

Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025 Country Level Implementation Plan – CLIP CAMBODIA
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1. Context for EU action gender equality and women’s empowerment in the country

Cambodia has a strong policy and legislative framework related to promoting gender equality. It is guaranteed in Article 45 of Cambodia’s Constitution, which prohibits all forms of discrimination against women. Cambodia is a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) since 1992 and ratified its Optional Protocol in 2010.

Over the past years Cambodia has made some progress in reducing the gender gap in terms of economic, education and health measures, including maternal health. In 2023, the Global Gender Gap index¹ for Cambodia was 0.695, a slight increase from 0.690 index in 2022. It ranked 22 out of 146 countries with a rank change of +6 compared to 2022.

Gender parity has been achieved in enrolment in primary and secondary levels of education, although recently, girls are doing better in schools than boys. More boys than girls drop-out of school and overall perform less well than their female counterparts, including at upper secondary levels.² The gap between male and female gross completion rates in lower secondary education is gradually widening, and the boys’ declining completion rate is a cause for concern. Similarly, at the tertiary level, in Bachelor and Associate degrees, female students are slightly more than the male ones. While progress in education has relatively advanced for both males and females, gender disparities remain with Cambodian women acutely underrepresented in tertiary education, particularly in STEM fields.

Women’s empowerment as a goal is reflected in key development policies: Pentagonal Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity, and Efficiency Phase V, National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2013-2030, Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) 2016-2030, Gender and Climate Change Action Plan (GCAP), the National Technical Vocational Education and Training Policy (TVET) 2017-2025, the Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries (2010-2019) and the Cambodia Trade Integration Strategy (CTIS) 2019 – 2023. CTIS, specifically, highlights the importance of women in trade and calls for increased mainstreaming of women empowerment in trade and business development policies. The Gender and Climate Change and Action Plan (GCCAP and the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) also address women and other vulnerable groups such as children, elderly and ethnic and religious groups. Furthermore, Cambodia has established the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) framework 2016-2025 to reduce poverty, vulnerability and inequality as explicit goals. The strategy includes provision of health coverage schemes to the poor and vulnerable to achieve universal health care, social assistance through the Health Equity Fund (HEF) for the poorest of the poor and financial support for pregnant women living in a situation of vulnerability and their children under two years of age. Even if there is a decline in maternal mortality it remains high at 154 per 100,000 live births.³

Neary Rattanak V 2019-2023 and the demonstrate Cambodia’s commitment to accelerate progress towards gender equality. The Third National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women (2019-

¹ World Economic Forum (2023) Global Gender Gap Index Report 2023. The Gender Gap Index measures gender equality based on the following factors: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

² Due to the constant gender imbalance towards boys in primary education, the approach is shifting from “girls’ education” to a more comprehensive gender equity approach to education

³ Cambodia’s Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2023. Available at:
<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Cambodia%20Report.pdf>

2023) aims to combat violence against women and girls through increased prevention, improved response, increased access to quality services, and multi-sectoral coordination and cooperation.

Despite gains and achievements in promoting gender equality in legislations and policies, many challenges remain. A key challenge relates to deeply embedded rigid gender norms that continue to uphold patriarchy in which men and boys are positioned as superior over women and girls. The traditional gender norms and the code of conduct of Cambodian women, known as “Chbab Srey” sets rules on how women should behave in society, in family and in their marital duties and obligations and have been biased against women interests and rights. This continues to reinforce unequal power relations between Cambodian women and men. For example, according to a UN national survey, 92% of females and 82% of males believe that a women’s most important role is to take care of the home and the family. The code for men, “Chbab Pros”, in contrast, promotes values of hard work, courage, and leadership for Cambodian boys and men and reserves decision-making roles and authority for men in both domestic and public spheres. While these gender codes largely have been removed from school curricula, these traditional gender norms still prevail and taught in schools. The pressure for these conservative gender norms underscores the root of development challenges and limitations to women’s economic opportunities and development potentials. These norms need to be transformed in order to achieve Cambodian women’s empowerment and accelerate progress towards gender equality, which in turn, will significantly contribute to Cambodia’s economic growth and development.⁴

Women constitute about 52% of the economically active population of which approximately 45% are self-employed, primarily in the informal sector, and their businesses are highly concentrated in the wholesale and retail trade, and the service sector. Between 97-99% of all MSMEs are micro-establishments and two-thirds (64.7%) of all micro-businesses are managed and owned by women. Gains in economic productivity of women have been achieved through greater access to micro-finance loan. However, only an estimated 1.7% of women’s businesses are registered, compared to 6.6% for men. About 70% of women businesses are home-based and they are often self-employed. Women make up just over half of the agricultural labour force and produce an estimated 70% of the country’s food, but they only account 24% of household agricultural holding managers, 12% of agricultural extension officers and 10% of agricultural extension services beneficiaries.

Although women’s participation in the labour force has increased, they are found in the vulnerable forms of everyday work being employed in, low-value, low-skilled occupations, performing routine tasks in an unstable wage employment, casual work and risky work environments.⁵ Poor, low-educated rural women tend to dominate in domestic work, home-based work, street vending and smallholder farming. According to the World Bank’s data, 57% of total female employment are in vulnerable employment, and are more at risk when it comes to labour migration and are susceptible to become victims of human trafficking within the country and abroad.

Women are also likely to face higher risks of losing their jobs during the transition to digitalization and automation compared to better-skilled men.⁶ There is a limited presence of women in professional and technical roles and senior management positions. Gender gaps are more pronounced in the job market requiring higher skills. As a result, the disparity in income between women and men remains large. These will be significant challenges for progress toward gender parity in Cambodia’s technical skills development, employment, and income and wage levels.

For many women, trade has brought employment and economic empowerment. In Cambodia, women are concentrated in export-oriented sectors like agriculture and garment, footwear and travel goods (GFT) manufacturing. Their jobs and social security are directly dependent on exports. The GFT industry employs approximately 750,000 workers, 89% of whom are women. Opportunities from trade have

⁴ EU (2022) Gender Country Analysis for Cambodia

⁵ Sotheary You. (2020), Promoting Economic Empowerment for Women in Marginalized Conditions, retrieved from Oxfam at: <https://cambodia.oxfam.org/latest/policy-paper/promoting-economic-empowerment-women-in-marginalized-condition>.

⁶ UNDP (2020), Adaptation and Adoption of Industry 4.0 in Cambodia Scoping Report. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/cambodia/docs/ResearchAndPublication/2020/Industry%204.0%20Report%20Final.pdf>

brought more household resources under women's control and have positive impact on investment in education and health, which consequently help in the poverty alleviation of their families. Upgrading women's productivity in the value chain could reduce adverse work conditions, at the same time, improve gains for trade. However, despite very high levels of participation in the labour force, the share of women's vulnerable employment – the sum of own-account workers and unpaid contributing family workers – remains high. The disproportionate burden on household and childcare responsibilities prevents women to pursue careers in the formal employment sector. Women are required to balance paid and family care work which pose higher constraints on their economic activities, skills development, mobility and time.⁷ Research has shown that Cambodian women are carrying out around 91.3% of unpaid care responsibilities in the home, compared to just 8.7% for men.

In terms of digital transformation, a large proportion of young people have increased access to internet and mobile devices with advanced digital technology (smart phones). A supportive regulatory framework has enabled banks and financial institutions to introduce digital payment services with agents across the country, which in turn, could boost financial inclusion, and benefit women. It should be noted, though, that getting people into the digital technology demands resources, knowledge and capabilities that women, particularly from disadvantaged groups, often do not have. There is limited data and comprehensive study on the impact of digital technology to gender equality in Cambodia including the significance of promoting economic empowerment for women and women-entrepreneurs. This calls for further exploration and analysis.

Despite the positive developments of policies to promote women and increase their representation in governance, particularly at the sub-national levels, **Cambodian women are still acutely underrepresented in the political sphere.** This is an important source of gender inequality in Cambodia. In the 2023 legislature, the parliament remains largely dominated by men, taking 87.2% of the parliamentary seats. Of the total 30 minister positions, only 3, or 10%, are women, and only 108, or 15%, of Secretaries of State are women, out of the total 613. This gender imbalance is also reflected in the Undersecretary positions: of the total 670 posts, 570 (84%) are men. At the sub-national level, in the 2022 Commune Council elections, elected women comprised just 22% compared to the 78% of the elected men.⁸ There are no policies or legislation mandating increased access of women to political leadership or promote gender parity in governance leadership and elective positions. Election laws are not taking account gender equality and parity in political parties.⁹

Sexual and gender-based violence remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations in Cambodia. Various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including rape, domestic violence (DV), and intimate partner violence (IPV), affect many women and girls in Cambodia, but reporting rates are low, and access to services and justice for survivors are serious constraints. 30% of women aged between 15 and 64 have experienced some form of physical, sexual or psychological violence. Domestic violence is the most common type of violence against women in Cambodia. The subject has recently gained in relevance due to the COVID pandemic, which has caused a rise in domestic violence cases in Cambodia, with reports mentioning 1 in 5 women being affected.

It remains a critical concern, though, that the law on the prevention of domestic violence and protection of victims provides for mediation and reconciliation for “minor” cases of physical and sexual violence and all cases of emotional and economic violence, and that informal reconciliation by community members without any formal training means that many cases of domestic violence are not resolved using formal justice measures. This is in contrary to the function of the justice system in providing mechanisms for accountability and for women to claim their rights and protection. Such failing on

⁷ MOWA, Neary Rattanak V (2020)

⁸ Cambodia UPR Working Group Report on Gender Equality in Political and Public Affairs (October 2023) Joint Submission to the UN Human Rights Council of Cambodia for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Kingdom of Cambodia (Fourth Cycle, 46th Session of the UPR Working Group)

⁹ Ibid (2023)

women's legal rights reinforces unequal power relations between women and men, and a setback towards gender equality.

A compounding issue is that women are also vastly underrepresented in the justice system, a male-dominated environment marked by low levels of gender-sensitivity, and biased, hostile and discriminatory attitudes from the very people whose duty is to provide legal redress on violations on women's rights. Significant efforts have, however, been made by government to improve the gender-responsiveness of the justice infrastructure by providing mechanisms for women, particularly from poor, rural and disadvantaged backgrounds, on access to legal aid, notably through the provision of free lawyers and counselling. Nevertheless, formal justice mechanisms are still underused by women, due to a lack of access (in some cases physical: women with disabilities) to information about these free services or misconceptions about their own rights and freedoms, adverse social norms and stigma affecting victims of GBV, as well as a lack of financial independence from perpetrators of violence.¹⁰ It is also worth noting that access to justice does not simply mean helping women to access the justice system. The lack of capacity of prosecutors and lawyers for strategic litigation on gender-based violence, and the lack of court rules on protecting survivors and witnesses including provision of psycho-social support are discouraging survivors to pursue legal measures against perpetrators. Providing essential services support to victims/survivors of domestic violence thus remains inadequate, especially in rural areas.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

The joint European response provides a framework for European partners to better coordinate their interventions and strengthen their political dialogue with the Cambodian authorities, and allows the mobilization of a wide variety of tools and cooperation modalities in order to support the Kingdom of Cambodia in the achievement of its national gender objectives.

The joint European response in the field of gender in Cambodia (2021-2025) is aligned both with the Gender Action Plan III (GAPIII) of the European Union and with the Royal Government of Cambodia Plan for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Cambodia – Neary Rattanak V (2019 – 2023).

The *overall objective* for the CLIP is: Based on a common understanding and vision of issues relating to gender in Cambodia, and in line with GAP III, the European partners undertake to work better together in order to contribute, through the human rights approach, to gender equality and women empowerment.

The selected *areas of engagement* and *specific thematic objectives* are in line with the areas of engagement of the GAP III and selected to fit the context of Cambodia and the priorities of the European Partners and are as follow:

1. Strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women
 - Increased access for women, in all their diversity, to decent work, including women's transition to the formal economy and coverage by non-discriminatory and inclusive social protection systems
 - Women in all their diversity have improved access to entrepreneurship opportunities, including social entrepreneurship, alternative livelihoods and strengthened participation in the green and circular economy
 - Reduction in gender disparities in enrolment, progression and retention at all levels of education and lifelong learning for women, men, girls and boys
 - Cambodian households have improved access to safe water and sanitation facilities, especially at rural level
 - Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, have improved nutrition levels

¹⁰ EU (2022) Country Gender Analysis for Cambodia.

2. Advancing equal participation and leadership
 - Women and girls, in all their diversity, have improved access to justice to safeguard their civil and political rights
 - Women's organisations, other CSOs and women human rights defenders working for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and rights work more freely and are better protected by law
 - Gender- fair and inclusive social norms, attitudes and behaviours promoting equal participation and leadership, including political representation, fostered at community and individual levels – through civic education, media, education and culture at all levels
3. Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation
 - Strategies and agreements on climate mitigation, adaptation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity are more gender-responsive, at local, national, regional and international level
 - Women and men in all their diversity, increasingly participate in and have improved access to jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities and alternative livelihoods in the green economy and the circular economy

The European Partners will work together to address these objectives through the following actions, especially in selected areas identified under the joint programming and the EU MIP:

- Support the work of women's organisations, other Civil Society Organisations, and women human rights defenders working for gender equality and women empowerment
- Support the RGC's efforts, potentially in collaboration with EuroCham, with regard to easing access to finance, tax regulations and registration for Cambodian women entrepreneurs. Advocate for a simplification of rules for the registration of new enterprises, as well ensuring clear and gender-sensitive communication about the procedures and existing tax incentives for registration.
- Contribute to a Cambodian skilled work force and strengthen its TVET and traineeship educational offer in close partnership with the private sector with a focus on women empowerment, taking into account the green and digital revolution, as well as financial literacy.
- Continue supporting the Government education sector reforms in promoting equity and quality of education and lifelong learning for girls and boys/female and male students, including via non-formal education for working- and out-of-school youth and women (in particular in the garment factories).
- Promote a more gender sensitive and gender responsive social protection system enabling both women and men access to more effective, efficient, accountable and sustainable social protection.
- Strengthen gender expertise of the gender focal points and all the staff of the European partners through capacity building and training.

The partners will explore options for synergies and joint implementation/co-financing. They will also work together with UN to ensure joint analysis and actions whenever most appropriate.

The civil society will be consulted in the programming process, in the implementation of the JES and in development of concrete actions. Collaboration with civil society organisations will be promoted in the different thematic actions under the priorities envisaged by the CLIP.

3. Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women's empowerment

For 2024-2025, the EU in Cambodia aims to fund under the MIP an education budget support programme focusing on formal technical education at the secondary level and STEM education at the tertiary that will have gender equality as principal objective (OECD marker G2).

The EU will also use its thematic instruments including thematic instrument for Civil Society Organisations and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights to implement priorities of the CLIP. Specific support to women's organisations by the EU and the EU Member States will be envisaged in line with the Human Rights and Democracy Strategy. The EU will use part of the allocation for civil society under the new CSO instrument to target women's organisations, in a complementary way of EU MS programmes towards women's organisations. In addition, in any Call for Proposals launched by the EU, gender equality will always be one of the key objectives to be considered.

These actions implemented through CSOs will provide complementary support to reach the objectives of the bilateral cooperation and will allow to address the areas that may be more challenging to tackle with bilateral instruments including the work on gender norms and support to women's rights defenders.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment

Gender equality will be an integral part of the political and policy dialogue and an important part of the implementation of the Gender Action Plan in Cambodia. It will include the following actions:

- a) Annual meetings with EU Head of Cooperation and EU MS development counsellors to report progress and achievements of the CLIP
- b) Quarterly CLIP monitoring meetings between the EU Gender Focal Person (GFP) and the EU MS GFPs to discuss progress, issues and actions related to the CLIP areas of engagement and indicators. A reporting matrix is being developed for this purpose.
- c) Discussion on gender during the EU-Cambodia dialogue that takes place every two years.
- d) Inclusion of gender related messages in EU policy dialogues with line Ministries
- e) Guided by the recent CLIP consultations with CSOs and UN agencies, annual EU Gender / CLIP dialogue-consultation mechanism will be established within the CSO GAD Network of Cambodia and the UN Gender Working Group respectively
- f) Ensuring that Structured Dialogue under the CSO Roadmap takes into account women's organisations and gender is one of the topic for discussion in the national and provincial dialogues.

5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities

Indicate if possible the strategic communication/high level events on gender equality foreseen during the period 2021-2025 by the EU or in cooperation with EU MS.

The implementation of the Gender Action Plan of the European partners will be accompanied by communication and public diplomacy strategies in order to disseminate messages about gender equality and women empowerment and highlight the main activities of the European partners.

Communication: The communication contract of the EU Delegation will provide an opportunity to expand communication on gender equality and women empowerment as part of the rights based approach of the communication strategy. Important days such as Women's Day and 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence will be marked on an annual basis. The EU and the European partners through its communication strategy will also promote civic education on gender equality and diversity.

Outreach: public diplomacy efforts will also focus on regular and structured outreach and exchanges with civil society organisations, community based networks, labour activists, human rights defenders, youth and women's organisations. These exchanges will have specific focus on gender and women empowerment. Discussion on challenges related to gender equality will also be part of the Structured Dialogue with civil society in the framework of the CSO Roadmap both at national and provincial levels. Women's organisations specifically will be included in discussions on EU programming and MIP implementation as well as in the framework of the Joint European Strategy.

Advocacy: the EU Delegation and European partners will continue to promote the adoption of joint messaging and agreed lines to take on specific gender equality issues (in particular women empowerment), to be raised in contacts with the authorities. They will continue disseminating official

positions related to gender equality such as statements, council conclusions, joint communications and press releases.

The Strategic dialogue with the UN will serve also as a platform to promote collaboration in gender equality amongst different sectors and will help in monitoring the developments, gathering information, joint analysis, producing joint messaging and organising joint events, meetings and campaigns that will promote gender equality.

The EU Delegation and European partners will promote engagement with the press around specific subjects or policies, op-eds, press briefings, field visits for cooperation programs and publication of press releases on specific subjects related to gender equality and women empowerment.

6. Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation

The EU Delegation had a specific Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming Technical Assistance Project from 1 February 2021 until 30 November 2023. The project provided technical support to the EU Delegation in mainstreaming gender equality in EU Programming and Programme/Project implementation, and in ensuring that synergies are established across sectors for higher impact and better results as well as to raise the capacity of Delegation staff to integrate a gender perspective in the different stages of the project cycle, and related communication and visibility milestones. This technical assistance also provided two trainings on: (1) gender equality and inclusivity; and (2) gender mainstreaming of policies and programmes. The project was tasked with the preparation of the Gender Profile and Analysis in 2022 and its 2023 update. It also carried out four sector gender analyses focusing on the EU thematic programmes.

The 2023 update of the CLIP was done together with EU Member States and in consultation with stakeholders.

Date:

Signature by Head of Delegation: