

SAVE THE CHILDREN: PREPARING FOR AND RESPONDING TO COVID-19 IN CAMBODIA

While the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases is still relatively low in Cambodia, the impact of Covid-19 on children and families is already quite pronounced. It's clear that COVID-19 could undo years of progress made in children's health, education and family livelihoods across the country.

Economic recession and the social disruption accompanying government restrictions are having devastating socio-economic impacts – impacting parental employment and entrepreneurialism and taking millions of children out of school, missing out on valuable holistic development and well-being support.

As the pandemic continues to spread, it is already remarkably evident that the most marginalised and vulnerable children will pay the highest price. Our opportunity to act is now in order to mitigate the potential devastation of COVID-19.

Cambodia reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on 27 January 2020. As of 27 May, there are 124 confirmed cases, and no confirmed deaths.¹

The most obvious risks and threats are to the health system and health status of Cambodia's population – not just linked to COVID-19, but other secondary health impacts. The pressure on national health systems to prepare and respond to the COVID-19 outbreak could expose children to the disruption of essential healthcare services that are vital to child survival.

But the impact of this crisis goes far beyond health. The indefinite closure of all schools has left 3.1 million Cambodian children without **education**. This has already had a significant and immediate effect on learning, while the long-term impacts could threaten the future of an entire generation. We know from experience, notably the Ebola crisis, that epidemics that lead to school closures create huge barriers for children's return to school, especially for the most marginalised. Girls are especially likely to permanently drop-out. The of school closures also extends beyond learning objectives, with many children facing increased risk of rights violations.

Children are also exposed to heightened child **protection** issues in this crisis, with many at risk of



Photo credit Hanna Adcock / Save the Children
Monyrath* (7) and her mum, supporting Monyrath's learning and development at home.

**Name changed to protect identity*

losing their caregivers to the virus or being forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms as pressures mount on the poorest households. With schools closed and physical distance, children and young people are more than ever are relying on digital platforms for home schooling and socializing, increasing their risk of online sexual abuse and exploitation. Domestic violence is likely to increase, as well as child labour and child marriage, as seen in other public health emergencies.

The global shock triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Cambodia's

1. <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/kh>

economy in 2020 at a time when Cambodia also faces the partial suspension of preferential access to the EU market under the “Everything but Arms” agreement. A forecast made by the Asian Development Bank has suggested that Cambodia could be suffering the worst **economic impacts** from COVID-19 among its fellow ASEAN member states when comparing the percentage of economic loss to Cambodia’s total GDP.² Based on the ADB report, Cambodia will see a loss of more than 390 million USD, which is equivalent to 1.15% of the country’s GDP. In addition, already 130 garment factories have applied for suspension, affecting 100,000 workers, while according to the Garment Manufactures Association of Cambodia (GMAC), approximately 60 percent of factories have been severely affected by cancelled orders of ready-made garment exports due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This negative economic impact will be felt most profoundly by poor and near-poor families in Cambodia, threatening their livelihoods and their overall well-being, and underscoring the need for strong social protection interventions to support them through this shock.

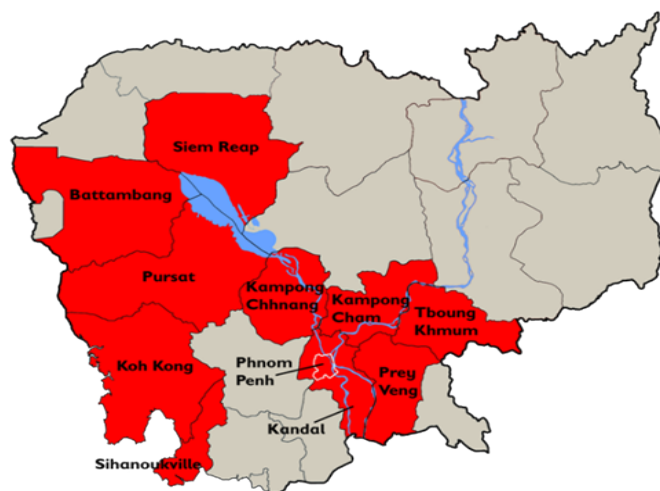
There are plenty of uncertainties during the Covid-19 global pandemic. But the one certainty we have, is that **the poorest and most vulnerable children and families will bear the brunt** of the COVID-19 fallout. Failure to contain the spread of the pandemic and address the secondary impacts will tear apart the lives of the most vulnerable children and their families across Cambodia.

Saving Children and Changing Lives in Cambodia

Save the Children has been working in Cambodia since 1970. We work with over 60 partners to deliver life-saving services to children in need. With a presence across ten provinces in the country, our work focusses on child rights, survival and development, centred on our three organisational breakthroughs: that all children survive, learn and are protected.

We have the experience, expertise and partnerships to have a significant impact in the fight against COVID-19 in Cambodia, especially for children.

We operate through a blended approach of direct implementation, combined with partnerships with INGOs, local CSOs, the private sector and line ministries (MoH, MoEYS, and MoSVY) at national and subnational levels. We are leveraging our investment in local partnerships to inform our response strategy and program design and to influence government and donor priorities. We are also providing support to CSOs to strengthen their risk management, staff well-being and business continuity during COVID-19. The Country Office has developed and rolled out practical and detailed field risk mitigation guidance, drawing from SCI resources, to ensure staff and partners are protected during face to face interactions and, where possible, use remote means to deliver our services. We aim to reach **438,532** people through our adapted services and programmes:







Our COVID-19 response targets over 430,000 people across 10 provinces: Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Koh Kong, Battambang, Siem Reap, Prey Veng, Kampong Cham, Kandal, Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh.

Sector	Females/Girls	Males/Boys	Total
Risk Communication and Community Engagement	132,000 (Female)	168,000 (Male)	300,000
Nutrition	780/3,680	250/890	5,600
Education	20,080 /27,805	5,199/25,422	78,506
Child Protection	10,371/8,917	5,578/10,756	35,622
FSL/ Child Poverty/ Social Protection	4,943/4,932	3,257/5,672	18,804
Total	168,174/ 45,334	182, 284/ 42,740	438,532



Responding to COVID-19 to Mitigate the Impact on Children

Save the Children has launched a global response to the COVID-19 crisis to carry out large-scale, high-impact measures to prevent and contain the virus and mitigate the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on children's survival, learning and protection. Our movement-wide response, **Protect a Generation**, has four goals:

-  **Saving lives** by preventing and managing the pandemic
-  **Helping children learn**, stay safe and return to school
-  **Increasing financial resilience** through safety nets for families in need
-  **Keeping children safe** in their homes and communities





In Cambodia, we have developed a COVID-19 response strategy in accordance with both our global response strategy and with Cambodia's national COVID-19 Master Plan and our in-country technical expertise. Our response is designed and implemented in close collaboration with local partners and authorities, with strong community engagement, including children. We will seek to ensure solutions are contextually appropriate and relevant to targeted communities and address the needs of vulnerable populations while safeguarding their rights.

Save the Children is an active contributor to the Cambodian Humanitarian Response Forum, the WHO Operational Partners working group and the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) working group. As co-leads of the Education and Child Protection sectors and the Joint Action Group for Disaster Risk Reduction, we are playing a key role in national and district coordination, bringing together civil society actors, the Government of Cambodia and the private sector to plan and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children.



Saving Lives: Save the Children is one of actors actively contributing to the national Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) pillar led by the Ministry of Health and the World





Health Organisation. Specifically, SC is leading the production and dissemination of child-friendly, gender sensitive information for children and caregivers across the country on how to protect themselves against COVID-19. Using different remote technology channels, we're sharing accurate information about the virus and effective infection prevention practices. This includes:

-  Broadcasting key messages via radio to target older people
-  Implementing social media campaigns to target younger audiences, including the development of child-friendly social media animations
-  Developing an innovative children's animation TV series
-  Developing and scaling up key COVID-19 messaging with interactive voice response call-in services for mobiles (Cell Card)



Helping Children Learn: As co-leads with UNICEF in Education in Emergencies coordination, we are supporting the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) in developing and testing

approaches to promote continuous learning in remote and hard to reach areas, with a focus on accessibility for the most vulnerable children. We are convening across INGOs to inform MoEYS gap analysis, support coordinated design and implementation of distance learning for pre and primary education in target provinces, and providing coherent input/support to national response planning with MOEYS. This includes:

-  Supporting government ministries and schools to set up virtual and social media platforms (messenger, WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Classrooms, etc.) to deliver online learning opportunities
-  Providing technical advice to education partners and teachers on learning content and materials, and online teaching techniques
-  Promoting innovations continuous learning to reach the most vulnerable children (with disabilities, from poor families, in rural and isolated areas, ethnic minority, etc.)
-  Working with partners to integrate COVID-19 prevention information into distance learning

- ✎ Sharing ideas and materials with parents and caregivers on simple home-based learning and play activities, to help them support their child's continued education and to look after their wellbeing and mental health



Increasing financial resilience: We helping to strengthen the social protection systems in Cambodia to ensure vulnerable households sustain and recover livelihood options and household income. This includes:

- ✎ Strategically engaging in the current national dialogue with the Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF and other development partners to strengthen social protection systems to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and support recovery
- ✎ Supporting the government to continue cash transfers to provide a safety net for families, providing technical advice on how to adapt the programme for women and children to cover all poor households in Cambodia
- ✎ Delivering skills-building training to support livelihood opportunities for those who have lost their employment, particularly those families at risk of separation
- ✎ Monitoring food and other key commodity prices and product availability at markets to inform cash transfers adjustments, and support traders to maintain supplies.
- ✎ Supporting small family business enterprises to produce and supply soap and face masks to communities



Keeping Children Safe: We're adapting essential child protection and child rights programming to ensure the safe continuation of essential services in the context of COVID-19. This includes:

- ✎ Developing and rolling out with MoSVY the national Guidelines on Case Management During Infectious Disease Outbreak (COVID-19)
- ✎ Distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline support workers to allow community-based work and case management to continue through partners
- ✎ Developing safeguarding measures in quarantine centres and guidelines on how to continue case management during the pandemic, including training webinars with partners
- ✎ Providing training to partners on psychological first aid and mental health to ensure they are equipped to work with children and families during COVID-19 and supporting them to track calls to helplines to understand the impact of COVID-19 on children
- ✎ Coordinating with sector key players (UNICEF, Ministry of Social affairs and other NGOs and civil society organisations) to provide alternative care options and fill gaps for children, who are separated from their primary caretakers due to quarantine, hospitalisation or death
- ✎ Mobilising key stakeholders to extend social protection schemes to at-risk households facing temporary loss of income
- ✎ Facilitating the development of an online petition from children to mobilise action from parents and caregivers on positive parenting and children's rights
- ✎ Working in partnership with other child rights organisations to strengthen the role of children's clubs and other community initiatives to report and refer child protection issues and better monitor situations of vulnerable households.

Across our response, Save the Children will ensure we are accountable to children, communities and partners by establishing robust feedback and complaint mechanisms. Our response will be research and evidence-led, informed by the experiences and needs of children. Raising the voices of children and promoting their rights is at the core of all our work.



Save the Children