



Cambodia

- Population Age Disaggregation: <14 yrs 29.4%; 15-59 yrs 61.7%; >60 yrs 8.9%¹
- Average household size: 4.3¹
- Female headed households: 25.6%¹
- Literacy Rates 15-24 yrs: male 90.9%; female 84.8%¹
- Infant Mortality rates: 18 per 1000 live births¹
- Maternal Mortality rate: 141 per 100.000 live births¹
- Rate of Domestic Violence: 20% (physical violence against women >15 years)¹
- Proportion of the population with a disability: male 5.3%, female 6.8%¹

Gender in Brief

The total Cambodian population is 15,288,489 (51.3% female),¹ with the country experiencing significant population growth since 2015. Despite females accounting for more than 50% of population, gender equality remains a major issue. While the majority of people are aware of gender issues and the resultant inequality, they predominantly follow traditional gender-based social norms, culture and stereotypes, which causes problems within families, workplaces and society more broadly, particularly in relation to gender-based violence (GBV), which continues to be widely persistent across the country. From 3 January 2020 to 14 January 2022, there have been 120,718 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 3,015 deaths¹. COVID-19 has magnified existing gender norms and roles, particularly for women and girls in having to manage more tasks in the household.²

According to the traditional Cambodian Code of Conduct for Women (Chbab Srey) women are considered to have lower status than men and the attributes outlined of the “ideal Cambodian women” remain influential. The status of women and men are influenced by marital status, age, number of children, and wealth. They are prescribed gender-specific roles in accordance with deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and traditions that serve to reaffirm the dichotomy between powerful masculinity” and “weak femininity”. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is widespread, with 31% of women reporting experiencing different types of physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse by an intimate partner in her lifetime.³ Globally, IPV may be the most common type of violence women and girls experience during emergencies.⁴ In the context of COVID-19, quarantine and isolation measures have had the potential to dramatically increase IPV for women and girls. Additionally, life-saving care and support to GBV survivors may be disrupted when front-line service providers and systems such as healthcare, policing and social welfare are overburdened and preoccupied with handling COVID-19 cases.⁴

Gender roles and responsibilities: Gender relations in Cambodia are complex. Khmer women can exercise considerable autonomy and independence. They can own assets, inherit property, manage financial transactions and contribute to household decision making. However, while the gender division of labour can be complementary and flexible, with men and women performing a range of productive and household tasks, traditionally women are responsible for a much larger share of the household work than men, as outlined in the Chbab Srey. There is an emphasis on women as household managers, while men are viewed as leaders and/or the head of the family. Traditional norms, combined with lower levels of education and literacy, continue to limit girls’ and women’s choices and ability to be independent, exercise their rights and reach their potential. Cambodia remains a hierarchical society with strong ideas about power and status. Women are participating actively in the labor force, but continue facing many challenges in advanced economic opportunities, often based on the limitations resulting from gender roles.

Education and Economic Empowerment: In Cambodia, based on National Institute Statistic 2019, the number of literate persons aged seven years and over increased from approximately 5.8 million to 11.9 million during the past 22 years, reflecting the progress of education-based programs which have raised literacy rates within younger age groups. Girls complete primary and lower-secondary school at slightly lower rates than boys. Generally, the literacy rate among men is higher than among women at all levels and ages, largely because women and girls are still responsible for household work and family care. Women (aged 18 to 24) attend higher education institutions at a rate of 19 percent, which is lower than men, at 22 percent.¹ The status of women in economic participation and development remains remarkably disparate because gender norms and stereotypes have limited the role of women to participate in the income generation activities. Women (aged 15 to 59) have an overall labour force participation rate of 78 percent, with rural women have a slightly higher rate of 82 percent, but this remains lower than the male rate of 86 percent.¹ Additionally, the gender pay gap is significant, with women earning, on average, 19 percent less for the same work as men. This issue of

inequality also costs society the opportunity to have a more effective and efficient labor market, increasing prosperity for all.⁵ There has been a slight decrease of child labour, for both girls and boys⁶ aged 5 to 17, to just under 18 percent, with no significant difference between boys and girls.⁷ The recently launched Sub-National Democratic Development (SNDD) Phase 2 (2021-2030) is committed to developing tools, methods and procedures for formulating gender responsive budgeting at the sub-national administration (SNA) level. This second phase of the program will promote service provision and inclusive, equitable and fair democratic development through modernisation of the SNA system and improvements to service provision processes and quality, contributing to eliminating poverty and enhancing quality of life.⁸

Policy and Participation: The Cambodian government adopted the SDG5 framework in 2015 with the aim to promote women's participation, gender equality and women's empowerment. The Neary Rattanak V and National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women (NAPVAW) (2019-2023) are the national strategic plans for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. However, women still face many challenges to participating in decision-making processes at all levels, because of persistent gender norms and the imbalance of power, which limit women's opportunities and threaten women's political and decision-making positions. In 2019, Cambodia approved the Gender Equality Policy to decentralize development at the sub-national level; yet, unfortunately there is no national level gender equality policy that applies for ministers and political parties, despite the impact of decision making at that level on the lives of women and girls. Women hold just 11 percent of ministerial positions, 19 percent of secretary of state positions and 19 percent of undersecretary positions as of 2016.⁹ As of 2017, there is just one woman in a provincial governor position, while just 26 of the 150 provincial deputy governors (17 percent) are women.⁷ These numbers have the potential to change during the 2022 commune elections. In the SNDD (2021-2030), women's role in leadership and management at the SNA level is one of the key priority activities promoted, and the government has committed to continue its efforts from the first national plan to strengthen and update this strategic plan at the SNA level and improve its future implementation. This strategic plan also suggests that each SNA will be required to formulate a clear plan, in accordance with their situation, that ensures the promotion of women to management positions.

Gender Based Violence and Protection: There are significant efforts from the government to implement policies that affect women and girls, such as NAPVAW (2019-2023), Neary Rattanak V, and the first National Policy on Gender Equality. However, GBV is still a widespread and prevalent issue in Cambodian society. The majority of Cambodian women suffer from many forms of violence, which greatly affects their self-development and ability to demand their rights. For example, 56 percent of garment workers recalled experiencing at least one form of sexual harassment in the past 12 months, 23 percent experienced gender harassment and 19 percent experienced unwanted sexual behaviours.¹⁰ Reports of gender-insensitive courts and legal processes are common, with some victims of GBV reporting having been blamed, ridiculed or re-traumatized by justice professionals. When combined with entrenched cultural beliefs that family matters are private, many women who have experienced GBV never seek justice.¹¹ One in five women (aged 15 to 49) have experienced physical violence and six percent have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.¹⁰ Overall, 18 percent of ever-married women report having experienced physical or sexual violence by a spouse, with 48 percent reporting resulting physical injuries.¹⁰

Gender in Emergencies: Cambodia has a population of approximately 1.2 million people travelling or living abroad, of whom 93 are based in Thailand.¹² COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect on Thailand and other neighbouring countries' economies, triggering the loss of jobs and subsequent return of Cambodian migrant workers during the pandemic. By November 2020, 119,725 workers had returned from Thailand.¹³ Women represent 83 percent of garment workers and a large percentage of tourism and entertainment workers, many of whom lost their jobs during the pandemic. In July 2020, CARE Cambodia conducted a Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) and found that women and girls in Cambodia face inequalities in many areas, including employment and payment, division of domestic labour, decision-making and participation. The pandemic is also exacerbating pre-existing food security and nutrition issues. Rising food prices, supply chain disruption and loss of income for laid-off urban workers, returned migrants and the informal sector have reduced food consumption for many Cambodian households. Environmental challenges such as drought are compounding these risks and highlighting the importance of climate-resilient recovery efforts.¹⁴ The SNDD (2021-2030) prioritizes gender equality and social equity and inclusiveness (GESEI) principles into SNA leadership and processes in order to ensure that early warning, emergency response and disaster risk reduction activities are carried out with a gender lens and address the needs of vulnerable groups.

¹ WHO update on Covid-19; <https://covid19.who.int/>, situation report 155.

² Page 6 of Rapid Assessment of COVID-19 Impacts on Girls Education.

³ International Rescue Committee 2015, P73

⁴ Rapid Gender Analysis, July 2020, CIC

⁵ <https://www.kh.undp.org/content/cambodia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2021/undp-launches-report-on-cambodias-gender-wage-gap>

⁶ Women and Men in Cambodia, Fact and Figures 2018, P43

⁷ Women and Men in Cambodia, Fact and Figures 2018, P43

⁸ Article by Khmer Times news: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501045431/cambodia-launches-national-programme-for-sub-national-democratic-development-phase-2-2021-2030/>

⁹ Women and Men in Cambodia Facts and Figures 2018, Page 59

¹⁰ STOP project baseline, CARE 2019

¹¹ CDHS 2014

¹² National Institute of Statistics 2019

¹³ IOM. 2020. Situation Report 21: October 28, 2020. Bangkok.

¹⁴ Partnerships for Recovery: COVID-19 Development Response Plans 2020-21 and 2021-22

¹⁴ based on National Institute Statistic 2019