

# Cutting the Grass, Not the Root

## How Cambodia's Scam Compounds Kept Hiring Through the 2025–2026 Crackdown

Two-page briefing on an investigative report by Moses Ngeth, September 2026. The report reads 4,991 job ads posted between April 2023 and July 2026 in 37 public Telegram channels and groups that advertise work in Cambodia. The recruiters wrote these ads themselves. The full report, the dataset and a numbers ledger are public.

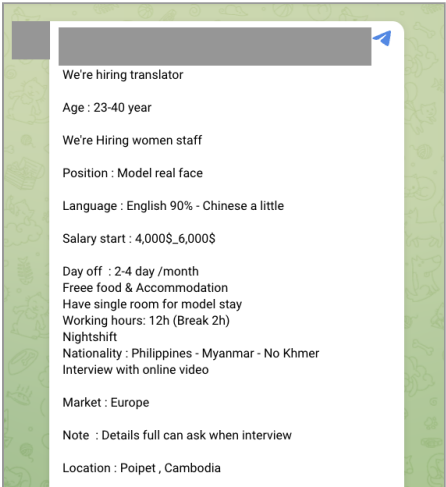
The Government of Cambodia, to foreign diplomats, 27 August 2026

**"There are currently no online scam compounds remaining in the country."**

The same job ad as first posted, 16 July 2026 [ad 7726]

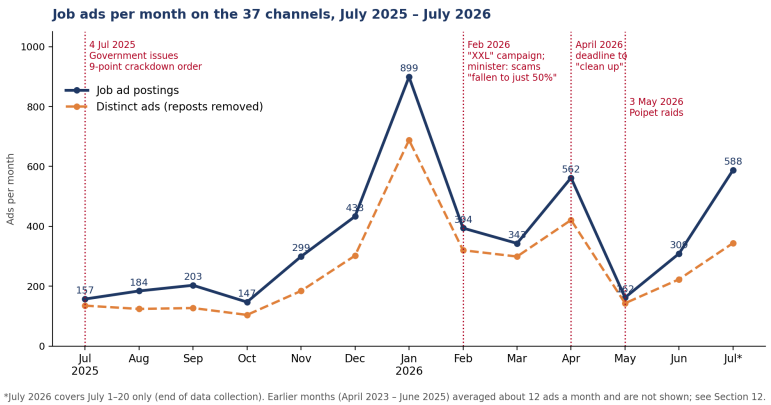
We're hiring women staff. Position: Model real face. Language: English 90%. Salary start: \$4,000 – \$6,000. Day off: 2–4 days/month. Free food & accommodation. Single room for model stay. Working hours: 12h (break 2h). Nightshift. Nationality: Philippines – Myanmar – No Khmer. Interview with online video. Market: Europe. Location: Poipet, Cambodia.

A "Model real face" is the woman who appears on a video call to convince a victim that an online friend is real. "Market: Europe" means the victims are in Europe. "No Khmer" means the company wants a foreign woman, far from home. The report explains every line of this ad.



The ad posted again in the same channel on 12 September 2026, sixteen days after the statement, with the same words; the only change is "Chinese a little" on the language line [test ad 473287]. Channel and poster names covered.

## The ads did not stop when the compounds were supposed to close



Job ads per month on the 37 channels and groups, July 2025 to July 2026. Blue: every posting. Orange: each ad counted once, reposts removed. The four Government dates are marked.

562

ads in April 2026, the month the compounds were supposed to be closed; 431 of them for sites in Cambodia, the second-busiest month in three years

1,059

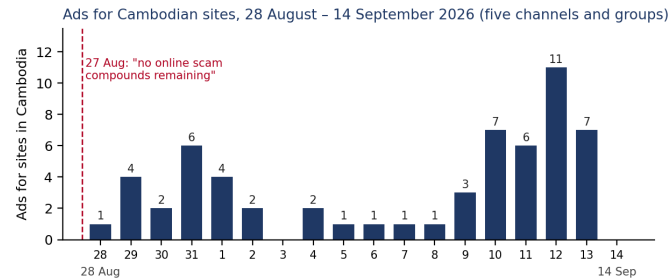
ads posted after the April deadline, from 1 May to 20 July 2026

11 → 67

Poipet ads a month: they fell to 11 after the 3 May police raids and were back to 67 by July, one of them for a "Newly opened company"

59

ads for sites in Cambodia found in five channels in the 18 days after the Government said no compounds remained (28 Aug – 14 Sep 2026)

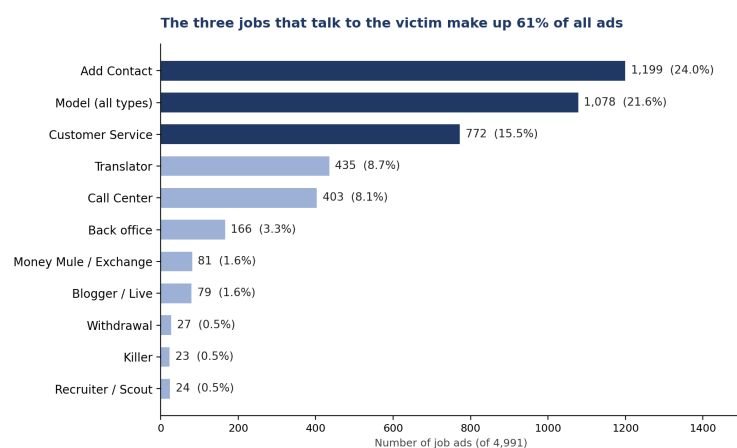


Ads for Cambodian sites per day, 28 August to 14 September 2026, five channels. Posted on 16 of the 18 days: Poipet 28, Sihanoukville 14, Phnom Penh 9, Pailin 3.

**Did the ads fall after the statement?** In these five channels, the ads for Cambodian sites did fall compared with July, back to about the level of June. But the channels did not slow down. They posted about as many ads a day as in July. What changed was the country in the ad: 193 of the 306 ads in those 18 days were for Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos, Pakistan, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand.

The Government's own statement says the industry has "altered their tactics" and is "hiding" in small places. That is not a description of an industry that has ended. It is a description of an industry that has moved, and not all of it has moved.

## What the jobs are



The job titles sound ordinary. The ads explain, in their own words, what each one does.

**Add Contact** (1,199 ads, \$600–\$750 a month) finds people online and starts a chat: "Find clients via SIM platform USA."

**Model** (1,078 ads, \$4,000–\$5,000) is the face on the video call: "Appear on camera, video calls." A "Model AI" uses software to put her face over another face.

**Customer Service** (772 ads) answers people already on the company's gambling "platform."

**Killer** (23 ads, "\$750 + Commission") is the industry's own word for the worker who gets the victim to pay.

Together, the three jobs that talk to a victim are 61 per cent of all the ads. The compounds are hiring people to talk.

## Who the ads want, and what they offer

**947 : 160**

ads asking for women against ads asking for men, where a preference is stated

**85%**

of Model ads that state a preference ask for a woman; the usual age range is 18 to 35

**12 h**

the usual shift where the ad gives one; 84% are twelve hours or longer; two days off a month is the usual number

**27**

ads say the company will keep the worker's passport; only 15 promise it will not

**22**

ads say "No Khmer"; others ask for Filipino, Indian or Myanmar workers, or a "European/American" face

## The jobs are moving, and the same channels are selling them

A. Hop 1: job ads posted in channels and groups about work in Cambodia, for a job in another country (829 ads)



All 37 channels and groups are about work in Cambodia. But 829 ads, one in six, are for a worksite in another country: Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos, Turkey, China, Vietnam, Pakistan, the UAE, Sri Lanka.

From July 2025 to April 2026, about **5 per cent** of ads with a location were for a job outside Cambodia. From May to July 2026, after the deadline, it was **55 per cent**. The channels, the recruiters and the ad formats stayed the same. Only the country in the "Location" line changed.

The same recruiters ask for Pakistanis for Islamabad, Filipinos for the Philippines and Vietnamese for Vietnam. The industry is following its workers home.

## Why the root survives: the officials the Government itself has charged

**The border.** January 2026: seven senior officials removed from their posts and ranks, six of them border police in Stung Treng; the ministry said they had worked with Lao "masterminds" to bring people across the border illegally.

**Immigration.** 22 April 2026, one week before the deadline: two generals in charge of immigration arrested, charged with taking bribes from online scammers during the crackdown, and with money laundering.

**The raids.** June 2026: 54 police and military police officers charged with breaking into a raided casino in Kampot to steal the evidence.

**The visas.** 24 August 2026: three Foreign Ministry officials sent to court over more than 6,000 visas which, the Anti-Corruption Unit said, were used by foreigners working in online fraud.

These are charges, and the report says so. But they were brought by the Government's own courts and anti-corruption unit, at each of the four gates a crackdown depends on. If the people at the gates can be paid, a raid closes a building; it does not close the business. The compounds change their names or move. The hiring never stopped.

**How to check this report.** The full dataset (4,991 ads, with the original text of every ad) and the 59 test postings are published with the report, with channel names and contact handles removed. A numbers ledger lists every figure in the report, the rule used to count it and its value in the dataset. Every ad quoted carries its number, and Appendix A lists all 90. No channel, group or recruiter is named, so that the report does not advertise them or warn them before investigators act; the confidential annex with the names has been given to the relevant authorities and is available to journalists on written undertaking. Requests to the author.