

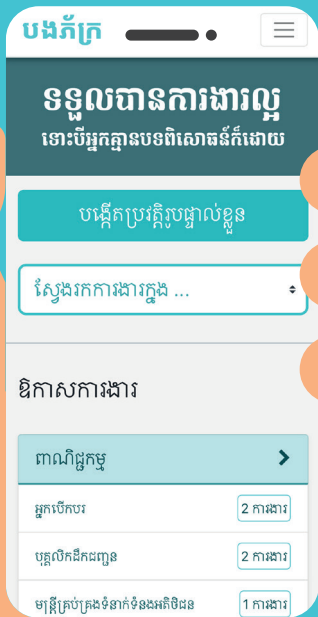


An online employment service  
for unskilled and low-skilled  
workers in **Cambodia**

# bongpheap

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[www.bongpheak.com](http://www.bongpheak.com)

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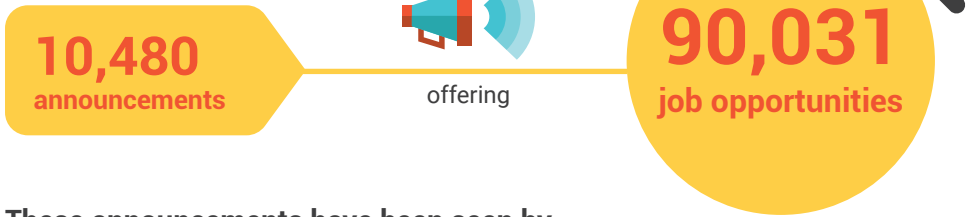
is an online employment service developed by the Open Institute (OI) in partnership with the USAID Cambodia Countering Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) program implemented by Winrock International.

The web site helps low skilled and unskilled populations easily and safely connect to employment opportunities within Cambodia. The system was developed to improve low skilled workers' access to job opportunities in Cambodia and to reduce risky cross-border migration.

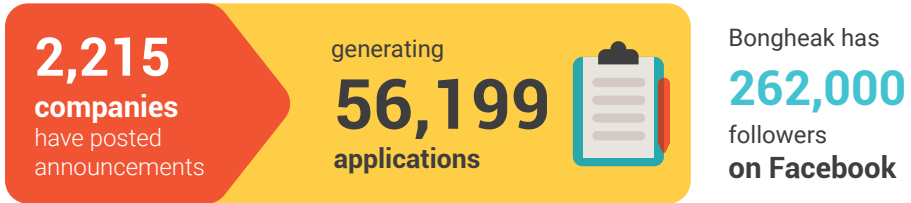
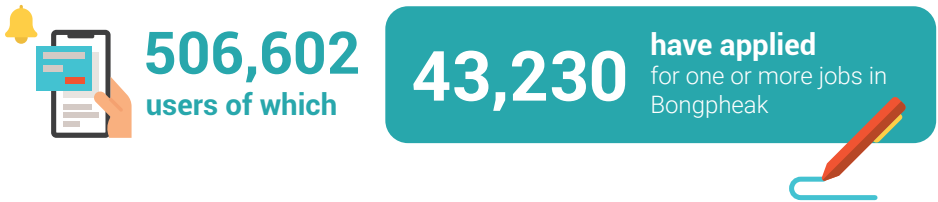
By eliminating intermediaries and the debt that accompanies their use, and by providing a wide range of low-skilled employment options in Cambodia, Bong Pheak reduces the risk of trafficking in persons (TIP) and exploitation. The site uses a mix of local in-person networks and web and voice technologies to reach vulnerable job seekers when they most need it, preventing risky, illegal or dangerous migration across the border into Thailand.

The online service was launched in late 2016

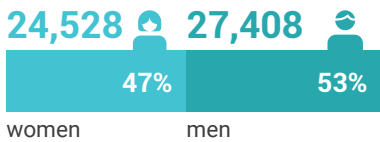
As of June 2020, the numbers are:



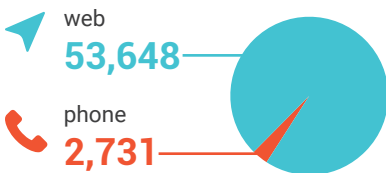
These announcements have been seen by



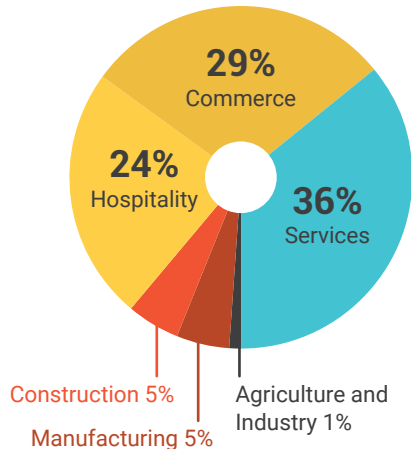
### Applications by sex



### Applications are through...



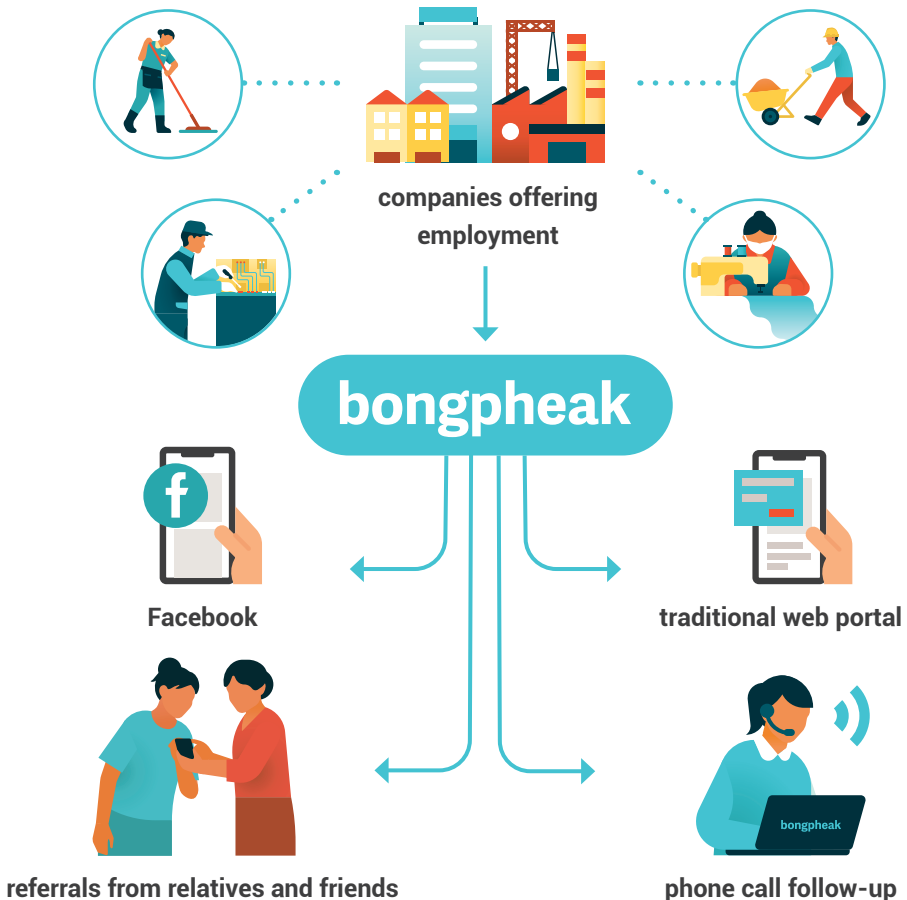
### Job announcements posted by sector



# Designing for all, Supporting the most vulnerable:

The Bong Pheak model uses multiple channels that allow job seekers to easily find and apply to positions. This includes a traditional web portal, the Bong Pheak Jobs Facebook page, and phone calls using Interactive Voice Response technology when jobs are referred from the web portal by friends or family.

As the first site to see potential market viability in the low-skilled and unskilled employment marketplace, Bong Pheak has been able to reach the most vulnerable workers with reliable and useful information that arrives through a trusted channel. Key features enable the most vulnerable populations in Cambodia to search and apply for safe job opportunities:



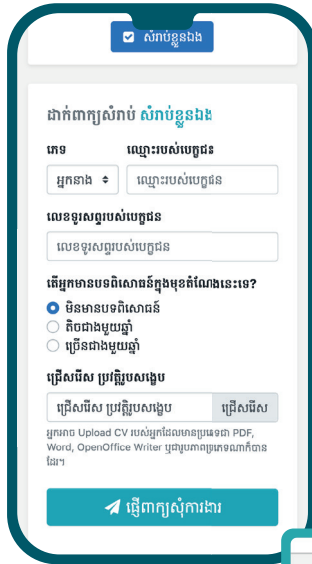
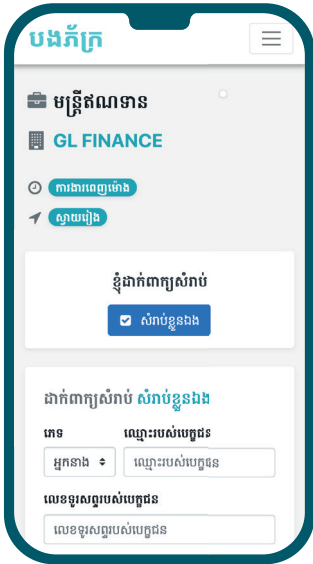


**Interactive Voice Response technology** is used to make automated phone calls to job seekers giving details about a position and the opportunity to apply by pressing '1'. When a friend or family member of a job seeker is on **BongPheak.com**, they can simply choose to refer the job via phone and enter contact information for the job seeker. Well under half of potential jobseekers owned a smartphone in 2016, according to the detailed inception study, but a large majority had access to or use of a regular mobile phone. The voice call component can reach and communicate with a large portion of the most vulnerable jobseekers based in rural areas with little access to information. The system leverages existing social networks among jobseekers to build trust, since information is viewed as more reliable and trustworthy when it travels through word of mouth<sup>1</sup>.

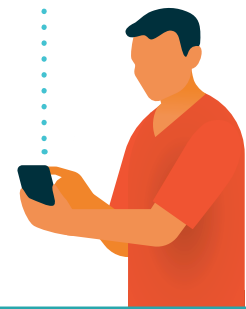
**Employers who advertise** jobs through Bong Pheak must have a physical address, which helps ensure that companies offering employment are legally established workplaces.

**Feedback mechanisms**, such as a recruitment management platform for employers and an open line of communication between applicants and the Bong Pheak customer service team, ensure transparency between users and Bong Pheak.

<sup>1</sup> According to Nielsen, 92% of people [trust recommendations from friends and family](#) over any other type of advertising.



only three "clicks" to apply



built-in CV creation tool



user-friendly interface



type of position based



A job seeker can apply for a position directly from the job description page by providing only basic information, including a name and phone number. The ease of applying to positions with minimal requirements allows all levels of technology users to navigate the process. There is also a built-in CV creation tool, where users can have a CV generated for them with information they provide. The platform interface is user-friendly and organized so that only three “clicks” are needed to find and apply to positions. Jobs are organized and displayed based on the type of position (“driver” or “security guard”), not by individual listings.

The system was developed in-house and based on extensive research to suit the Cambodian context, considering what both jobseekers and employers desired in such a platform. By using existing informal information circulation mechanisms among potential jobseekers and integrating the use of word-of-mouth and community referrals into its operation model, the Bong Pheak model acts as a hybrid platform with other communication channels such as Facebook.

## Towards Sustainability

After the successful launch and rapid growth of the platform from 2016 to 2019, Bong Pheak transitioned to a paid service for employers in April 2019. The new strategy included having some non-paid products, which helped improve site traffic while still requiring some services be fee-based.

A new private-sector partnership was established in late 2019. Bong Pheak is developing a pilot chatbot feature through Facebook Messenger which will allow for personalizing contact with potential users (job seekers and employers). This approach fits with Facebook's preponderant role in providing online information for the local population and increase its overall ability to connect low skilled workers with employment opportunities in Cambodia.

Communication with users via Facebook Messenger chatbots could potentially collect follow-up information from hired applicants, filling the current gap to effectively monitor the satisfaction and long-term employment of Bong Pheak's clients more frequently and at larger scale.

## Confidentiality & Privacy concerns

**Bong Pheak stores data about both job seekers and employers, with the added challenge that low-skilled workers are particularly vulnerable to TIP and need additional data protection. Under no circumstances should Bong Pheak create an additional TIP risk that did not exist when job seekers searched for work using other methods.**

Data is protected through:

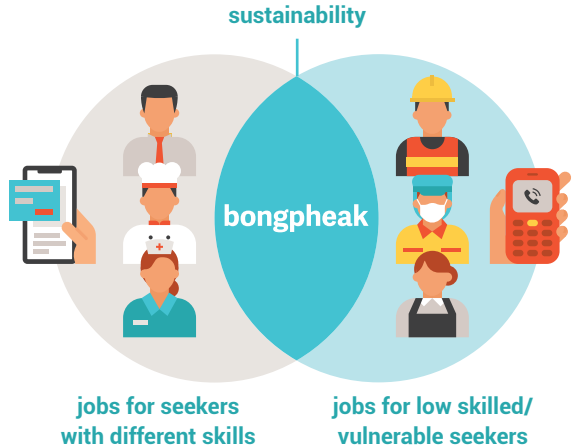
- Implementation of a strict privacy policy
- Design of software against abuse by system users (hackers) or through user interface
- Cloud storage based in Singapore, where strong privacy laws protects from misuse
- Personally identifiable information is not shared beyond what is authorized by the users



# Four years after the platform was launched, lessons learnt include:

To maintain and sell a service such as Bong Pheak, employers need access to job seekers that have different levels of skill or experience, as a “one stop service”: to reach the most vulnerable, the service must also reach those who are not.

Only a minor portion of current users belong to the target group of most vulnerable users (those who are vulnerable to human trafficking and who are vulnerable to economic disengagement due to low technology access). Data shows that it needs to target workers who are beyond the scope of this target group to propel the sustainability of the platform



Even though jobs referred using the IVR feature (people using analog phones) reach **less than 5% of users**

The conversion rate of this feature is extremely high:

Three times more applications are submitted via this method, or about **15% of total applications submitted.**



- Voice technology is coupled with the trusted relationships that exists between family and friends who are working and the person looking for work.

Data has shown that a job referred to the rural job seeker by a relative was trusted in the same way as if that person had received the information directly. This led to a higher percentage of applicants receiving information through normal phone than by those receiving it through a smartphone.





## Rural potential

Maintaining and growing Bong Pheak's reach in the rural areas of Cambodia through IVR, where the most vulnerable populations live, will continue to be a priority in ensuring the platform is connecting opportunities to those who need it most.



## Growth through social

Growth was generated through Facebook advertising and engagement, and Bong Pheak's second phase is piloted to run through the social media site by developing a chatbot that will channel identified and interested clients to the site. Bong Pheak is developing the tools to allow employers to complete all their transactions through Facebook.



## Additional tools

Bong Pheak developed a tool to help job seekers prepare their CV, but the tool was not as simple as it needed to be for many job seekers with low digital literacy to use. Based on these findings, a voice-generated creation tool will be tested.



## Keeping it simple

Simplicity is the key for the system to attract users. Scroll down menus, too many options and 2D buttons resulted in discouraged job-seekers, while users prefer direct communication and messenger interaction.



## Presenting the business

When working with the private sector, operating as an NGO or research firm does not easily open doors. Bong Pheak has developed a brand and image that have positioned the site as a professional service.

# What is next?

The Bong Pheak model has succeeded in providing local employment options to workers across Cambodia and is adapting to the role Facebook and social media are playing in today's communications between employers and employees. How can the model be adapted to other countries in the region? Some possible countries where such a system could find an audience include:



**Bangladesh**

No basic online marketplace exists for unskilled work in Bangladesh; however, a smartphone app developed by the NGO BRAC, Kormo, connects job seekers with employers/jobs.<sup>2</sup> The app requires users to have a smartphone and technological know-how, which may not be the case for many vulnerable and low skilled job seekers. A service with features tailored to those who may not have regular and reliable access to smartphones or Internet would provide a useful alternative.



**Nepal**

Due to a shortage of domestic job opportunities, nearly 500,000 Nepalis migrated abroad for work in 2019<sup>3</sup>. Nepali rural and low-skilled workers commonly find jobs through acquaintance referrals, localized agents, and recruitment agencies. One website, Rojgari [www.merorojgari.com](http://www.merorojgari.com), advertises low-skilled jobs and is a subsidiary website of the largest online employment service for skilled workers in Nepal<sup>4</sup>. However, interested workers must physically visit one of the four centers located in the country to apply, which can be a major challenge for rural populations. As telecommunications services have grown drastically in the last decade, with high uptake in mobile phone use<sup>5</sup>, a service like Bong Pheak would be well suited to the Nepali context.



## Lao PDR

For many years, there has been a shortage of job opportunities for low-skilled workers in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), which led to high numbers of labor migrants to Thailand<sup>6</sup>. Although recent data has shown there aren't enough workers to fill available positions, namely in the construction and agriculture sectors<sup>7</sup>, unemployment is still high (9.4%), and this is believed to be due to difficulty job seekers have in accessing information about available positions.<sup>8</sup> To facilitate easier access to available jobs, the Lao PDR government has partnered with the country's largest employment website operator to jointly develop a labor market information system online. This online system includes positions in a variety of sectors and may start meeting the needs of many low-skilled workers, but a system with specific features for rural populations with limited technology access would be viable option to explore.

## Cross border opportunities.

For the **Cambodia-Thailand corridor**, a digital/online system used by recruitment agencies in Cambodia could highlight open opportunities, giving job seekers choice in selecting the job, job location and agency they apply to. A similar platform to Bong Pheak could also be developed to be used in both Thailand and Cambodia, in which the recruitment agencies post positions and receive the applications directly. Using a chatbot through Facebook or another social media platform is also an option.



<sup>2</sup> [https://www.kormo.com/about\\_en.html](https://www.kormo.com/about_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> in 2019 The Kathmandu Post, 2019. <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2019/08/14/as-opportunities-for-nepali-workers-dry-up-in-popular-labour-destinations-migration-numbers-dwindle>

<sup>4</sup> <https://rojgari.com/>

<sup>5</sup> The Kathmandu Post, 2016. <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2016/06/14/mobile-subscriptions-outnumber-population>

<sup>6</sup> UNODC, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Laotian Times, 2019. <https://laotiantimes.com/2019/08/19/labor-imbalance-causes-unemployment-in-laos/>

<sup>8</sup> Laotian Times, 2019. <https://laotiantimes.com/2019/08/19/labor-imbalance-causes-unemployment-in-laos/>



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