

# CAMBODIA GENDER IN BRIEF

## 2024



**Total population: 16.9 million (50.5% female)** in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Children aged 0-14 is 29%, 10-19 aged is 19%, 10-24 aged is 26%, 15-64 aged is 65%, and 65+ aged is 6%. Based on Worldometer<sup>2</sup> estimates current Cambodia's population is 17 million in November 2023, stays in the world population rank is 73. Based on available data in 2019 demonstrated that:

- (1). Average household size: 4.313,<sup>3</sup> (2). Female headed households: 25.6%<sup>3</sup>
- (3). Literacy Rates 15-24 years: male 90.9%; female 84.8%,<sup>3</sup> (4). Infant Mortality rates: 19.3 per 1000 live births<sup>2</sup>
- (5). Maternal Mortality rate: 141 per 100.000 live births,<sup>3</sup> (6). Life expectancy: 71.5 years (female is 73.8 years)<sup>2</sup>
- (7). Proportion of the population with a disability: nearly 25%, moderate around 20%, and severe almost 5%<sup>4,3</sup>

## Current Contemporary Gender Inequality and its Root Causes

Gender inequality and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) against women have been acknowledged worldwide as a violation of basic human rights and cost significant social and economic impacts at individual, family, and society level. A Global Gender Gap Index 2023,<sup>13</sup> Cambodia is rank in 92 among 146 countries, rank 7 among ASEAN Countries. In Cambodia, gender inequality remains a major social issue. This gender stereotype and GBV continue happening in Cambodia society while it is understood that the traditional the Cambodian Code of Conduct for women and man (Chbab Srey and Chbab Bros) has deeply rooted and significantly influenced on how society classified women and men gender roles and social expectations that pressure mainly on women who are the most vulnerable and experienced the suffered and violence while men are given power and privileged in decision making at all levels in both private and public sphere.

Gender is intersectionality as the status of women and men are influenced by marital status, age, education background, ethnicity, geographical location, number of children, and wealth etc. 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)<sup>4</sup> is 21% of women reporting experiencing physical, sexual, emotional, and abuse by an Intimate Partner (IP) in (current or most recent) were dropped around 10% if compared to data available in 2016, however, 43% of women who have experience this violence committed by IP has sustained injured. However, 53% of them who experienced physical or sexual violence never sought for help or told anyone about the violence.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, violence against children aged 1-14<sup>4</sup> was 66% including experienced physical (43%) and psychological (59%) violence from parents/caregivers. Moreover, GBV and harassment also has happened at workplace in Cambodia with remarkable prevalence.

Report from unions<sup>5</sup> in 2019 illustrated that 87% among interviewed workers experienced verbal harassment or unwanted touching based on their gender while nearly 46% had a supervisor or manager force them to be their mistress or “second wife” in return of improving their work condition. Additionally, 28% reported<sup>4</sup> that they were forced to have sex with someone at workplace to extend the contract or fix their sewing machine or to obtain a bonus. More than a third reported<sup>4</sup> that managers were the perpetrators of GBV while 24% said were the sewing machine mechanics.

## Women Education and Economic Empowerment

In Cambodia, based on the National Institute Statistic 2019<sup>3</sup>, 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 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 completed primary and lower-secondary school at slightly lower rates than boys.

[1] United Nations Population Fund: World Population Dashboard Cambodia Country: <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population>

[2] Worldometer: Cambodia population 2023: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/cambodia-population>.

[3] General population census of the Kingdom of Cambodia 2019: National Institution of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, 2020

[4] Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey 2021-2022: National Institution of Statistics & Ministry of Health, 2023

[5] Women Workers Address Gender-Based Violence in Garment Factories in Cambodia: Solidarity Centre, Cambodia 2019

Generally, the literacy rate among men is higher than among women at all levels and ages. Average completion among women and girls<sup>4</sup> are 20% (who aged 6 and over) have never been to school, 40% have attended some primary school is slightly higher than men and boys (13% & 38% respectively). These inequality in education largely due to women and girls are still responsible for household chore and family care. Women (aged 18 to 24) attend higher education institutions at a rate of 19%, which is lower than men, at 22%. Due to the limit access to education and dropped out among girls and women lead to limit the opportunities among women to work in leadership and management roles for almost all sectors across Cambodia.

## Diversity and Social Inclusion

Research by ADD International<sup>6</sup> found that 40% of people living with disabilities had an increased risk of violence during the pandemic, with most of the increase in psychological and economic violence up to 77%. The increased risk particularly affected people already at risk of violence before the pandemic, demonstrating how the pandemic and resulting public health measures worsened existing situations. While the statistics are not sex disaggregated, 90% of the respondents were women (Christensen et al., 2020). LGBTQI+ people also experience high rates of violence from family members as well as significantly higher rates of IPV (Salas & Sorn, 2013). Research by RoCK & TNS Cambodia in 2015<sup>7</sup>, indicated that the study with trans women across Cambodia found that almost 40% had been sexually abused and almost one quarter had been physically abused (Mun et al., 2016). In a survey<sup>7</sup>, almost two thirds of LGBTQI+ respondents identified exclusion from families as one of the biggest problems facing them, 60% named harassment, 46% forced marriage and 32% physical violence by straight people. There are multiples policies and services designed to support persons with different abilities and LGBTQI+ but there remain major challenges to response to the needs of these groups and further effective actions and coordination needs to priorities.

## Women and Sexual Reproductive Health

In Cambodia, women and girls are facing challenges in health and sexual reproductive health at individual, family, and community levels. More 57%<sup>4</sup> of married women reported they joint decision with their husbands on family planning or had children while there were 37% made decision by themselves and 6% reported they were dominant decision by their husbands. Two thirds (66%)<sup>4</sup> of married women have the potential for a high-risk birth, while 35% had a single high-risk category and 31% experienced multiple high-risk categories. Additionally, 60% of women aged 15-49 reported that at least one problem in accessing to health care for themselves and 51% reported that the most common problem was inadequate money for health consultation or get treatment and 35% were fear to go alone to access the health service. This barrier<sup>4</sup> happens more with women in rural area (68%) compared to urban women (50%). These clearly indicated that women and sexual reproductive health are remains challenges and needs further effective actions and interventions to address to leverage the quality and inclusive health and sexual reproductive health services and programs for women and girls including persons with different abilities.

## Women in Humanitarian & Emergencies and Climate Change

Cambodia is already heavily affected by Climate Change, which translates to an urgent need to adapt to its already visible effects in 2015-2016 which impacted over 2.5 million people in 18 provinces and rice loses estimate at \$100 million in 2019, by World Bank report 2023<sup>8</sup>. Additional severe flooding in 2022<sup>8</sup> affected 85,000 households and 5,000 households' displacement. Without proper adaptation and mitigation measures, climate change could cost up to 9% Cambodia's GDP by 2050 while these impacts could increase gradually poverty rate by up to 6% by 2040. This report clearly demonstrated that women and children are most vulnerable to these climate consequences. UN Women and CDRI 2021<sup>9</sup> has documented the discriminatory traditional social roles and power hierarchies within the families, which are strongly rooted in society that structure how women, girls, men, and boys are affected differently given the socially assigned discriminatory gender roles and responsibilities at the household and community levels. These gender norms limit women from developing the skills necessary to adapt to the changing climate and risk deductions. The implementation efforts of gender equality in climate change action remains inadequate such as lack of coordination and budgeting for gender responsive climate change implementation; thus, urgent gender and climate resilience and adaptation programs are needed.

[6] COVID-19: Violence Risk and Income loss among Persons with disabilities: ADD International, 2020

[7] Research Report on Opinions, Attitudes and Behaviour toward the LGBT Population in Cambodia, Rainbow Community Kampuchea, 2015

[8] Country Climate and Development report: World Bank Group, 2023

[9] State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Cambodia: UN Women and CDRI, Report 2021