

# Vulnerable prey for brokers

Justine Drennan  
and Mom Kunthea

**S**UDDEN hardships such as job loss, crop failure, natural disasters or a family member falling ill are key factors that push impoverished Cambodians into the hands of labour brokers, making them highly vulnerable to human trafficking, a USAID-funded study has found.

Trafficking victims, more than other poor Cambodians, tend to be young and lack education. But the likelihood that they experienced a string of stressful events before going abroad sets them apart from their peers, says a survey of nearly 1,000 Cambodians organised by NGO Winrock International.

Trafficking survivors on average experienced more than three such hardships in the year before they were trafficked, while poor Cambodians who had not been trafficked experienced an average of two such events, said Daniel Lindgren of development consulting group Rapid Asia, which conducted the study and yesterday presented its findings.

"Suddenly someone goes from a vulnerable situation



Domestic workers at Phnom Penh International Airport return from Malaysia in February this year. A report says brokers take advantage of people in vulnerable situations, particularly poor Cambodians. PHA LINA

to a very critical situation," Lindgren said.

Brokers are drawn to such desperation, added Lindgren, whose organisation has conducted similar surveys in other countries. During the 2004 tsunami, it took three weeks for aid to reach Indonesia's hard-hit

Aceh region. Labour brokers appeared in a day.

In Cambodia, the study also found that the experience of being trafficked – often into fishing, construction, domestic work and sex work – did little to provide victims with the information necessary

to defend themselves. People who had been rescued from trafficking were no more likely than others to say they would take precautions against entering into the undefined but broker-dependent set-ups that the study found was most associated with trafficking.

Impressing upon vulnerable populations the need to clarify the status of broker agreements should therefore be a focus of anti-trafficking efforts, Lindgren concluded.

Ten Borany, deputy director of the Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department at the Ministry of Interior, said yesterday that "police officials are trying to do their best to spread information and directly educate villagers at the commune, village and community level, so that they understand what they need to know for their job before leaving home to go overseas".

Ya Navuth, executive director of anti-trafficking group CARAM Cambodia, said that more than 400,000 Cambodians are working in Thailand, more than 50,000 in Malaysia, more than 10,000 in Korea and more than 5,000 in other countries.

He stressed, however, that it was hard to estimate the number of victims of trafficking.

Inhumane labour conditions and sexual exploitation, even of migrants who initially enter foreign countries by legal means, blur the line between trafficking victims and other exploited migrants, said representatives of CARAM and other NGOs. ■