



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN CAMBODIA: A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

From Politikoffee

Reading Time: 3 Minutes

Note: This article has been collected in the period from February to April. Due to the proofreading, editing and design process, some facts might be outdated.

Covid-19 remains the dominant topic of discussion and issue of concern for Cambodian society and the world at large. The consequences also affect people from all walk of life, especially vulnerable groups and young people in Cambodia. Home schooling has become a routine; universities and some other areas have been ordered to be closed for an unforeseeable time. That is why we asked Politikoffee, a network of young and socially enthusiastic people, to share their view of the crisis through focus group discussion. In three questions, the following is their snapshot:

What are the most salient points that Covid-19 has on the socio-economic status in Cambodia?

In the midst of social panic during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia like many other countries is battling with a great deal of social problems especially socio-economic difficulties and employment. Unlike many developed countries that have passed billions of dollars worth of bills to support their citizens, Cambodia has limited financial response to maintain the socio-economic status.

Nevertheless, vulnerable people such as women and youths are among those most affected by the profound socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. The Garment, Textile and Footwear (GTF) sector in Cambodia

directly generates employment for around one million workers, nearly 80 percent of whom are women (ILO Cambodia, 2018). 130 factories have been confirmed closed and suspended due to sharp drop in market demand. According to the latest report on employment status in this sector, around 100,000 Cambodian workers have recently lost their jobs, either permanently or temporarily.¹ This translates to around 10% loss of employment in the sector.

The declines in other sectors such as tourism also forced the closure and suspension of a number of restaurants and other businesses. According to Khmer Times, Cambodia’s Angkor Archaeological Park has seen a staggering decline in revenue from April ticket sales at about 99.5 percent drop in monthly revenue.²

Table 1: Age and gender distribution of DTF workers in Cambodia aged 15 and above.

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
15-24	49.0 %	45.0%	45.8%
25-34	38.5%	38.5%	38.5%
35-44	9.4%	11.4%	11.0%
45-54	1.6%	3.6%	3.1%
55-65	1.4%	1.3%	1.3%
65 and above	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%
Percent	100%	100%	100%
Number of GTF Workers	224 750	833 026	1 057 776

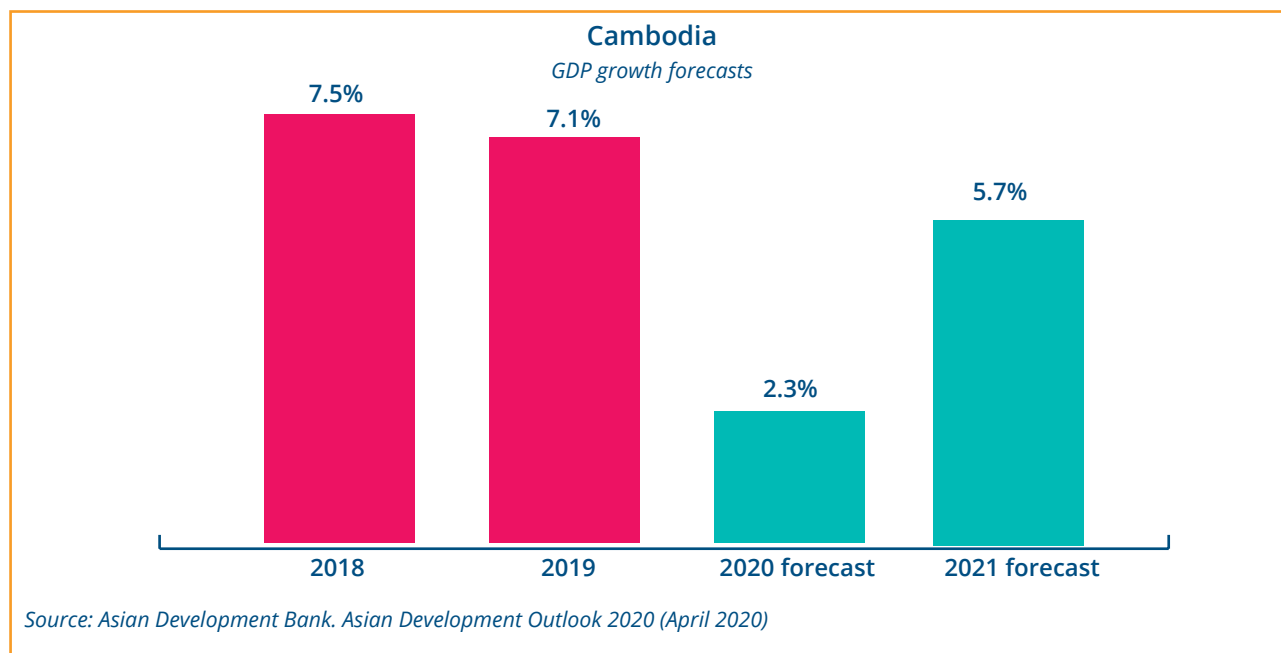
Source: Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey (CSES) data (2016)

¹ <https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/business/2020/05/01/fgn38-asia-may-1d-day.html>

² <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50719371/angkor-wat-records-a-99-5-percent-drop-in-monthly-revenue/>

There is no specific data about the total employment that has been lost due to COVID-19. But nonetheless, in terms of the economy of Cambodia as a whole, Cambodia's economic growth is expected to drop to 2.3% in 2020.³ The challenge still remains to opening up the economic activities to halt a possible meltdown

be hit very hard by the virus. In contrast, Cambodia's government has done an excellent job in containing the spread of Covid-19. As of May 3rd, Cambodia has conducted more than 12,304 tests, which equals to 757 per million people, according to CDC's Ministry of Health. This indicates that around 0.07% of the total



of the economy that could push the nation into serious recession.

What do you think of the government's response and measure toward containing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic?

There have been a lot of concerns over the capability of Cambodia's government dealing with the crisis. Like many other countries, Cambodia's educational institutions in all levels have to be postponed, mass gathering is not permitted and social distancing must be practiced. While many countries have spent months in lockdown, Cambodia since its first case dated late January has never been in lockdown nor had serious travel restrictions, despite a short-term travel restriction for several days during Khmer New Year. Cambodia is a lower middle-income country, where public health is considered the least qualified compared to neighboring ASEAN member states such as Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia. Many argued that because of the quality of our public health system, Cambodia would

population has been tested. Plus, there is no new infection for 20 straight days.

However, the most important response from the government is the state of emergency legislation. The controversial draft legislation has been criticized by domestic and international rights groups for giving the government sweeping powers to curtail civil rights and liberties, such as freedom of movement, expression, association, and assembly. As long as the legislation

³ <https://www.adb.org/news/cambodias-economic-growth-slow-2020-rebound-expected-2021-adb>





doesn't strangle the rights of mass communications and freedom of expressions, public health is the number one priority during this time of crisis.

From a youth perspective, what do you think would be the best precaution measures to combat and in preparation of the next pandemic wave? What are some of the best practices to minimize the socio-economic risks that are associated with it?

The best precautionary measures are hygiene practices such as washing hands with soap or alcohol-based sanitizer, and social distancing such as avoiding large gatherings or crowded places. Right now, rush hour is coming back. Boulevards and streets are now full of cars and people during peak hour. We are really concerned because if there is the next pandemic wave, we all would be in a miserable situation. To avoid this scenario and maintain momentum that we have, it is important for the government to limit the number of

people in places such as malls, markets, restaurants and parks. Wearing masks must be compulsory to enter those places. The best practice to minimize the socio-economic risks is opening up our economy and at the same time carefully flattening the curve as much as we possibly can. Financial allocation and subsidies should be measured in response for those who are in need. Since there are only 2 active cases in the kingdom, important and necessary jobs and employments must be returned.

Politikoffee is a group of young enthusiastic and social media-savvy Cambodians who love sociopolitical and economic discussion.