

## Cambodia

A 2001 child labor study conducted by the Cambodian National Institute of Statistics found that over 1.5 million children aged five to 14, or about 45 percent of the age group, were working, almost one-fourth of them more than 35 hours per week. Rates of labor participation by gender were relatively equal. Many working children appear particularly vulnerable to exploitation, such as the 20,000 working children under the age of 15 who reported living away from home during the survey period. In addition, Cambodian children are engaged in some of the worst forms of child labor, such as commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). Cambodia is reported to be a country of origin, transit and destination for trafficking in persons, including children, for the purposes of CSE and various forms of work, including labor and begging. Internal trafficking of children also occurs. Children, primarily girls, also work as domestic servants, and many of them do not attend school.

In this context, the Government of Cambodia has made significant efforts to improve access to quality education for children. In May 2001, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS) published its Education Strategic Plan 2001–2005, which established priorities to expand access to quality education opportunities, and to increase the institutional capacity of local schools and communities for involvement in educational decision-making. The plan includes multiple targets that are of relevance to working and/or vulnerable children, including efforts to increase enrollment at the primary and secondary levels; mainstreaming children back into school; improving gender parity; improving educational quality; and increasing persistence and retention indicators.

The government's abolition of start-of-year primary school entry fees in 2001 reportedly led to a large increase in gross and net enrollment rates. Marked progress has also been made in extending access to education through secondary school construction and primary school expansion. NGOs are also active in improving access to and quality of education, and work at the grassroots level with local government officials and communities. Several scholarship programs, including a new large-scale effort by the government, target vulnerable girls to ensure that they enroll in secondary schools, particularly since the dropout rate is disproportionately higher for girls. A Non-Formal Education (NFE) Department within MOEYS focuses on

delivering tailored education services to meet the needs of people of all ages, including working children and children out of school.

As a result of these efforts, access to education has improved, as have efficiency indicators such as recent reductions in repetition rates. However, there are still large educational disparities at the provincial and district levels, and serious gender and rural-urban gaps remain. Dropout continues to be a problem. Furthermore, significant numbers of children are effectively barred from returning to the formal school system if they drop out temporarily, as children above the age of 12 are unable to enter grades 1–3. The government has developed an NFE strategy, but implementation of many aspects of it, including providing NFE with a view to mainstreaming recipients, is still in the early stages.

Banteay Meanchey, Otdar Meanchey, Battambang, Siem Reap, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, and Kampong Cham have been identified as provinces containing significant numbers of children at risk of the worst forms of child labor, particularly trafficking and CSE. Applicants are requested to select up to three provinces in which to focus interventions in selected areas where there is high risk to children of being trafficked and/or becoming engaged in CSE. The areas selected should demonstrate the applicant's clear understanding of risk factors that constitute barriers to the education of children engaged in or at risk of child labor. Applicants are strongly encouraged to focus activities on the primary school level and on the transition to secondary school for two main populations: children who have dropped out of school (or never enrolled) who wish to return and reintegrate into the formal school or pursue alternative education, and children in primary school who are at risk of dropping out.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to demonstrate how project activities can inform policies to develop a replicable and sustainable strategy that can be brought to scale for larger numbers of working children. This approach would include identification of common factors causing children to drop out and/or fail to enroll in the formal schools, barriers to re-entry for children engaged in or at risk of child labor, and successful models for mainstreaming children from NFE to the formal education system. In particular, proposals should demonstrate how activities will complement, extend and reinforce the objectives of existing national and NGO efforts and the plans

of the government of Cambodia. Proposals may also link with other U.S. government-funded or international donor efforts.

## West Africa

### Benin

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 26.5 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Benin were working. Children as young as seven years old work on family farms, as domestic servants, on urban construction sites, in public markets, and in other small enterprise-based jobs. In addition, children are trafficked within Benin to the urban areas of Cotonou, Parakou and Porto Novo. There is also the traditional practice of *vidomegon*, which involves poor rural families placing children (typically daughters) in the homes of wealthier families, often relatives, so that the children may work and receive an education. However, the practice often degenerates into exploitation as children are forced to work as domestic servants, for long hours and with little or no access to education or wages.

Benin is also a source, destination and transit country for the cross-border trafficking of children. Beninese children are usually trafficked into Nigeria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Niger, and the country receives children from Burkina Faso, Niger and Togo. Trafficked children are often employed as agricultural workers, domestic servants, and commercial sex workers. More than half of internally trafficked children are girls, while the majority of externally trafficked children are boys. Boys who are trafficked internationally often go to work on cocoa, coffee or cotton plantations in Côte d'Ivoire, or for fishing or manual labor in informal workshops. Many girls who are victims of cross-border trafficking are brought to Gabon to work as domestic servants.

Most victims of child labor and child trafficking originate from rural areas and tend to have little, if any, education even though primary education in Benin is free and compulsory for children between the ages of six and 11 years. Indirect and opportunity costs of attending school are two major barriers that keep children out of school. The gross primary enrollment rate in 1998 was 84.2 percent, although there was a significant gap in boys' and girls' enrollment rates. There is also a considerable disparity between the genders in attendance rates.

A 1997 conference identified and prioritized weaknesses in the education system. Among the top concerns listed were a shortage of trained teachers,