

Cambodian Child Beggars in Bangkok: New Research to Initiate Action

The issue of Cambodian Child beggars, particularly in Bangkok, has been a collective concern of the anti-trafficking community for many years. New research by Friends and UNIAP shed new light on previous assumptions and findings, and highlighted new trends in Cambodian child begging in Thailand.

Consultation workshops to discuss the recommendations of the research were conducted in Thailand and Cambodia on the 6th of October 2006 and the 23rd of January 2007 respectively. During these consultations, findings of the research team were presented and discussed with key government departments and non-governmental actors. From this, practical recommendations and follow-up steps were developed to address the issue of Cambodian child beggars in Thailand. The process has been a testament to the commitment and effort of the Governments of Cambodia and Thailand on this issue and has reflected their preparedness to approach the delicate challenges that are associated with improving the current situation.

The research found that the majority of Cambodian child beggars travel to Bangkok with their mothers or other family members and that most beggars have a degree of control over their day-to-day lives. Previous research on Cambodian child beggars alluded to both a high prevalence of abusive practices against child beggars by traffickers and to the “fake mother” phenomenon in which a woman begs with an infant that is not her own ostensibly to gain more sympathy from potential givers. This new research found that such abuse and trafficking is not experienced by the majority of Cambodian child beggars in Bangkok. Due to the wage-level that could be obtained through begging in Thailand, the research found that the issue was more related to the migration of vulnerable migrants rather than trafficking.

However, the research did find that 19.9% of the children questioned came with a “Me Kyhol” or non-blood relative. Interestingly, 5 out of the 8 disabled children questioned came with a Me Kyhol although none of the 8 disabled children were found to have been intentionally mutilated for the purpose of begging. The children were also asked by the research team whether they were happy or not: most of the children who came with their mother said yes; and half of the children that came with a ‘Me Kyhol’ said they were unhappy.

The research also found that there was no significant correlation between location of begging and earnings by the children and observed that beggars do not only target the areas frequented by tourists. The research team also interviewed samples of the Thai population about their frequency of giving to beggars and their average amount given. This section of the research found that a large majority of Thais give to beggars. A minimum approximation based on the sample interviewed revealed that Thais give around \$500,000 monthly to beggars in Bangkok alone. With such a large amount of money being given to beggars, there is clearly an incentive for Cambodians to migrate to work as a beggar in Bangkok.

In doing this research, Friends and UNIAP aimed to influence current responses and help to create a long-term strategy to address the problem of Cambodian child beggars in Thailand. The research produced key recommendations to improve the issue of Cambodian child beggars in Bangkok under five broad areas: Pre-departure/Prevention of unsafe migration; Work on the streets; Services in shelters in Thailand; Repatriation and return; Promoting sustainable reintegration.

Consultation workshops to discuss the recommendations of the research were conducted in Thailand and Cambodia on the 6th of October 2006 and the 23rd of January 2007 respectively. During these consultations, findings of the research team were presented and discussed with key government departments and non-governmental actors. From this, practical recommendations and follow-up steps were developed to address the issue of Cambodian child beggars in Thailand. The process has been a testament to the commitment and effort of the Governments of Cambodia and Thailand on this issue and has reflected their preparedness to approach the delicate challenges that are associated with improving the current situation.

Working groups to implement these recommendations are being created in Thailand and Cambodia. This new research on the Cambodian child Beggar issue in Bangkok will guide and support the efforts of the Thai and Cambodian governments, national and international NGOs, UN agencies, and international community to more affectively address the issue and provide appropriate support to victims.