The Kingdom of Cambodia is the most youthful country in South East Asia as more than 60 per cent of the total population is aged below 25. (United Nations Country Team, 2009) Cambodia's baby boom continued throughout the 1980’s, which contributed to a labour force growth of 53 per cent between 2000 and 2006. (BDLink Cambodia, 2008) Approximately 270,000 youth newly enter the labour market each year and youth employment has become a major social challenge for Cambodia. (BDLink Cambodia, 2008)

**Youth Unemployment and Underemployment**

Youth represented 25.8 per cent of the total labour force population and youth unemployment was 3.3 per cent in 2008. (National Institute of Statistics, 2010) Even though the youth unemployment rate is relatively low in Cambodia, the reality is that most young people are engaged in the informal economy as vulnerable workers. For their own and family survival, young people cannot afford to be unemployed, hence they work for low pay with poor working conditions on short-term or informal contracts. (United Nations Country Team, 2009)

**Young Women**

A large portion of young women are unpaid household workers in Cambodia. (National Institute of Statistics, 2010) They tend to enter and exit the labour force at an early age than their male cohorts because of the traditional perceptions of gender roles and early marriage, which hinder their career progress in the long-term. Even though the primary education enrolment rate improved dramatically over the past decade, many girls are still discouraged and forsake higher education due to economic reasons and travel distance to higher institutes. (UNESCO)

**Internal and External Labour Migration**

Both young women and men from rural areas are attracted to urban areas and often sought employment in low-skilled industries such as garment and construction sectors. (BDLink Cambodia, 2008) Approximately, 10,000 young people find employment overseas mainly in Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia and Thailand, and the Government aims to increase the number of Cambodian migrant workers through better international migration management with the support of host countries. (National Institute of Statistics, 2010) Most young migrant workers were either engaged in the manufacturing sector (50 per cent) or working as domestic workers (35 per cent) in 2008. (National Institute of Statistics, 2010)

**Child Labour**

Poverty is both a cause and consequence of child labour in Cambodia. (ILO Cambodia, 2008) Many girls and boys leave schools to support their families by partaking in income-generating activities. The proportion of working children has increased to 8.7 per cent in 2008 and the majority of them work in the agriculture sectors. (National Institute of Statistics, 2010) Some children are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including the sex industry and street begging.
Education and Skills Development

Even though the primary education enrolment rate in Cambodia was approximately 98 per cent in 2011, both secondary and tertiary education enrolment rate were low at 38 and 16 per cent respectively. (UNESCO) The Government of Cambodia recognizes the importance of quality technical and vocational education and has established 39 nation-wide polytechnics and institutes, and 25 provincial training centres. (National Institute of Statistics, 2010) Even though more than 100,000 students graduate from technical and vocational education institutes each year, the majority students (84 per cent) still find securing employment challenging and many employers are concerned with the mismatch between skills required by them and the skills possessed by young Cambodians. (BDLink Cambodia, 2008)

Government Priorities

The Government of Cambodia developed a national policy for Cambodian youth in 2010 and encouraged the establishment of the youth council. The national youth policy aims to expand education opportunities for young people, increase vocational trainings for youth, build youth centres and foster youth identities based on cultural heritage.

The UN and Youth in Cambodia

20 United Nations’ and other international organizations are working to support the post-conflict economic, social and cultural development of Cambodia. (UNDAF, 2010) The United Nations Country Team has set youth as one of the urgent cross-cutting issues to tackle and has focused on increasing the employability of Cambodian youth and protecting their rights in education and employment.

The ILO in Cambodia

The ILO has been an economic and social recovery partner of Cambodia since the early 1990s, and between 2011 and 2015; it aims to tackle youth employment by improving rights at work, promoting sustainable enterprise growth and decent job creation and extending social protection. (ILO, 2011) The ILO is currently working on nine projects in Cambodia including Better Factories in Cambodia and Supporting the implementation of the social protection delivery system.

Policy and Programme Recommendations

As part of the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Youth and the following activities can be conducted to support youth employment in Cambodia.

- Developing a reliable labour market data and information system on youth employment.
- Building employment services and centers for youth.
- Strengthening the capacity of the social partners and promoting tripartite solutions for youth employment at the local level.
- Providing entrepreneurship skills development programmes to promote youth entrepreneurship.
- Providing information sessions and trainings on migration for youths and supporting the creation a legal migration system to prevent exploitation of the Cambodian workers abroad.

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More information is available at www.ilo.org

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