

The effects of migration on children

Given the increase in migration witnessed by Cambodia over the past few years, UNICEF commissioned this study to assess the effects of migration on children. The objectives of the research are to:

- Assess the impact of migration on children in the areas of child protection, intra-family relations, and access to education, health and other services, focusing on children who are left behind and those who migrate with their parents;
- Map out existing interventions, both governmental and non-governmental from which children of migrant parents benefit;
- Provide recommendations for government action at national and sub-national levels, as well as for international organizations and NGOs.

This research is primarily qualitative in nature and aims to map existing trends, issues, services and gaps in services for children affected by migration. Primary data collection was carried out through direct conversations with target groups and reviews of relevant literature and existing quantitative data on migration. Primary data collection was conducted via 29 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 251 participants (62 adult parents, caretakers or grandparents in villages and 189 children who have migrated or stayed behind in villages) and key informant interviews in Phnom Penh and target provinces (Battambang, Poipet of Banteay Meanchey, Prey Veng and Siem Reap).



The scale of migration

In recent years, Cambodia has experienced increasing levels of domestic and international migration. While Cambodia has seen relatively steady economic growth over the last decade, employment growth has been limited to a few key industries, such as garment manufacturing, tourism and construction. These are generally located around Phnom Penh, and this has led to a rise in domestic migration, with young people, couples and families with children leaving their village of origin and moving to where they can find work. The Cambodia Rural Urban Migration Project (CRUMP) report concluded that the population of Phnom Penh more than doubled from 1998 to 2012 from 567,860 to 1,237,600 residents, with an average annual of growth rate of about 8 per cent.

Cambodians also migrate to neighbouring countries in search of work, the primary destinations being South Korea, Malaysia and Thailand (TAF, 2011). This has increased the need for policies that facilitate safe migration and more effective protection of migrant workers' rights. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) is becoming increasingly supportive of international migration.

There is very little data on children affected by migration, either domestic or international. There are currently no government or international agencies in Cambodia that systematically collect quantitative data on child migrants or children of adult migrants.

The 2013 Cambodia Inter-Censal Population Survey (CIPS) collected data on migrant children, but did not include children below 10 years of age in data analysis and reporting. According to the CIPS report, of all migrants estimated in Cambodia in 2013, a total of 8.3 per cent were between the ages of 10 and 19 years, of which 3.2 per cent were 10 to 14 years old and 5.1 per cent were 16 to 19 years old.

In 2011-2012, the Ministry of Planning undertook the CRUMP, the first study of Cambodian domestic migration. The CRUMP is currently the most comprehensive analysis of domestic migration in Cambodia, including the most common routes, migrant profiles and to some extent, the impacts of migration on communities of origin. However, data on children is limited. The CRUMP study shows that migrants tend to have fewer children than non-migrants in rural areas. Married female migrants are particularly likely to have no children: 30.1 per cent of all married female migrants in the sample had no children compared to only 5.9 per cent of all married female non-migrants. Married migrants are also less likely to have a large number of children. Only 19 per cent of migrants have three or more children compared to more than 63 per cent of non-migrants in rural areas. The CRUMP data shows that Cambodian migrants are more likely to be unmarried and have either no children or fewer children than the rest of the population.

Further information on the number of migrants in Cambodian households can be obtained from the Commune Database (CDB). The data are collected by village chiefs, commune councils and provincial departments of planning. This dataset provides a snapshot of the estimated total number of economic out-migrants 18 years of age and over in every commune in the country and is disaggregated by gender. Unlike the CIPS, only those household members whose primary occupation was 'migrating for work' were recorded in this dataset. The dataset does not distinguish types of migration (long term, short term or circular). The CDB does not collect any information on the children of these migrants or on child migrants themselves.

Nevertheless, it is possible to use the CDB to identify communities with the highest economic out-migration rates for adults. For example, for the origin provinces selected for this study, the numbers in 2014 are shown in Table 1 (percentage indicates proportion of migrants of the total provincial population).



Table 1: Proportion of migrants in total provincial population (CDB 2014)

source of province	number People total province	country			overseas			The number of migrants (% province)
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Prey Veng	1,194,146	52,481	55,548	108,029 (9%)	32,588	17,060	49,648 (4.2%)	157,677 (13.2%)
Battambang	1,173,414	28,580	20,378	48,958 (4.2%)	50,219	34,174	84,393 (7.2%)	133,351 (11.4%)
Siem Reap	1,042,286	13,328	10,036	23,364 (2.2%)	32,794	20,411	53,205 (5.1%)	76,569 (7.3%)

Source: CDB 2014

This table shows that Prey Veng sends twice as many migrants domestically as it does internationally, which is further corroborated by the CRUMP, which identified Prey Veng as one of the top provinces of origin for recent Phnom Penh migrants (CRUMP, 2012). Battambang and Siem Reap are more likely to be origin provinces for international migrants which correlates with their proximity to Thailand. However, unlike the CRUMP, the CDB dataset does not provide any information on the number of child migrants taken along or left behind, or the number of child migrants themselves (those under 18 years of age).

National police reports provide figures on movement out of home villages on a monthly basis. The reports capture the number of people who leave home villages in search of work. They also provide information on child migration. Data is collected by commune police posts throughout the country and consolidated at the national level. The reports are also available at the National Committee for Counter Trafficking. According to this information, migration almost doubled from 2014 to 2015, with reports showing 450,845 people migrating or leaving villages in November 2015 compared with 241,375 people in November 2014.

By working with Thai counterparts on migrant management, the Cambodian Government receives information on migration. According to a census conducted by the Thai Government in March 2015, there were more than 450,000 migrants working illegally in Thailand.

There are data collection mechanisms in place that capture the movement of people and migration, but the quality of the data is limited. Significant discrepancies were found in data from different data sources. The mechanisms include administrative data collection (CDB, monthly police reports on migrant movement, and exchanges of information between concerned countries) and data from surveys such as the CIPS and CRUMP.

Reasons for migrating

Primary research for this study confirmed that the main reasons families migrated were financial. This correlates with the CRUMP survey results that showed predominantly labour-related reasons for migration (85 per cent of migrants to Phnom Penh and 97 per cent internationally.) Further field research through case studies examined in detail the factors that led to migration. Six out of seven case studies shared a similar pattern of events. In these cases one member of the family had become ill. The family had used its land as collateral to borrow money for medical expenses, including transport costs to the hospital. In most cases families had borrowed from both the village moneylender and from lending institutions, often borrowing from one to pay another. In all six cases, the loan had increased and families owed between US\$1,000 and US\$10,000 at the time of the research. Faced with losing their land, all these families had decided to send most working-age youth to Thailand to work on construction sites. Only one family in the case studies had not migrated in order to pay a debt, and in this case the family had left in order to save for a wedding.



Whether children stay or go

Cambodia is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 of which specifies that children's views should be taken into account regarding decisions that affect their lives and wellbeing; this includes parents' decisions to migrate. However, the overwhelming majority of responses from both children and adults interviewed in this study revealed that children were not consulted when their parents made the decision to migrate, regardless of age or location. In most cases, children were simply informed after the decision had been made and generally had no influence on it. Only two children in the sample of 189 were consulted by their parents on whether they wanted to stay or move with them.

The case studies in this research also found that this decision was influenced by the availability of a family member to care for a child. Migrant parents who did not have a family member, typically a grandparent, to care for a child were faced with few alternatives other than to take the child.

One of these alternatives may be a residential care institution. A previous study found a link between migration and the placement of children in institutions in Cambodia (Jordanwood, 2011). In some cases parents reported placing their children in institutions in order to migrate. While residential care can increase access to education, it is also associated with a wide range of negative impacts on children's development (Jordanwood, 2011).

Impacts of migration on children

Until recently, most research efforts have focused on either the direct economic impacts of migration on individual households or countries' economies, or explored the consequences from the urbanization perspective. The latest research efforts have started to recognize more indirect multi-dimensional impacts of migration not only on migrants themselves, but their children, other family members and communities at large.

Impacts of migration on children left behind

Age appears to play a significant role in the decision of whether to take children when parents migrate. Younger children tend to stay behind, while those over 15 years are more likely to move with parents or other relatives. This may be because the minimum age for labour in Cambodia is 15 and therefore most children aged 15 and above migrate with parents to work.

Grandparents as primary caregivers of children left behind

The CRUMP survey found that of domestic migrants who left children behind, 82.4 per cent left their children with grandparents (usually a grandmother). This finding is similar to that of the primary data

collection conducted by this research, with 21 out of 27 caregivers being grandparents. The average age of a grandmother in this study was 62.4 years, and most lived in difficult circumstances. The majority of these women had limited education, and almost half had no education. The grandparents cared for between one and eight grandchildren each.

Most of the grandparents in the study suffered from health problems and described feeling overwhelmed by the burden of taking care of their grandchildren. Many of these elderly women explained that they had not had a choice of whether to take care of their grandchildren. They had been forced to take on the role at this advanced stage in their lives by circumstances beyond their control. One grandmother explained that she often felt unable to care for grandchildren properly. She said that it was physically and mentally exhausting caring for grandchildren:



“ This little one is so active, I can never leave her alone. I am worried she'll fall into the water jar. I catch her climbing on barbed wire fences. I had to take down the bottom stairs to the house. I am too old to watch her properly, she is too active. ”

Remittances

When asked about the general benefits of parental migration for children, almost all caretakers cited

“ having money to study, buy clothes and pay for food ” or
“ transfer money back home to support the family ”

as the main benefits, all of which can be attributed to remittances.

Most family members who stay in villages of origin rely heavily on remittances. The majority of caretakers in rural areas who reported receiving at least some money from their migrant household members used the money for general expenses, especially food (reported by everyone).

Almost all caregivers reported overall higher standards of living after someone in their household migrated, regardless of destination. Interviews with children revealed that their diet improved after migration, whether they stayed behind or moved with family or alone. Either the number of meals eaten per day or the quality and variety of food improved—in some cases, both. In the majority of cases sampled in this research, remittances were the main income source for the entire household.

The majority of respondents in the study reported spending a proportion of remittances on supporting children’s education. However, when children reach 15 years of age, remittances tend to be reduced and the impact of remittances on school attendance decreases.

Case studies found that families headed by grandparents alone struggled to consistently provide food. All grandparents in the case studies noted that they were sometimes forced to eat only rice for a day and to borrow rice for their grandchildren to eat, even after a family member had migrated. The primary research identified grandmothers who were not receiving remittances and had no other reliable source of income. In Siem Reap, a 61-year-old grandmother left her 8- and 10-year-old grandchildren for four to five days at a time in order to beg in local villages, as her daughter who migrated to Thailand had stopped sending remittances after she remarried.

The lack of a national social protection system meant that there was no formal social safety net for these grandparents to rely on.

Access to and continuity of education

A study by the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) on the impacts of migration on children left behind found that adult out-migration had a negative effect on school attendance (CDRI, 2014). Specifically, children in families of migrants were more likely to drop out of school, especially girls, because they either had to contribute to housework and household income or had little interest in school. However, the primary findings for children left behind in this study revealed that most children of school age in migrant families were enrolled in school and reported no issues with attending regularly, even if they had to help their grandparents with household chores or farm work. Overall, primary research did not reveal any major issues with continuity of access to education for children who stayed behind.

Some caretakers reported their children's school performance improved after their parents' migration, but were unable to explain why. This could suggest that the extra income from remittances supported children to stay in school, however further research in this area is required for evidence-based conclusions.

Child protection

Both children who migrated with their parents and children whose parents migrated without them faced threats to their safety. The most prevalent concern for both groups was the amount of time children spent without adult supervision. Almost all parents or grandparents in the research reported leaving children alone for some period of time.

In interviews, commune council representatives offered several anecdotal examples of children who had been sexually and physically abused after having been left behind with relatives when their parents migrated. Migrant families and children did not mention child abuse, and the lack of a national database recording reported incidents of abuse against children makes it difficult to ascertain the prevalence of these reported incidents.

Children as young as 2 years old were left alone, in some cases for long periods. Many grandmothers had left their grandchildren for periods of several days, and even weeks. Most parents and grandparents understood that it was dangerous for children, especially toddlers to be left alone, however they explained they did it when they were unable to find a neighbour to watch the children. Day care centres are uncommon in Cambodia, and where they do exist they are located in urban areas and are relatively expensive.

While most children in the primary data collection did not report increased levels of labour due to their parents' migration, there were many examples of children working, mostly as day labourers in the agricultural sector.

Emotional and psychological wellbeing

The research found that children suffered from a range of negative emotional and psychological impacts due to migration, including the disruption of relationships between parents and children. Most parents in the research visited home only once per year due to the cost of travel. One grandparent said her grandchild lived in a constant state of sadness, missing her mother. Another issue was the anxiety faced by families of international migrants. Grandparents who were carers and children of international migrants described living in a constant state of anxiety. One grandmother taking care of grandchildren said:



“ Their mother cries when she has to go home, they both cry, and the children ask her to stay, but she cannot because we are a poor family. We have no choice. ”

Another grandmother explained:

“ When the children are one year old and their mother has to go back to Thailand, they cry. No one wants to go, but we are poor. They must go. ”

Impacts of migration on children who migrate with parents

The study found that older children tended to migrate with their parents, and that the effects of migration were different for children who migrated and those who stayed behind. For children who migrated with parents, the major issue identified in this study was continuity of school, together with child protection issues, including child labour.

Access to and continuity of education

The relationship between parental and/or child migration and school enrolment has been gaining particular attention in Cambodia and elsewhere in the region, given the increases in migratory patterns. A recent study on the dropout incidence from lower secondary school (Cambodia National Council for Children, 2015) suggested migration was one of the reasons children dropped out of school.

Documentation is a stumbling block for many parents enrolling their children in new schools when they move. Despite primary and secondary education officially being free in Cambodia, migrant families still encounter significant challenges when attempting to enrol their children in school in a new place. While school enrolment is officially open to any child in any location in the country, birth certificates are a strict requirement for registration. This requirement aims to ensure children are placed in the right grade for their age. It also reinforces the importance of birth registration. However, in practice this requirement makes it very difficult for some migrant children to enrol in school. The study findings indicate that it is more challenging for students who transfer to schools in urban areas, particularly Phnom Penh, due to the informal facilitation costs involved. Even when families had birth certificates for their children, the transfer process from one school to another was long and complex. Respondents reported paying significant amounts of money to arrange for documents to be transferred to a new school in Phnom Penh. According to the 2014 Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey, only 64 per cent of children in Cambodia have birth certificates. This causes problems largely for rural Cambodians, who are either not aware of this requirement or fail to obtain birth certificates for their children for other reasons. One 12-year-old girl was not able to go to school when she moved to Phnom Penh with her family:

“ I don't go to school now. It is because I lost my birth certificate, so schools didn't accept me. My parents went back to the village to get a new birth certificate for me, but when we submitted it to the school in Phnom Penh, they still didn't accept me. They said they preferred the old one, and they also said I was too old to register. I am 12 years old now. ”

A further unexpected challenge some poorer families encountered after enrolling their children in school in Phnom Penh was the relatively high cost of informal school fees in the capital. Informal school fees are daily payments that children are expected to make to teachers to supplement low teacher salaries. In many cases children who are unable to pay these fees will be shamed, barred from full participation in classes, or will be unable to pass examinations required to progress to the next grade (Brehm et al., 2012).

Children who had migrated to Thailand faced particular challenges accessing education. These included the language barrier, lack of proper documentation, necessity to earn income and varying length of stay. One participant in the case studies was an 8-year-old child who had accompanied her parents to Thailand. She had not attended school while she was there. Her grandmother explained:

“ *She didn't go to school in Thailand because her parents were there illegally. She was allowed to go, but because her parents were illegal, they were afraid of the police. They were afraid that someone could kidnap her, or take her away while she was at school, and they would have no way to get her back because they were illegal.* ”



Continuing education after migration to urban areas was especially difficult for older children (15 to 18 years). Children in this age group are considered suitable for full-time work, which is especially relevant for poorer families where the opportunity cost of education is very high. Economic opportunities available in urban areas, particularly in Phnom Penh, may indirectly lead to children in this age group dropping out of school to be able to move for work. In some cases, children choose to migrate alone, which increases the risk of exploitation and danger. For example, several 15- to 16-year-old girls interviewed in Phnom Penh said they had dropped out of school in their home villages because they had heard about possible work in garment factories in Phnom Penh. Even though their parents disapproved of their decision, they chose to move to help alleviate the dire economic situation of their families. As one 16-year-old garment worker explained:

“ My family is poor; my parents supported my studying, but I couldn't stand seeing them work so hard to pay [for everything]. So I decided to stop studying and move, but my parents didn't know. They went to the field one day, and I left for Phnom Penh without telling them. They were very angry with me, but I couldn't see them in a [difficult financial] situation like that. ”

Child labour and physical safety

Older children interviewed in the study were working in construction, which due to the level of risk and the materials used has been identified as hazardous labour (NIS, 2013b).

Another concern was the safety of the environment in which children who had migrated with their parents were living. Some children who migrated with parents or who migrated independently lived on construction sites. The 2012 ILO Child Labour Study found that the main place of work for 82.1 per cent of male child labourers and 17.9 per cent of female child labourers was a construction site (ILO, 2013). Children interviewed for this study often lived on building sites, which are dangerous environments due to both the building activities and the exposure to dust and materials.

The study observed that children who moved to Thailand as irregular migrants experienced the biggest negative impacts of migration on safety. Most migrants who enter Thailand from Cambodia do so without having completed immigration procedures and are treated as illegal residents by the Thai Government. Both adults and children described being continuously afraid of the police. One child said:

“ I went to work in Thailand with my grandmother; she sold garlic in the streets. When I went for a walk, the Thai police arrested me to transfer me back to Cambodia. I have been back for six months, but my grandmother has not come back yet. ”

Reports from stakeholders who worked with Cambodian children in Thailand, coupled with findings from related studies, revealed that begging on the street, particularly at night, placed children at risk. They also stated that children being forced to beg in organized groups and give their profits to an adult was considered trafficking (Friends, 2006).

Children who had returned from Thailand and stakeholders who worked on both sides of the border described the procedures by which children are returned to Cambodia after being apprehended by police. These conditions and procedures warrant concern. Many children, but not all, were separated from their parents because they were alone when they were arrested. Some children were immediately returned to Cambodia, but many were held in shelters for extended periods, ranging from eight months to more than one year. These shelters detained children against their will, and the conditions in them were poor. One of these centres in Thailand also housed homeless adults.

A key informant who had worked in the centres explained that the staff perceived their job as controlling children rather than caring for them. He explained that none of the centres had child protection policies and that he had seen repeated cases of staff physically and sexually abusing children.

Many children who are returned to Cambodia as a result of apprehension by Thai authorities are first detained in Thailand, and then returned through the Poipet transit centre. Some of these children are then placed directly into residential care in Poipet, where attempts are made to find their families. This can be a difficult process, as there is no national government mechanism for uniting separated children and parents. If parents or caregivers are not located, or choose not to return, children might enter the residential care system permanently. If parents or caregivers are located, staff in the residential care centre said that most migrate to Thailand again as soon as they are able.

Available services for children affected by migration

Services provided by NGOs

Phnom Penh has the highest concentration and variety of services provided by local and international NGOs, however service coverage becomes scarce further from the capital. There are two border transit centres in the north-western region of Cambodia: Poipet Transit Centre and Damnok Toek. They provide temporary accommodation, medical and psychological care, and other assistance to survivors of trafficking and irregular migrants returning from Thailand, including unaccompanied children. However, Poipet Transit Centre only provides accommodation for one night and Damnok Toek has limited capacity and is sometimes unable to assist all children referred to it¹. Other services, such as legal counselling and vocational training, are based in provincial capitals. There is a halfway house in Siem Reap supported by the Cambodian Centre for the Protection of Children's Rights for girls who do not want to or cannot return to their home villages, and a local branch of Friends International opened a shelter and a training centre in Siem Reap in response to it becoming a major regional destination for domestic migrants, including children.

Government services

Following the 2014 expulsion of Cambodian migrant workers by the Thai army, the Royal Government of Cambodia made efforts to provide legal documentation services to cross-border migrant workers so they could go back to work in Thailand. These services include issuing low cost passports, reducing the cost from \$124 to \$4 per passport, and jointly creating one-window check points with Thai counterparts to issue work licenses and work permits for migrant workers.

Domestically, there are no special government services for migrants and their families at any stage of the migration process. The responsibilities of local government bodies are very limited. Village authorities in urban areas revealed that migrants who move into their jurisdiction do not necessarily come to their office to register or make their presence known. It is therefore difficult for local authorities to estimate how many migrants enter their communities and to assess what services may be needed. This is a serious impediment to adequate policy development and resource allocation. As one village chief in Siem Reap said:

¹ Representatives of Damnok Toek in Poipet were interviewed for this study.

“ Our role is to provide public services to residents. However, most migrants fail to report to their village chiefs [back home] when or where they migrate. When they come to live here, they never report their presence to me. Thus, it is hard to work with them. We can't manage them. We also do not have clear data of migrants in our area. ”

At the village and commune level, there are no dedicated reintegration services or support for returning migrants or victims of trafficking. Commune councils, even those in communes with high migration rates, do not allocate any budget for this and are generally not prepared for the possibility of high return rates. Based on information received from interviews with village and commune chiefs, there are two main responsibilities related to migration governance delegated to them:

- Registering the number of out-migrants on an annual basis (primarily for the CDB)
- Disseminating information about safe and regular migration.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings and conclusions from both primary and secondary research, a number of recommendations were developed for national and sub-national government agencies, as well as relevant UN agencies and NGOs.

At the national level, for government agencies involved in migration governance and associated issues:

Data improvement:

1. The Ministry of Planning (MoP) could prioritize national-level data collection and analysis on regular and irregular migrants and their children in order to inform policy design, for example:
 - Add more detailed migration indicators to the CDB, including for migrants under 18 years of age;
 - Conduct an analysis of children left behind by migrants, as well as child migrants of all ages using the dataset from the next Cambodian Population Census;
 - Conduct a specific household survey to better estimate the number of children left behind and the number of children who migrated, and to understand their wellbeing.

Social protection and social welfare:

2. The RGC could accelerate the expansion of social protection coverage targeting poor and vulnerable families, including the Health Equity Fund to reduce indebtedness for high out-of-pocket health expenditure. The cash transfer programme could also be expanded.
3. MoP could review the IDPoor design and procedures to ensure updated lists of poor families and to capture the near-poor vulnerable population.
4. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) could deploy adequate numbers of social workers and resources at the district and commune level to identify vulnerable children, including those who are left behind due to parental migration, and to refer them to relevant services.
5. The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and concerned ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), MoSVY and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT) could explore the possibility of providing subsidized day care services to migrant families with young children in urban areas to ensure children are not left alone during the working day.

Education:

6. MoEYS could ensure that all schools provide accurate and up-to-date information to migrant families on procedures and requirements for student enrolment (birth certificates, school transfer papers and other relevant documents for migrant families). MoEYS could employ a flexible approach in facilitating migrant children being enrolled in school.
7. MoEYS could continue to strengthen the use of the Education Management Information System on student tracking so that migration within Cambodia can be documented.
8. MoEYS could strengthen tailored services for older migrant children (15 to 18 years) who are more likely to move alone for work rather than study, including those who return from cross-border migration. Tailored services could include night classes, part-time study programmes or accelerated learning to ensure completion for boys and girls in basic education.
9. MoEYS could continue to evaluate and grant official recognition for community schools established in migrant areas.

At the sub-national level, for government agencies involved in migration governance and associated issues:

- 10.** Sub-national administrations (commune committees for women and children (CCWC) or others) could establish mechanisms to identify families with vulnerable children, including children left behind when parents migrate and children who migrate. They could monitor child wellbeing to provide social assistance and child protection support when needed using the Commune/Sangkat Fund or other available resources, and refer people to available government or non-governmental services.

UN agencies, Development Partners and NGOs could:

- 11.** Support new research initiatives to fill knowledge gaps on the impact of migration on children.
- 12.** Support commune councils in their efforts to identify vulnerable children, monitor their wellbeing and provide social assistance and child protection support.
- 13.** Support MoSVY to build capacity and provide social welfare services at the local level.

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