research included surveying “indirect sex workers”, defined as women whose “primary mode of

¹ Morris, E. 2007, ‘Promoting employment in Cambodia: Analysis and options’, International Labour Organization, pp.114-115 http://www.ilo.org/wemsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wems_bk_pb_137_en.pdf – Accessed 20 February 2012

² United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) 2009, ‘Cambodia: Exodus to the sex trade? Effects of the global financial crisis on women’s working conditions and opportunities’, UNICEF website, 20 July http://www.unicef.org/eapro/UNIAP_Report_SIREN_CB-04_Cambodia_financial_crisis_and_sex_trade_FINAL.pdf – Accessed 5 March 2012

employment is not sex work but who may sell sex opportunistically for material benefit”.³ The survey found that, within the entertainment sector, women working in karaoke bars as hostesses, singers, escorts, waitresses and beer promoters receive a basic, monthly wage and may negotiate or decline an offer of sex with a client. Low wages prompted women’s participation in sex work, which in turn benefitted the employer by attracting larger numbers of clients to the venue.⁴ It was reported that:

Generally, salaries in the entertainment sector are so low that eventually all of the workers interviewed began to supplement their income with sex work. The underlying reason for all of the women beginning to sell sex was their financial commitments, including accommodation and food but also often related to commitments to support their mothers, siblings or cousins. Most made the decision to sell sex independently, although a few said they were convinced (but not forced or coerced) to sell sex by someone else.⁵

According to the women participating in the survey, discussions of money for sex were not shared with the venue managers or owners who could only take profit from renting the room, selling food, drinks and entertainment.⁶ The fundamental matter in workers’ decisions to sell sex were their wages, and those surveyed felt themselves to be “compelled by necessity to supplement their income by accepting tips for tasks such as kissing, cuddling, drinking with and entertaining male clients”; the report concluded that, for many entertainment sector workers, “selling sex is one of the only means [sic] of earning enough money for them to survive”.⁷

There do, however, appear to be options to working in the entertainment sector. A number of local and international non-government organizations offer vocational training programs which focus on providing women with the opportunity to find employment or establish their own businesses, including AFESIP Cambodia, which supports victims of sex slavery,⁸ New Futures

³ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.14
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February 2012

⁴ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.25
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February 2012

⁵ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.63
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February 2012

⁶ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.25
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

⁷ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.69-70
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

⁸ „Background’ 2009, AFESIP website, 23 April
http://www.afesip.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=54 – Accessed 6 March 2012

Organisation, which provides skills programs for young people in the rural Takeo area,⁹ World Vision,¹⁰ and the Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA).¹¹

Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA’s *Sustainable Livelihood Training* project in 2002-2006, in part funded by AusAID, was found on completion to have “significantly reduced poverty by providing vocational education and agricultural and life skills”. Training programs were for 6, 4 or 3 months duration and included vegetable growing, textiles and design, hairdressing, hospitality, and office skills; literacy was included in training for rural women. Of the 5,445 people who successfully completed the training, most were women, and 90% of those who took part in the training provided through Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA’s programs were able to earn an income from their skills.¹²

3. Employment for hairdressers in Cambodia. Are there many jobs for hairdressers? What would a women who works as a full-time apprentice hairdresser, or a junior hairdresser, earn in Cambodia? Is this enough money on which to survive without also working in another job?

While no information was found to indicate the number of jobs for hairdressers in Cambodia, information from various non-government organizations indicates that developing vocational skills as a hairdresser has been promoted as one way for a young woman to find employment or start her own business.

A report jointly produced by Cambodia’s Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) and the ILO in 2004 indicated that hairdressing was one of a number of “popular subjects” amongst trainees in 1999-2001 that had a high rate of subsequent employment.¹³ Hairdressing has continued to be offered in vocational training programs run or supported by a number of local and international non-government organizations – including AFESIP Cambodia,¹⁴ New Futures Organisation,¹⁵ World Vision,¹⁶ and APHEDA¹⁷ – with the aim of providing the opportunity to develop skills to find employment or establish a business.

⁹ „Education Centre’ (undated), New Futures Organisation website

http://www.newfuturesorganisation.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=37:education-centre&Itemid=62 – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹⁰ „Cambodia: Looking at a bright future’ (undated), World Vision Cambodia website

<https://www.worldvision.ca/About-Us/Newsroom/press-releases/Documents/Cambodia.pdf> – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹¹ „Sustainable Livelihood Training 2002-2006’ (undated), APHEDA website

http://apheda.labor.net.au/projects/cambodia/history/1177310754_1802.html – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹² „Sustainable Livelihood Training 2002-2006’ (undated), APHEDA website

http://apheda.labor.net.au/projects/cambodia/history/1177310754_1802.html – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹³ Kyoko Kusakabe, Yim Pich Malika, et al 2004, „Action Research on the Gender Dimension of Skills Development in Cambodia’, International Labour Organization website, April, pp.42-43

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_170_en.pdf – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹⁴ „Background’ 2009, AFESIP website, 23 April

http://www.afesip.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=54 – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹⁵ „Education Centre’ (undated), New Futures Organisation website

http://www.newfuturesorganisation.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=37:education-centre&Itemid=62 – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹⁶ „Cambodia: Looking at a bright future’ (undated), World Vision Cambodia website

<https://www.worldvision.ca/About-Us/Newsroom/press-releases/Documents/Cambodia.pdf> – Accessed 6 March 2012

The ILO notes, however, that “[h]igh employability does not necessarily mean decent work which provides a living wage”,¹⁸ and this may apply to those who seek to derive income from hairdressing in Cambodia.

The SalaryExpert website advises that the average annual salary for a hairdresser in Sihanoukville is KHR40,963,898, with half of those employed earning between 30,600,032 and 46,575,952 (the 17th and 67th percentiles). When benefits and bonuses are added to this salary, the average total income is estimated to be KHR42,664,928 – less than the cost of living in Sihanoukville, estimated to be KHR46,574,465 for a person who is renting accommodation.¹⁹

The WageIndicator website reports that Cambodia’s poverty line is approximately 2500 KHR (or USD 0.63) per person per day in 2010 prices, and 19% of female workers and 22% of male workers earn below the national poverty line and cannot meet their basic needs. With reference to the international poverty line of USD 1 per day, 26% of respondents are poor (27% of males and 24% of females). The percentage of working poor is highest in Sihanoukville with 36% of workers living on less than USD 1 per day and lowest in Phnom Penh with 12% of workers living on less than USD 1).²⁰

While these statistics indicate that a hairdresser may not be able to earn enough money from hairdressing to cover the cost of living, it is not uncommon for workers in Cambodia to have to earn money from more than one activity. The ILO notes that the demand for work in which women are engaged – including hairdressing – tends to vary across seasons, and given that the income from each job is also likely to be relatively low, women often need multiple jobs in order to stay above the poverty line. One study found that 39% of women respondents were engaged in more than one income earning activity (as compared to 23.9 % of male respondents).²¹

4. Whether a woman who worked in a nightclub in Cambodia would be at risk of violence and rape and other forms of harm (from the nightclub owners or patrons).

Research carried out in Cambodia in 2009 by Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA for the International Labour Organization found that women employed in the entertainment sector were vulnerable on a broad front, with lack of regulation within the entertainment sector being the single most important factor contributing to that vulnerability. While the subjects of the study were indirect sex workers – defined as “[w]omen whose primary mode of employment is not sex work but who may sell sex opportunistically for material benefit”²² – the report notes, importantly, that most of

¹⁷ „Sustainable Livelihood Training 2002-2006’ (undated), APHEDA website

http://apheda.labor.net.au/projects/cambodia/history/1177310754_1802.html – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹⁸ Kyoko Kusakabe, Yim Pich Malika, et al 2004, „Action Research on the Gender Dimension of Skills Development in Cambodia’, International Labour Organization website, April, pp.42-43

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_170_en.pdf – Accessed 6 March 2012

¹⁹ „Report Summary – Hairdresser working in Sihanoukville, All Cambodia’ 2012, SalaryExpert website, 6 March

http://www.salaryexpert.com/SEReports/Free_Salary_Intl/index.cfm?job=2240&area=8143&GetReport=Get+Report – Accessed 7 March 2012

²⁰ Cambodia Institute of Development Study 2011, „Minimum Wage Compliance Report Cambodia’, WageIndicator website, August, p.11 <http://www.wageindicator.org/documents/publicationslist/publications-2011/Minimum-Wage-Compliance-Report-CAMBODIA.pdf> – Accessed 7 March 2012

²¹ Kyoko Kusakabe, Yim Pich Malika, et al 2004, „Action Research on the Gender Dimension of Skills Development in Cambodia’, International Labour Organization website, April, p.62 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_170_en.pdf – Accessed 6 March 2012

²² Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.14

the reports of abuse related to the subject's work within their formal work setting in the entertainment sector.²³

The risk of harm came from both employers and customers. The report noted that venues open and operate with very few requirements to ensure the safety of customers or staff, and workers are made vulnerable to serious harm while carrying out their regular duties.²⁴

For the purpose of the study, entertainment workers were defined as “[w]omen employed in the entertainment sector, e.g. beer promoters, karaoke singers, massage workers and hostesses, regardless of their possible involvement in direct or indirect sex work”.²⁵ A key duty of the entertainment worker is to encourage clients to purchase more food and alcohol; establishment owners therefore encourage workers to sit and drink with clients, and workers agree to do so because they need to earn tips in order to earn a living wage.²⁶ Being pressured to sell alcohol and consuming unsafe levels of alcohol are common among karaoke workers,²⁷ and result from working conditions that fail to provide a living wage and protection from unfair or unsafe conditions.²⁸

According to the report:

- Most of the workers experience verbal humiliation and abuse – clients yell abuse or humiliate them for not agreeing to sit with them or simply because the clients believed the women were not respectable.
- Almost all workers had been forced to drink excessive amounts of alcohol, either by the clients or by managers... One worker reported an experience of one client forcing her to drink until she

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

²³ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.66

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

²⁴ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.72

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

²⁵ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.14

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

²⁶ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, pp.73-74

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

²⁷ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.25

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

²⁸ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.69-70

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

passed out; another reported her manager forcing her to drink with clients at a private party or lose pay.

...

- All of the women reported being concerned about violence when clients get drunk. One beer promoter told of being abused and kicked by a regular client who accused her of making him drink too much. Rather than receiving assistance from the establishment's manager, she was dismissed to appease the client.
- Three women reported sexual assault or attempted sexual assault within their place of employment.²⁹

The ILO report also notes that the conflation of the entertainment sector with the sex industry in common dialogue has led to stigma and discrimination attaching to entertainment workers, heightening the abuse they receive at work and within the community.³⁰ This increased likelihood of abuse is not insignificant in Cambodia where women who are perceived to be sexually available may be targeted for sexual assault,³¹ and where, according to 2009 and 2010 sources, the incidence of sexual assault appears to have been increasing.^{32 33}

5. Whether the Cambodian authorities provide protection to (i) women and (ii) women who work in nightclubs, who experience violence from men.

According to Human Rights Watch, violence against women in Cambodia “goes largely unpunished”.³⁴

The US Department of State reports that rape is a criminal offense punishable by a prison sentence of between five and ten years, but that rape and other forms of violence against women were common. Underreporting of gender-based violence is likely, due in part to poor enforcement. According to one source, 501 cases of rape and 546 cases of domestic violence were reported during 2009, of which the courts tried 180.³⁵

Amnesty International observes that prosecution is weak.³⁶ Police do not often visit a crime scene or collect evidence aside from the victim’s testimony.³⁷ Those reporting rape may

²⁹ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.66 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

³⁰ Australian People for Health Education and Development Abroad 2011, „Cambodia – addressing HIV vulnerabilities of indirect sex workers during the financial crisis: Situation analysis, strategies and entry points for HIV/AIDS workplace education’, International Labour Organization website, p.69 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/genericdocument/wcms_165487.pdf – Accessed 20 February

³¹ Woods, L.N. 2008, *Sound the Alarm: Reporting Violence Against Children In Cambodia*, scribd website, source: UNICEF Cambodia, p. 11 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30801758/SOUND-the-ALARM-Reporting-Violence-Against-Children-in-Cambodia> – Accessed 11 May 2011

³² Amnesty International 2010, *Breaking the Silence: Sexual Violence in Cambodia*, 8 March, p.5

³³ The United Nations in Cambodia 2009, *Situation Analysis of Youth in Cambodia*, UNICEF website, May, p. 33 http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/FINAL_UN_Youth_SitAn_2009.pdf – Accessed 10 May 2011

³⁴ Human Rights Watch 2010, *World Report – Cambodia*, 20 January

³⁵ US Department of State 2011, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Cambodia*, 8 April, Section 6

³⁶ Amnesty International 2010, „Cambodia’s government must protect victims of sexual violence as reports of rape increase’, Amnesty International website, 8 March

³⁷ Amnesty International 2010, *Breaking the Silence: Sexual Violence in Cambodia*, 8 March, p.24

encounter disbelief from police officers,³⁸ and judges and prosecutors are often sceptical about victims' statements from the outset.³⁹

Sources indicate that Cambodia's policing and judicial institutions require reform, with the country ranked 164 of 178 on Transparency International's most recent Corruption Perceptions Index – scoring 2.1 on a scale ranging from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean).⁴⁰ Bribes are often required to ensure a rape case is investigated because individual officers have discretionary power over which cases to investigate,⁴¹ and a complainant who fails to pay bribes to court officials may experience extensive delays with their case.⁴²

Police officers and security personnel appear to enjoy a degree of impunity.⁴³ Human Rights Watch reports that in the wake of 2008 laws which criminalise prostitution, sex workers in particular face sexual harassment, arbitrary detention and rape by police and security guards.^{44 45}

³⁸ Amnesty International 2010, 'Cambodia's government must protect victims of sexual violence as reports of rape increase', Amnesty International website, 8 March

³⁹ Amnesty International 2010, *Breaking the Silence: Sexual Violence in Cambodia*, 8 March, p.38

⁴⁰ Transparency International 2011, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2011*, November

⁴¹ Amnesty International 2010, *Breaking the Silence: Sexual Violence in Cambodia*, 8 March, p.23

⁴² Amnesty International 2010, *Breaking the Silence: Sexual Violence in Cambodia*, 8 March, p.40

⁴³ Human Rights Watch 2010, *Off the Streets: Arbitrary Detention and Other Abuses Against Sex Workers in Cambodia*, July, Section IV

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch 2011, *World Report – Cambodia*, 24 January

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch 2010, *Off the Streets: Arbitrary Detention and Other Abuses Against Sex Workers in Cambodia*, July, Section IV

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http://www.afesip.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=54 – Accessed 6 March 2012
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http://www.salaryexpert.com/SEReports/Free_Salary_Intl/index.cfm?job=2240&area=8143&GetReport=Get+Report – Accessed 7 March 2012
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http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_170_en.pdf – Accessed 6 March 2012

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United Nations in Cambodia 2009, *Situation Analysis of Youth in Cambodia*, UNICEF website, May http://www.unicef.org/cambodia/FINAL_UN_Youth_SitAn_2009.pdf – Accessed 10 May 2011

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US Department of State 2011, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2010 – Cambodia*, 8 April

Woods, L.N. 2008, *Sound the Alarm: Reporting Violence Against Children In Cambodia*, scribd website, source: UNICEF Cambodia <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30801758/SOUND-the-ALARM-Reporting-Violence-Against-Children-in-Cambodia> – Accessed 11 May 2011