BACKGROUND RESEARCH TO THE UNICEF REGIONAL REPORT
Situation of Children in the Context of Migration in ASEAN Member States

CASE-STUDY

Migration and Family Separation

Needs, challenges and access to services for children remaining behind in Battambang, Cambodia

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CASE STUDY

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Cover photo: June 2017, Siem Reap, Puok District, Kork Run village. With the little remittances received from her parents who have migrated, a young girl and her grandma have to rely on vegetables that they can find together around their house. © UNICEF/UN077779/Khoy Bona

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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCWC	Commune Committee for Women and Children
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRUMP	Cambodia Rural-Urban Migration Project
DHS	Demographic healthDemographic health surveys
DoSVY	Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
EAPRO	East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KIs	Key Informants
KII	Key Informant Interview
MHICCAF	Migration and Health Impacts on Cambodian Children and Families
MoSVY	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PoSVY	Provincial department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation
PoWA	Provincial Department of Women's Affairs
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from an in-depth case study on children affected by migration in Cambodia, particularly exploring the prevalence, circumstances, protection risks and support available to children who remain behind when parents migrate from Battambang, Cambodia. This study is part of a regional situation analysis of children affected by migration in ASEAN states, commissioned by UNICEF East-Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), through its European Union-UNICEF co-funded programme, 'Protecting children affected by migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia' (2018 – 2022).

'Children remaining behind' includes those children who stay in their home country or community while one or both parents migrate. Primarily, parents migrate to earn an income, often sending remittances home to support children's health and education. [1] However, children remaining behind are at risk of a variety of protection risks and negative outcomes, including neglect, abuse, school absence and low psychosocial wellbeing. [2]

The aim of the research was to develop an in-depth, contextual understanding of the situations of children remaining behind in Battambang province in Cambodia when parents migrate (internally or internationally), to identify new and evolving protection risks (particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic) and explore children's access to protection services and support. This was not a comparative study between children who remain behind and children from non-migrant households, nor did the study aim to be representative of all children who remain behind nationally. Four specific research questions were addressed:

1. What factors influence parents' decisions to migrate while their children remain behind, as well as their choices for childcare arrangements while they are gone?
2. What is the scale/ prevalence at which children in Cambodia remain behind due to migration? What are the particular demographic characteristics and circumstances of children remaining behind?
3. What protection risks and challenges do children remaining behind face and why? How, if at all, have these been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What access do children remaining behind have to child protection services and other support; what are the main gaps and challenges and how can these be strengthened to better support children's rights?

A primarily qualitative study was implemented to address research questions, which included: a desk review of literature highlighting the situation of children remaining behind in Cambodia; qualitative interviews in Battambang, Cambodia, with 21 children aged 11-15 years, 18 caregivers and 6 returned parents, and 12 key informant interviews (KIIs) with expertise in children remaining behind. Additionally, a quantitative telephone survey was conducted with 26 parents who returned to Cambodia from Thailand during the Covid-19 pandemic.

[1] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces,* Cambodia, 2017, p.9.

[2] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces, Cambodia,* May 2017, p 10. Available at: Study on The Impact of Migration on Children in The Capital and Target Provinces_Eng.pdf.pdf (unicef.org).

1.1. Findings

1.1.1 Factors influencing parents' decisions for children to remain behind and childcare arrangements

Across responses in interviews and surveys, the primary reasons for parents migrating were to earn money and to enable parents to support their family. Most children and caregivers noted that prior to parents migrating, families were in difficult financial situations and parents migrated in order to obtain an income and send money home to support the family. Often, parents also migrate to pay off debts, which were commonly acquired as a result of difficulties in crop production.[3]

A key reason for parents deciding to leave their child behind was related to childcare. In the survey, parents reported that children being able to receive better care in Cambodia and a lack of childcare in Thailand were the two most important reasons in the decision to migrate while their children remained behind. Interviewees indicated that family members (primarily grandmothers) are trusted to look after children, and that children would be without care while parents worked if children were to migrate with parents.

Parents often migrate without their children due to bilateral agreements and employment rules preventing migration with children.[4] Additionally, parents who migrated to Thailand through irregular migration routes did not migrate with their children, due to the dangers associated with irregular migration and the refusal of brokers to take children into Thailand.[5]

Another common reason for migrant parents' decision for children to remain in Cambodia is education; it was noted across interviews and in the survey that children are able to obtain a better education in Cambodia, and that is important for children to attend school in the Khmer language. There were instances of children who were not of school age (generally age three and lower and over the age of 14) migrating with parents, further supporting reports that education may be a primary factor in the decision for children remaining behind.

1.1.2 The prevalence, characteristics and circumstances of children remaining behind in Battambang

Existing quantitative evidence suggests that 22.4 per cent of migrant households include at least one child remaining behind.[6] Key informants stated that up to a third of households in rural Battambang have an adult who has migrated, and that the majority of parents migrate while their child remains behind.

Past research indicates that the most common form of parent migration for children remaining behind is the international migration of both parents (most commonly to Thailand), followed by the internal migration of both parents (most commonly to Phnom Penh).[7] This was the same pattern in this study's sample of

[3] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[4] United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand, *Thailand Migration Report 2019,* IOM, 2019; Schloenhardt, S. *Irregular migration and smuggling of young women and girls in South-East Asia and the Pacific: A review of existing evidence* in *Supporting Brighter Futures: Young women and girls and labour migration in South-East Asia and the Pacific*, IOM, 2019, p 101.
[5] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[6] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p. 16.
[7] Ibid.

interviewees. Key informants stated that the majority of children remaining behind are under 14 years of age. Past research indicates that children over the age of 15 tend to migrate with parents to work.[8]

Research consistently demonstrates that caregivers of children remaining behind are most commonly grandmothers[9], with this pattern being found in the present sample. A minority of children were cared for by an aunt, and in one instance, a grandfather. There were varying degrees to which caregivers were able or willing to provide care for children, with some grandparents suffering from physical ailments, while others supervised the children at a distance while children lived in a different home / physical space to the caregiver. While all caregivers were consulted about looking after children prior to parents migrating, some indicated that they were happy to look after the children, while others stated that they did not want the parent to migrate but parents did not have a choice. Some caregivers were employed to ensure support for children (e.g. for food provisions), but others' primary role was to care for children remaining behind.

The majority of caregivers reported that parents send home remittances to support the family, although there was variation in the amount that parents are able to send. Some reported that parents intend to send money home, but first they must pay the debt incurred through employers paying for brokers and migration documents. Others stated that parents send money home occasionally or inconsistently.

Findings from the interviews with children and caregivers showed that there were variations in the extent to which children have contact with their parents while left behind. The majority of children reported that they spoke to their parents (mother and father) on the telephone, although some spoke to parents infrequently, while others spoke almost daily. In the returning migrant survey, 75 per cent of parents reported speaking to their children daily. There was more than one instance of interviewees having no contact with migrant parents. Most children identified telephone calls as an important way to communicate with parents and expressed enjoyment about talking to parents, while a couple stated that they do not feel comfortable talking to their parents. Some children had not seen their parents since they migrated (often multiple years ago), while some children reported that their parents visit home (some rarely and some regularly); parents migrating to Thailand tended to return home less frequently (around once per year or less) than parents migrating internally.

1.1.3 Protection risks and challenges faced by children remaining behind

Children who remain behind are vulnerable to a range of protection risks. Despite many parents migrating primarily to earn money to support their family, most children remaining behind in the present study continue to live in poverty, which supports existing evidence suggesting that poverty is often a persistent issue for children remaining behind[10], and aligns with insight provided by key informants. This poverty impacts children's access to food, access to medical treatment and access to education. Many children and caregivers reported that children often engage in child labour to support the family, and key informants noted that children remaining behind often miss school in order to carry out labour duties.

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[8] Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia, Quantitative and Qualitative Study on the Impact of Cross-Border Parental Migration on Families Left Behind in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 2018, p.2. Available at: https://jrscambodia.org/publication/Left_Behind_Children_Report.pdf.

[9] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children and families left behind*, 2019, p. xxvi. Available at: https://www.louvaincooperation.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Migration%20impacts%20on%20cambodian%20children-MHICCAF%20REPORT.pdf.

[10] Zimmer Z. & Van Natta, M. *Migration and left-behind parents and children of migrants in Cambodia: a look at household composition and the economic situation,* Asian Population Studies, 14(3), pps. 271-289, 2018.

Despite parents' decision for children to remain behind often being linked to perceptions that remaining in Cambodia increases children's access to education, findings from interviews suggest that children remaining behind lack the resources to fully engage in education and often attend school inconsistently. Some children reported that they or their school-age siblings were not in school. Children and caregivers reported that they were in need of support to access school materials.

Children who remain behind often have to care for their grandparent caregivers or for younger siblings. Findings also showed that children remaining behind were vulnerable to neglect; neglect was the highest reported concern by parents in the returning migrant survey, and several children and caregivers reported that caregivers were unable meet children's basic care needs. Key informants noted that children remaining behind are vulnerable to neglect due to poverty, the age and physical ability of caregivers, and a lack of parenting skills amongst caregivers.

Findings show that children remaining behind are also vulnerable to emotional, physical and sexual abuse; multiple children and caregivers reported that caregivers shout at them and beat them when they misbehave, with caregivers reporting that this is often a result of the stress caregivers feel with caregiving responsibilities and financial difficulties. Key informants noted that caregivers can take frustrations about the lack of remittances sent by parents out on children. Children who have no contact with parents and a lack of a support or child protection network in the community are particularly at risk of abuse. When asked about the protection risks posed to children remaining behind, key informants commonly noted that children remaining behind are vulnerable to sexual abuse due to lack of parental supervision. One child in the sample had experienced sexual abuse. Poor mental health and low wellbeing in children, child engagement in risky behaviours and low-quality family relationships (particularly family conflict) were all noted as additional risks to children remaining behind by respondents.

1.1.4 The impact of COVID-19 on children remaining behind

There were several ways in which the COVID-19 crisis has impacted the situation of children remaining behind in Battambang. Respondents reported that children remaining behind have sunk further into poverty, due to parents and caregivers experiencing a loss in income, particularly for migrant parents in Thailand. Interviewees indicated that in some cases, the COVID-19 crisis has meant that parents have returned home, meaning fewer children remained behind during COVID-19, although it was noted by key informants that some parents who had lost their jobs within Cambodia due to COVID-19 have migrated abroad, and that due to being out of education as a result of lockdown restrictions and due to more difficult financial circumstances, some children had migrated with parents to work. In the returning migrant survey, parents reported that wanting to be closer to families and concerns about themselves or their family members catching COVID-19 were the most important reasons in the decision to return to Cambodia from Thailand. In contrast, some migrant parents have been unable to travel back to Cambodia from Thailand due to borders being closed. As a result, some children who remained behind have not seen their parents since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

1.1.5 Access to protection services for children remaining behind

There were several forms of support that children remaining behind and their caregivers receive. However, it should be noted that in the majority of cases, this support is provided to families living in poverty generally, and is not bespoke or specifically targeted to children remaining behind. Many caregivers reported that they

receive financial assistance from the Cambodian Government in the form of an IDPoor card[11] due to living in poverty. The amount of financial assistance differed between families, ranging from 120,000 to 320,000 riels per months. Some caregivers also received small, one-time payments from NGOs.

The other main support that families with children remaining behind receive is assistance with food (noted by caregivers, children and key informants). Some caregivers have received support for starting a business or building a home, and NGOs provide children with support to access education, including scholarships, school supplies and travel. For children remaining behind where there are child protection concerns, support is provided by social workers. There are also some parenting programmes aiming to prevent abuse, but it was noted that caregivers of children remaining behind (particularly grandmothers) are excluded from these programmes. Many respondents highlighted the importance of the commune chief and councils for identifying and signposting children in need to the correct NGOs / support provisions. The main limitation noted was a lack of resources for NGOs, limiting their ability to provide long-term support for all children who need it.

1.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

Poverty is the underlying reason for parental migration. Children remain behind to enable parents to earn money to support the family and in order for children to access education in Cambodia. Despite this, children who remain behind continue to live in poverty. Children remaining behind often attend school inconsistently, or have to engage in child labour to support the family. Children who remain behind are also at risk of neglect (due to poverty and limited caregiving capacity of elderly caregivers, who are primarily grandmothers) and emotional, physical and sexual abuse. There is limited support specifically tailored to children remaining behind; these families primarily receive financial support for which individuals living in poverty are eligible. Support is also often short-term due to a lack of NGO resources. Recommendations include:

- MoSVY should conduct a national-scale study to learn about the needs of children remaining behind, to support the development of policies and programmes to meet these needs and increase dissemination of knowledge on the situation of children who remain behind to parents and communities. Policies to be considered include the development of formal kinship care arrangements;
- MoSVY should reconsider the criteria for families in poverty receiving financial support, with consideration of the risks posed to children who do not receive support;
- MoSVY should develop a national systematic recording of children remaining behind by local authority to track these children and identify those in need of support;
- Local authorities should be encouraged to keep a list of all parents who have migrated and put parents under a duty to report the placement of their children with relatives or other caregivers to enable easy identification of children remaining behind. Local authorities should be encouraged to monitor children remaining behind to ensure the arrangements made for such children are adequate and, in the event that they are not, to make a referral to the district social services office or DoSVY (at the provincial level);
- MoSVY should consider incorporating children remaining behind as a distinct group within the Primero (child protection case management) system and should strengthen the availability of targeted services (including preventative services) to children remaining behind and their family; including targeted financial support for food and education costs, the provision of educational resources for children, parenting

[11] ID Poor is the National Standardised poor identification service, implemented by the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia as part of national efforts to reduce poverty. ID Poor cards provide households living in poverty with financial assistance., https://www.idpoor.gov.kh/.

support programmes for elderly caregivers, and increased support for elderly caregivers' physical healthcare needs – this could be achieved through partnerships with NGO service providers;

- MoSVY and DoSVY should further support the collaboration and coordination between the different key actors (village chiefs, commune leaders, NGOs, social services workforce, schools, religious leaders), to ensure the protection needs of children remaining behind are met;
- MoSVY and the Ministry of Education should work together to increase the capacity of schools to identify children at risk of dropout or missing school due to remaining behind status, through the appointment of a teacher to act as a focal point for children remaining behind to monitor attendance and welfare of such children and work in cooperation with the CCWC;
- MoSVY should work to assess the risk of drop out of school for children remaining behind to include them in the government cash transfer programme in order to bring them back school and to engage adolescents in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training programme;
- MoSVY, DoSVY, CCWC and NGOs who provide positive parenting programmes should ensure that grandparents and non-parent caregivers are included amongst those targeted;
- MoSVY should ensure that migrating parents are supported (pre-departure) with support/skills/information on how to continue to provide support to children who remain behind (including regular contact with children), particularly related to emotional risks highlighted in the case study;
- MoSVY should ensure parents are provided with financial and debt management support and support for income generation and employment opportunities in rural Cambodia to reduce the need for parents' migration;
- MoSVY, CCWC, MoI, local authorities and NGOs in the area should utilise existing SBCC platforms (such as Cambodia PROTECT) to increase their effort to build child protection safety nets and awareness of positive parenting and child protection issues for families with children remaining behind, including how to report abuse. Communications should aim to increase awareness amongst local authorities, caregivers, parents and communities of their responsibility and role in providing protective roles for children remaining behind. Other communications to be considered include producing leaflets and posters and community theatre groups for communes to raise awareness of the needs of children remaining behind, particularly the need for parents to communicate regularly with their children. Such information should also include the impact of irregular migration on the ability to maintain contact with children remaining behind.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and rationale

This report presents the findings of an in-depth case study research in Cambodia on children affected by migration, specifically focusing on the needs and challenges faced by children in Battambang[12] province who have remained behind while their parents have migrated away for work, and their access to services and support. The study also examines the impact of COVID-19 on left behind children. The purpose of this research was to develop an in-depth, contextual understanding of the situation of children remaining behind in Cambodia, using Battambang as a case study example of the experiences of children who remain behind when parents migrate internally and internationally. This was a small-scale study which was not designed to directly compare the situation of children remaining behind to other children, nor was it aiming to provide a nationally representative picture of children remaining behind.

This case study is part of a regional situation analysis of children affected by migration in ASEAN states, commissioned by UNICEF East-Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), through its European Union-UNICEF co-funded programme, 'Protecting children affected by migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia' (2018 – 2022). It is anticipated that this research will inform efforts within ASEAN to support children affected by migration, including the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration (2019) and the Regional Plan of Action (2021) for its implementation. This study is one of a series of six in-depth case studies across different ASEAN countries which aim to explore, in a localised, contextualised and in-depth manner, the various ways in which children may be affected by migration.

This study was designed and implemented by Coram International, in partnership with UNICEF Cambodia and UNICEF EAPRO. Primary data collection was conducted by Soksophea Suong, Coram's national consultant and a team of enumerators.

'Children remaining behind' includes those children who stay in their home country or community while one or both parents migrate, either within or outside their country of origin / residence to find work, seek a better life or to continue their studies. Although comprehensive and representative data on the number of children remaining behind in Cambodia is unavailable, the Cambodia Rural-Urban Migration Project (CRUMP) surveys have consistently found substantial populations of children remaining behind (internal and international). According to the most recent published survey (data collected in 2011), 22.4 per cent of migrant households had at least one child who had remained behind, with the majority of children remaining behind living with grandmothers.[13]

One of the main motivations for parents' migration is to improve the financial and socioeconomic circumstances of the family.[14] Remittances from migrant parents provide an important source of income for families, particularly for children who remain behind in rural areas; remittances from migrating parents

[12] Battambang is a province in the North West of Cambodia, which shares a border which Thailand, and internally with Banteay Meanchey to the north, Pursat to the east and south, Siem Reap to the northeast, and Pailin to the west. Migration from Battambang is common, particularly internationally to Thailand due to proximity to its border.

[13] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p. 16.

[14] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces,* Cambodia, 2017, p.6.

support a higher standard of living for families remaining behind.[15] While children remaining behind may benefit from improved living conditions and access to education and other services as a result of remittances sent home by migrating parents[16], they may also face a range of risks and harms to their welfare and safety due to being separated from their parents, including emotional harm, physical violence and neglect.[17] More recently, there have been concerns that the impact of COVID-19 containment measures in limiting economic opportunities for migrant parents may impact negatively on children remaining behind, who depend on the remittances from migrating parents.[18]

There is a notable gap in the literature exploring decision-making in cases of children remaining behind; however, it is thought that the limited opportunities for children to migrate in a lawful way with their parents is a deterrent to parents taking children with them, along with limited access to education and other services for undocumented children in destination countries.[19]

The aim of this study was to develop an in-depth, contextualised understanding of the situation of children remaining behind in Cambodia, to understand decision making processes for children remaining behind, the prevalence at which children remain behind, protection risks for children remaining behind, support available for children remaining behind and any changes in the situation of children remaining behind due to Covid-19.

2.2 Research aims and questions

The aim of the research was to develop an in depth, contextual understanding of the situations of children remaining behind in Battambang province in Cambodia, to identify new and evolving protection risks (particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic) and explore children's access to protection, services and support. The research included both children whose parents migrate internally and children whose parents migrate abroad. This was not a comparative study between children who remain behind and children from non-migrant households, nor did it aim to be a nationally representative study; rather, the research focused specifically on the situation of children who remain behind in Battambang, as a case study example of the experiences of children remaining behind. Four specific research questions were addressed:

1. What factors influence parents' decisions to migrate while their children remain behind, as well as their choices for childcare arrangements while they are gone?
2. What is the scale/ prevalence at which children in Cambodia remain behind due to migration? What are the particular demographic characteristics and circumstances of left behind children?
3. What protection risks and challenges do children remaining behind face and why? How, if at all, have these been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What access do children remaining behind have to child protection services and other support; what are the main gaps and challenges and how can these be strengthened to better support children's rights?

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[15] Ibid, p.9.
[16] Ibid, p.9.
[17] Davis, J, *On the Border: Exploring the Perspectives & Experiences of Street-Involved Children on the Thai-Cambodian Border*, May 2017, p 37.; UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces, Cambodia,* May 2017, p 10. Available at: Study on The Impact of Migration on Children in The Capital and Target Provinces_Eng.pdf.pdf (unicef.org)
[18] UNICEF, *A lifeline at risk: Covid-19 Remittances and Children,* 2020. Available at: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/a-lifeline-at-risk-covid-19-remittances-and-children.pdf.
[19] UNICEF, *Children left behind*, Available at: https://www.unicef.org/media/83581/file/Children-Left-Behind.pdf.

2.3 Scope

The focus of this study is children affected by the migration of their parents or caregivers, while children remain behind. Children who remain in their home country or community while one or both parents migrate either within or outside their country of origin / residence are also considered to be a group of children affected by migration. Most children who remain behind are cared for by family members but in a minority of cases, may be placed in residential care homes or left to fend for themselves.

2.4 Definition of key terms

This case study uses the following understandings of key terms and concepts:

'Children affected by migration' (CABM) is a broad umbrella term that encompasses children (those aged under 18 years) [20] who move or have moved within their country of origin, or across the border into another State, temporarily or permanently. This includes children who migrate voluntarily or involuntarily, whether as a result of forced displacement due to national disaster or conflict, or for economic, social, educational or cultural reasons; or individually or to accompany parents who have migrated internally. It also includes children affected by the migration of a parent / parents ('children remaining behind').[21]

'Child protection' is the prevention and response to "*all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse*"[22] against persons under 18 years of age.[23] This includes an examination of the types of protection risks to which children affected by migration may be exposed and the response of child protection systems and services to these risks.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was primarily qualitative, utilising individual interviews with children and caregivers and key informant interviews (KIIs), to obtain an in-depth, contextual understanding of the risks and challenges faced by children remaining behind, and opportunities for intervention and support (research questions 1, 3 and 4). A small, quantitative survey was conducted with returning migrants, with the aim of

[20] This is in accordance with international definitions of childhood, in particular, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1. It should be noted that in the domestic law of some ASEAN States, such as Thailand, children who have attained majority through marriage are not included within the definition of 'child' in the Child Protection Act 2003. In addition, in some domestic laws, such as the Philippine Republic Act 7610 a child over the age of 18 who cannot fully take care of himself because of a physical or mental disability or condition is included within the definition of a child.

[21] Joint General Comment No. 3 (2017) of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and No. 22 (2017) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of migration, CRC/C/GC/22 16 November 2017, para. 9. See also UNDESA which defines an international migrant as anyone who changes his or her country of usual residence 1 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1998). Recommendations on Statistics on International Migration, Revision 1. Sales No. E.98.XVII.14; and International Organization for Migration: *Who is a migrant?* www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant, accessed 6 April 2021.

[22] Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19(1); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 13 (2011), The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, 18 April 2011, CRC/C/GC/13 (CRC GC No. 13 (2011)), para 4.

[23] This is in accordance with Article 1 of the CRC.

obtaining generalisable conclusions about the scale and prevalence at which children remain behind, and the characteristics of these children (research question 2), although there were challenges to administering this survey (noted below in the limitations section).

3.1.1 Desk Review

First, a desk review was undertaken, including relevant UN reports, academic articles and news articles available in English related to the situation of children remaining behind in Cambodia. The findings from this desk review are presented in the background and context section within the findings section.

3.2 In-depth case study interviews

In-depth interviews were carried out with children remaining behind, as well as their caregivers (e.g. grandparents) to learn more about children's circumstances, their protection needs and challenges, and their access to services and support. Interviews included questions about the particular effects, if any, of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's circumstances, including any impact on remittances, access to services, and living conditions more broadly. Interviews were conducted with **21 children and 18 caregivers** (breakdown by gender provided below in the sampling section). Child participants ranged from age 11-15 years; this age group was selected given the small scale of this case study, the capacity of older children to articulate issues relating to remaining behind without a parent and experiences of support services to which they may have had access.

Interviews were semi-structured: a question schedule was developed to guide discussions and ensure a level of standardisation in the data collected, but was used flexibly, to enable a participant-led discussion and to capture events, experiences and concerns of the most relevance and importance to children and their families. Interviews were conducted with children and caregivers from the same family, in order to obtain information on children's circumstances from different perspectives.

Five interviews were conducted with a migrating parent (in one case, with two parents), where the parents had returned to Cambodia. Interviews with migrating parents explored factors influencing their decisions to migrate and to leave their children behind and, (where applicable) to return to Cambodia. Interviews also explored the considerations that parents took into account when making care arrangements for their children in their absence, and the factors that enabled or constrained these decisions.

Interviews included a mix of life history questions and questions that focus on participants' current circumstances and experiences, to allow researchers to examine any links between participants' backgrounds and life circumstances with particular protection challenges and experiences concerning access to protection, services and support. Qualitative data collection complemented evidence identified during the literature search conducted during the inception phase of the situation analysis, which informed the research questions for this case study. This ensured that primary qualitative data collection did not duplicate past research.

3.2.1 Sampling

Participants for in-depth interviews were selected through purposive sampling (a qualitative method of sampling where participants are selected based on their satisfaction of criteria relevant to the research questions). To the extent possible, the sample of children remaining behind and caregivers of these children was selected to achieve diversity across variables of interest, particularly the child's gender and age, household wealth, type of caregiver and destination of migrant parent (i.e. internal and international migration). The

UNICEF Cambodia Country Office identified non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with children remaining behind in Battambang, and children and caregivers were recruited through these organizations.

The sample of children consisted of 11 boys and 10 girls aged 11 to 15 years. The caregiver sample consisted of 17 females and one male aged 35 to 76 years, and the parent sample consisted of four females and two males aged 29 to 45 years.

The sample included representation of children remaining behinds when parents had migrated abroad to Thailand and internally to Phnom Penh or Sihanoukville (with an unknown migrant destination in a few cases). In the majority of cases, children remained behind with a grandmother while both parents migrated, but a few children lived with an aunt or non-relative. There were also a few instances of children living with caregivers and only references to a migrant mother (i.e. no mention of a father), suggesting these households represent children from single-parent families. Further details of the interview samples can be found in appendix 6.2.

3.3 Key informant interviews

In addition to interviews with children and families, a series of key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out with local service providers, policy makers and community leaders, providing protection, care and support to children remaining behind. Interviews included frontline workers from local NGOs, social workers from the Provincial department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (DoSVY), Provincial Department of Women's Affairs (PDoWA), representatives from provincial councils, district social affairs officers and the commune committee for women and children. A total of **12 KIIs** were conducted.

The aim of KIIs was to gather expert perspectives on situations of migrating families and children remaining behind, and the work being done by local services to protect children and facilitate their access to services and support where required. As with in-depth interviews, a question schedule was developed to guide interviews, which was adapted depending on the interviewee's professional role and experience. Interviewees were asked to share details of their experience working with children remaining behind; insights into the needs and challenges faced by these children; perspectives on current practices in providing children protection services and support, and perceived challenges and opportunities for improvement and reform.

3.3.1 Sampling

Participants for KIIs were selected using purposive sampling methods to ensure that a broad range of relevant perspectives (e.g., both NGOs and local government services, participants working in different sectors, children living in different types of care arrangements etc.) were captured in the research, and to ensure only individuals with direct knowledge of the topic of children who remain behind were captured in the research. The full sample details can be found in appendix 5.2.

3.4 Survey of returning migrants on Thai-Cambodian border

A short survey was administered to migrants who had returned to Cambodia from the Thai border. This survey was administered to returning migrants over the age of 18 years with children remaining in Cambodia. Analysis of the CRUMP survey indicates that households with children remaining behind whilst parents migrate internationally have poorer socioeconomic outcomes (whereas those where migrants were internal

had higher household socioeconomic outcomes).[24] The heightened vulnerability for children remaining behind in the context of international migration makes this group of key interest for further exploration. This in-depth case study therefore conducted the survey with those returning from international migration only. The survey aimed to complement (rather than duplicate) data already available from the CRUMP and recent IOM surveys. The survey was designed to help highlight the characteristics of children who remain behind and their families; parents' decisions to migrate and leave children behind; the role of COVID-19 in decisions to return home and parents' perspectives of the impact of parents' migration for children who remain behind.

Survey questions were closed and multiple choice, and were conducted over telephone, with survey enumerators entering data through computer-assisted personal interviewing, using ODK (an open-source mobile data collection platform) software installed on an electronic device.

3.4.1 Sampling

The returning migrant survey was administered through convenience sampling. Due to the transient nature of this population, there was no conceivably feasible method for obtaining a probability sample. Difficulties in obtaining a sample (which were, in part, related to COVID-19) resulted in significant challenges administering the survey (see limitations section below). Surveys were conducted via telephone interview. A convenience sample was obtained of migrants who returned from Thailand in July 2021, which included the contact telephone number of 352 individuals. However, the majority of numbers either; were no longer in use (i.e. disconnected); belonged to individuals who had already re-migrated without their phone or were not parents and therefore ineligible for the survey. As a result, only N = **26 surveys** were completed (six of which were only partially completed due to connection difficulties or unavailability of participants). The low number of completed surveys limits the insight that can be drawn from the data with regards to decision making processes surrounding leaving children behind and perceived impact on children.

3.5 Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and uploaded into NVivo software (a software package that facilitates the organisation and analysis of qualitative data). Data was reviewed and coded to identify key themes, connections and explanations relevant to the research questions. A thematic analysis approach was used to explore qualitative data. Quantitative survey data was analysed in Excel to produce descriptive statistics.

3.6 Verification and validation

This report underwent two rounds of verification and validation. As a first step, UNICEF EAPRO and key stakeholders (including representatives from Country Offices) provided written feedback on a first draft of the report. Coram International made necessary amendments to the report, before then undergoing the second phase of validation. This phase of validation involved the presentation of key findings from the case study to the UNICEF Cambodia country office and stakeholders, including members of the UNICEF Child Protection team, representatives from MoSVY at national, district and provincial level, the Provincial Department of Women's Affairs, Provincial Department of Administration, the National Committee for counter trafficking in

[24] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p.33.

persons, and NGOs. The validation meeting was held remotely over Zoom. Following the meeting, any final amendments based on feedback during the validation meeting were implemented to the report.

3.7 Ethics

The research project was carried out in compliance with UNICEF's *Ethics Charter and Guidance for Ethical Research Involving Children,*[25] Coram International's *Ethical Guidelines for Field Research with Children* and recent guidance relating to data collection during Covid-19.[26] The team developed a detailed ethical protocol for the research (attached at Annex 6.1), and a full ethical review was carried out for the research by Coram's external review board, with approval obtained prior to the commencement of the data collection.

3.8 Limitations

The table below provides a summary of the limitations of this study and the steps taken by Coram International to mitigate these limitations.

Constraints/ Limitations	Mitigating Strategies
Covid-19 outbreak and remote data collection	The Covid-19 outbreak put significant constraints on data collection and travel, limiting the international research team's ability to collect data face to face, meaning a small number of interviews with key informants were carried out remotely. There are some limitations to collecting qualitative data remotely; technical and connectivity issues have the potential to interrupt the interview, and it can be more difficult for the interviewer to build a 'rapport' with the participant, which may have discouraged the participant from sharing freely and openly, ultimately decreasing the quality of the data collected. In order to mitigate these impacts, the team has: • Monitored the situation on a continuous basis, in order to inform decisions regarding travel and any necessary amendments to data collection procedures; • Carried out national data collection through virtual means; • Where face to face data collection was conducted, Covid-19 safety measures were put in place; and • Ensured robust training, mentoring and supervision of national consultants through virtual connection.
Potential reporting bias and recall bias	Professional stakeholders may have selectively revealed or suppressed information, hoping to 'look good' rather than to present the realities of their work. To mitigate against reporting bias, the research team

[25] Graham, A., Powell, M., Taylor, N., Anderson, D. and Fitzgerald, R. *Ethical research involving children* (2013), UNICEF Innocenti: Florence.

[26] Berman, G., *Ethical considerations for evidence generation involving children on the COVID-19 pandemic* (2020), UNICEF Innocenti: Florence, DP 2020:01; The Market Research Society, *MRS Post-Covid-19 lockdown guidance: undertaking safe face-to-face data collection*, 14 July 2020.

	emphasised the anonymity and confidentiality of the research to stakeholders, in order to encourage honest, transparent responses.
Delays in securing ethical approval and resulting difficulties in obtaining a sample for the returning migrant survey.	Due to delays in securing approval to conduct the research and challenges of intermittent Covid-19 restrictions during 2021 the research had to be delayed until Spring 2022. This impacted the study significantly, particularly impacting data collection for the returning migrants survey. Permission to conduct surveys directly at the border was not granted. Whilst it was anticipated that it would be possible to conduct in-person surveys with individuals leaving the border isolation facility to return home, delays in project implementation and the easing of restrictions in Cambodia meant that the facility was closed at the time of data collection. Therefore, it was not possible to conduct surveys in person as initially planned, and instead surveys were conducted via telephone interview. Approximately 330 phone numbers were obtained for individuals who returned to Cambodia in June/July 2021, with the support of obtaining contact details from UNICEF Cambodia. However, the 9-month delay before data collection meant that many of these mobile numbers were no longer in use, no longer belonged to the returning migrant, or the migrant was not a parent and was therefore ineligible for the survey. Together, these limitations resulted in a small sample size (N=26) for the returning migrant survey, with a particularly small sample of males (N=7). This prevented the disaggregation and inferential analysis of data, particularly in relation to understanding gender dynamics in parents' migration and decision to leave children with caregivers in Cambodia.

4. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

4.1 Prevalence and household characteristics for children remaining behind

There is limited comprehensive and representative data on the number of children remaining behind in Cambodia; the most recent information published relating to the prevalence of children remaining behind was the Cambodia Rural-Urban Migration Project (CRUMP) survey, conducted in 2011.[27]

According to this data, 22.4 per cent of migrant households had at least one child who remained behind, with the greatest proportion of those children under the age of 12 years (17.8 per cent of migrant households).[28] A high percentage of children remaining behind were aged between two and 10 years, indicating that younger children are more likely to remain behind.[29] A survey conducted on households with children remaining behind in Cambodia in 2015 found that children under the age of 15 tend to remain home, while those aged 15 and over migrate with parents.[30]

The CRUMP data indicates that children living in migrant families are more likely to be living in extended family situations with households headed by a female, and with 52.5 per cent of migrant households containing a grandparent.[31] The average age of primary caregivers in migrant households was significantly older than in non-migrant households (53 years compared to 35 years).[32] More recently (2019), IOM's Migration and Health Impacts on Cambodian Children and Families (MHICCAF) study found that 75 per cent of children who remain behind have their grandparents as their primary caregiver, 40 per cent of caregivers are over the age of 60 years, and 95 per cent of caregivers of children who remain behind are female.[33] Among migrant households, socio-economic conditions tend to be worse when the head of the household is a single parent of the migrant (i.e., the grandparent of a child remaining behind), who is also most likely to be female.[34] These findings suggest that grandmothers often carry the burden of caring for children remaining behind and are most likely to struggle financially when parents migrate and leave children behind.

The MHICCAF identified the most common form of parent migration for children remaining behind as the international migration of both parents (46 per cent of migrant households), followed by the internal migration of both parents (26 per cent of migrant households), with Thailand being the main destination for international migration and Phnom Penh being the main destination for internal migration.[35] Amongst

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[27] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015.
[28] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p. 16.
[29] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p. 12.
[30] Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia, *Quantitative and Qualitative Study on the Impact of Cross-Border Parental Migration on Families Left Behind in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia*, 2018, p.2. Available at: https://jrscambodia.org/publication/Left_Behind_Children_Report.pdf
[31] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p. 12.
[32] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p. 20.
[33] IOM, Migration impacts on Cambodian children, 2019, p. xxvi.
[34] Ministry of Planning (Cambodia), *Migration and left-behind households in rural areas in Cambodia: Structure and socio-economic conditions*, A CRUMP Series Report, December 2015, p. iv.
[35] Ibid.

households where only one parent migrates, children under the age of three years were most likely to live in a household where the father had migrated, whereas for children over the age of three, they were most likely to live in a household where only the mother migrated.[36] In households where only the mother had migrated, maternal grandmothers were most likely to be the primary caregiver for the children[37], further demonstrating the burden of parent migration on grandmothers.

4.2 Reasons for parent migration and children remaining behind

One of the main reasons migrate both internally in Cambodia and externally (often to Thailand) is improve the financial situation of the family.[38] Remittances form an important proportion of income for individuals in Cambodia, particularly for those living in rural areas; often, parents who migrate without their children send remittances to caregivers. Research (MHICCAF) indicates that migrant fathers send home more remittances that migrant mothers, and international migrant parents send home more remittances than internal migrants.[39]

Caregivers in rural areas of Cambodia who remain behind with children rely heavily on remittances from migrating parents, which supports a higher standard of living for children remaining behind.[40] Specifically, remittances are most commonly used for the provision of extra food, more frequent or better quality medical care and support towards children's education.[41] However, research indicates that migrant households have a lower income than non-migrant households, and that migrant households have a lower expenditure on child education[42], suggesting that migration may not be sufficient in improving the socio-economic and educational situation of children remaining behind. Additionally, research indicates that caregivers receive remittances from parents inconsistently, with much of the money earned through migration going towards parents paying off debts, rather than providing remittances.[43]

Closures of borders and reduced migration during Covid-19 has impacted remittances in Cambodia, with the country seeing a 17 per cent reduction in international remittance income in 2020[44], and only 4.9 per cent of Cambodia's GDP being remittances in 2020, compared to 5.8 per cent in 2018.[45] There have been concerns that the impact of COVID-19 containment measures in limiting economic opportunities for migrant parents

[36] Ibid.
[37] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children*, 2019, p. xxvi.
[38] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces,* Cambodia, 2017. p.6.
[39] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children*, 2019, p. xxvii.
[40] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces,* Cambodia, 2017, p.9.
[41] Ibid.
[42] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children*, 2019, p.xxvii.
[43] Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia, *Quantitative and Qualitative Study on the Impact of Cross-Border Parental Migration on Families Left Behind in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia,* 2018, pps.3-4. Available at: https://jrscambodia.org/publication/Left_Behind_Children_Report.pdf
[44] ILO Asia Pacific Migration Network, *Covid-19 hit Cambodian migrants hard, remittances fell by 16.6%,* News report, Available at: https://apmigration.ilo.org/news/covid-19-hit-cambodian-migrants-hard-remittances-fell-by-16.6
[45] *The Global Economy Business and Economic Data*, Accessed 20.10.22: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Cambodia/remittances_percent_GDP/

may impact negatively on children remaining behind, who depend on the remittances from migrating parents.[46]

There is a notable gap in the literature exploring decision-making in cases of children remaining behind; however, it is thought that the limited opportunities for children to migrate in a lawful way with their parents is a deterrent to parents taking children with them, along with limited access to education and other services for undocumented children in destination countries.[47]

4.3 The impact of parent migration on children remaining behind

Some evidence suggests that children remaining behind benefit from improved living conditions and access to education and other services as a result of remittances sent home by migrating parents.[48] However, recent evidence suggests that the household income of migrant households with children remaining behind continues to be lower than non-migrant households.[49] Additionally, evidence indicates that children remaining behind complete fewer years of schooling, particularly children whose parents migrate internationally.[50]

Children who remain behind may also face a range of risks and harms to their welfare and safety due to being separated from their parents. Studies in Cambodia have demonstrated a strong correlation between children remaining behind and vulnerability to risk: in one study, 90 per cent of children whose parents had migrated while children remained at home alone or with a sibling reported experiences of physical violence.[51] In another, the lack of adult supervision was found to be "the most prevalent concern" threatening the safety of children remaining behind: some grandparents reported leaving children alone without supervision for multiple days at a time.[52] Grandparents looking after children remaining behind report struggling and feeling "overwhelmed by the burden of remittance taking care of their grandchildren", with this burden most commonly falling to grandmothers.[53] Elderly caregivers of children remaining behind in Cambodia also experience increased mental health problems as a result of caregiving burdens, particularly grandmothers, further limiting capacity to care for children.[54]

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[46] UNICEF, *A lifeline at risk: Covid-19 Remittances and Children,* 2020. Available at: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/a-lifeline-at-risk-covid-19-remittances-and-children.pdf

[47] UNICEF, *Children left behind*, Available at: https://www.unicef.org/media/83581/file/Children-Left-Behind.pdf.

[48] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces,* Cambodia, 2017, p.9.

[49] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children*, 2019, p.77.

[50] Marchetta, F. and Sim, S., *The effect of parental migration on the schooling of children left behind in rural Cambodia,* World Development, 146, 2021.

[51] Davis, J, *On the border: Exploring the Perspectives & Experiences of Street-Involved Children on the Thai-Cambodian Border*, May 2017, p 37.

[52] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces, Cambodia,* May 2017, p 10. Available at: Study on The Impact of Migration on Children in The Capital and Target Provinces_Eng.pdf.pdf (unicef.org)

[53] UNICEF, *Executive summary: Study on the impact of migration on children in the capital and target provinces, Cambodia,* May 2017, Available at: Study on The Impact of Migration on Children in The Capital and Target Provinces_Eng.pdf.pdf (unicef.org)

[54] World Vision, *Learning Report: The Grandmother Inclusive Approach for Improved Child Nutrition*, 2022. Available at: https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Learning%20Report%20The%20Grandmother%20Inclusive%20Approach%20For%20Improved%20Child%20Nutrition.pdf

Research demonstrates that children remaining behind in Cambodia are more likely to experiences physical ill-health than children in non-migrant households; in the MHICCAF study, more children in the migrant households reported being sick in the last 30 days than in the non-migrant households.[55] Children remaining behind were also more likely to report that they have to borrow food and reduce the number of meals or reduce portion size of meals when their households have food insufficiency compared to children from non-migrant households.[56] Children remaining behind were also more likely to be withdrawn from school in response to food insufficiency compared to non-migrant households[57], although the research did not find differences in nutritional status between these children. In other research, grandmother caregivers of children remaining behind reported that remittances from parents are inconsistent and insufficient, which results in food shortages and difficulty meeting children's nutritional needs.[58] Moreover, there have been instances of child deaths in Cambodia as a result of remaining behind.[59]

Research in Cambodia and across other ASEAN countries and Asia more broadly indicates that children who remain behind are at increased risk of psychosocial problems, including higher rates of depression and conduct problems.[60] Children remaining behind, particularly teenage boys, can be disobedient to the authority of their caregivers.[61] However, some evidence suggests that the mental health of children remaining behind in Cambodia does not differ to children in non-migrant households, although children remaining behind have a lower attachment to caregivers, indicating lower quality caregiver-child relationships (which also increases risk for future psychosocial problems).[62] Caregivers looking after children remaining behind are also more likely to experience psychosocial problems; the MHICCAF study found the prevalence of depression and anxiety among the caregivers to be as high as 43 percent and 50 percent, respectively, which was significantly higher than caregivers in non-migrant households.[63]

[55] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children*, 2019, p.xxvii. Available at: https://www.louvaincooperation.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Migration%20impacts%20on%20cambodian%20children-MHICCAF%20REPORT.pdf

[56] ibid

[57] ibid

[58] Shneiders et al. *Grandparent caregiving in Cambodian skip-generation households: Roles and impact on child nutrition*, Maternal and Child Nutrition, 2020. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/mcn.13169

[59] VOA News, *Girls' death alert Cambodia to human cost of economic migration*, News report, December 09 2018. Available at: https://www.voanews.com/a/girls-deaths-alert-cambodia-to-human-cost-of-economic-migration/4692843.html

[60] Migration Policy Institute, *Promoting the Health of Left-Behind Children of Asian Labour Migrants: Evidence for Policy and Action*, 2015. Available at: MPI Issue No 14_10Sep2015_FINALweb.pdf (migrationpolicy.org)

[61] Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia, Quantitative and Qualitative Study on the Impact of Cross-Border Parental Migration on Families Left Behind in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia, 2018, p.14. Available at: https://jrscambodia.org/publication/Left_Behind_Children_Report.pdf

[62] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children*, 2019, p.xxviii

[63] Ibid

5. FINDINGS

This section outlines findings from interviews with children, caregivers and parents and KIIs, in addition to the survey on returning migrant parents. Findings are presented for the core research questions set out above, namely exploring the factors underpinning parents' decisions to leave children behind, the characteristics and experiences of children remaining behind, the protection risks faced by these children, changes to the situation of children remaining behind during COVID-19, and access to support. Note that the small scale of this study make a gender analysis difficult, but where differences between boys and girls (or male and female parents/caregivers) arose, these have been noted.

5.1 Factors influencing parents' decisions for children to remain behind and childcare arrangements

This section outlines the reasons for parents migrating, as outlined by children, caregivers, parents and key informants. As noted, findings in relation to the survey represent parents who returned after migrating from Cambodia to Thailand, whereas responses from interviews with children and caregivers represent children who remain behind when parents migrate both internally and/or internationally.

5.1.1 Providing financial support to families

Across responses in interviews and surveys, the primary reasons for parents migrating were to earn money and to enable parents to support their family. These two factors were rated as the most important reasons for migrating in the survey of migrants returning from Thailand to Cambodia (Figure 1), and were cited as the reason for migrating both across the border to Thailand and internally (to Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville) amongst interviewees. Most children and caregivers noted that prior to parents migrating, families were in difficult financial situations and parents migrated in order to obtain an income and send money home to support the family. Caregivers also reported that their caregiving role was essential in enabling parents to financially support their children. Whilst children often said they did not have a choice in their parents' decision to migrate, most said they were happy that their parent was working to support the family.[64]

> *"My mother helps us to have a better living. She works hard to support our education and living."*[65]

In many cases, caregivers noted that parents' income was not stable when working locally or that parents were unable to find work at all without migrating. Caregivers and parents mentioned that migrating for work (particularly to Thailand) enables parents to earn more money than working within Cambodia.

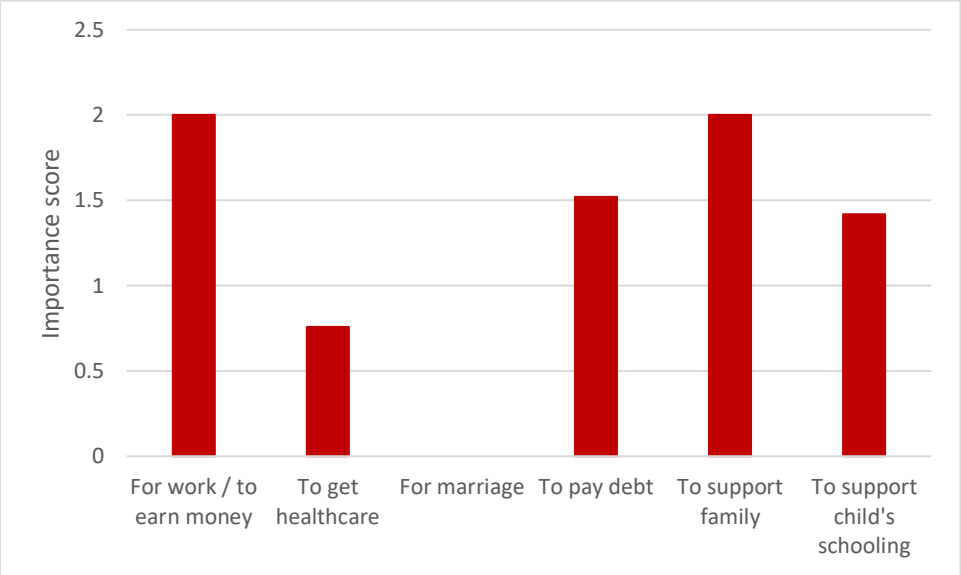
> *"I decided to migrate to Thailand because our family was too poor. When I went to Thailand, our family was in a very bad situation. Our economic situation was dropping down. We owed debts. Our job was unstable. Sometime, we had work to do and sometimes we did not. So, my wife and I had a discussion and we decided to leave our children and migrated to Thailand to look for work opportunity. We left our children with my mother."*[66]

[64] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 7)
[65] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 19).
[66] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 1).

Some caregivers indicated that they were unhappy about the parents' decision to migrate, stating that they advised parents not to migrate, or did not believe it was a good option for the children. Some caregivers stated that migrating was the only option for parents to earn an income.

> *"Before she migrated, she could not find a job and did not know what to do for a living. So, she just tried her luck to go to Thailand looking for an opportunity. I tried to stop her but she said she did not have a job here. She also failed her exams. She did not know what to do. So, I just let her be."*[67]

Figure 1: Returning Migrant Survey: Reasons for Migrating (N = 26)



Another important reason for migrating, which was also related to the family's financial situation, was the requirement to pay back debts. This was the third most important factor surrounding the decisions to migrate from the returning migrant survey, (Figure 1), and was highlighted as one of the key reasons for migrating in interviews. Some reported that parents had sold land or property in an attempt to repay debts, but that this had not been sufficient, meaning parents were forced to migrate to work as a last resort. This pattern was consistent across all families. However, in some cases, mothers and fathers migrated together (both abroad and internally) in order to make money to repay debts[68], whereas in other cases, the father would migrate to Thailand while the mother would migrate internally, in order to be closer to children.[69]

There were various ways in which families had acquired debts. In many cases, parents had borrowed money to try and build or support their business, or to obtain and look after land. Some families had acquired debt as a result of taking out loans to pay for the costs of harvesting rice or paying to rent fields and then being unable to produce rice to sell; in some cases, rice production had been impacted by flooding and droughts.[70] There were also some reports that parents acquired debt through the process of migrating. In some cases,

[67] In-depth interview with Caregiver, Feb 2020 (Caregiver 9)
[68] In-depth interview with parents, Feb 2022 (Parent 1)
[69] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 4)
[70] Interview with Key Informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).

employers would pay the fees necessary for migration and parents would have to pay this back through labour. In other cases, parents had to take out loans to pay brokers to migrate:

> *"I migrated with a broker. Actually, the employer contacted the broker to find workers for them. The broker reached out to us. When we decided to migrate, the broker charged us 6,000 baths per person for bring us to Thailand. We did not have the money to pay for the broker and other cost involving traveling from our hometown to Thailand. So, the employer paid the broker and for other expenses first. Then, they would take our salary to repay what they paid for us."*[71]

On several occasions, interviewees noted that their debt was a result of physical ill-health in the family. In some cases, parents had been too unwell to work and earn an income, while other families were forced to take out loans to pay for healthcare treatments. For example, one caregiver reported that the parent had to migrate to pay off the debt she incurred by having to pay for a caesarean section.[72]

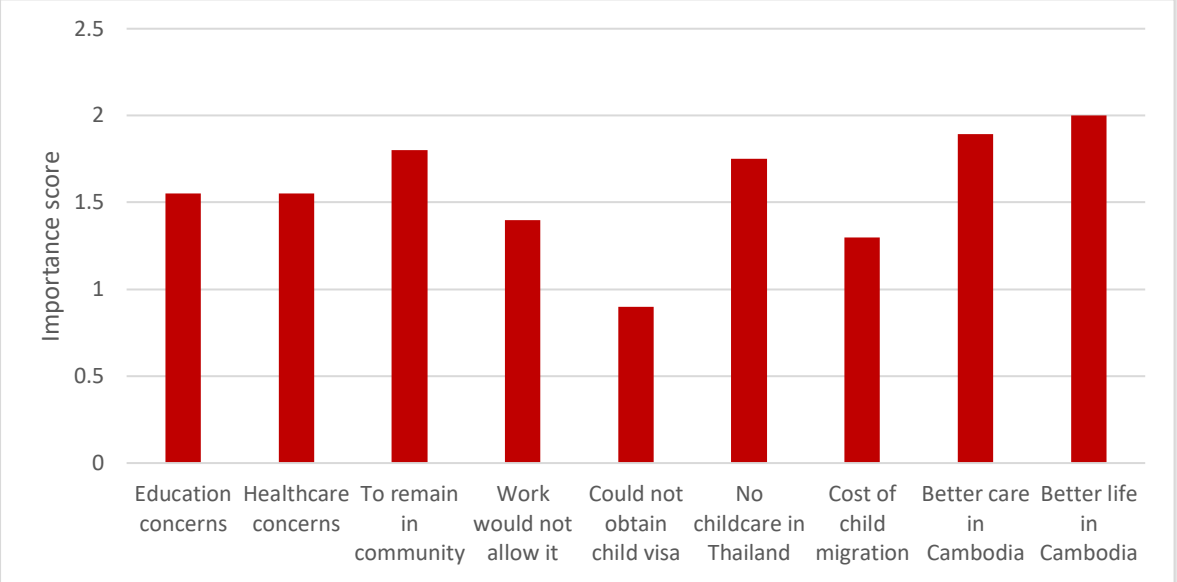
> *"Before we had children, we decided to take loan about 500K to 600K riels from a micro finance to build a hut to live in. Then, I became sick. I could not work. I borrowed more money from other source for my treatment. Our debts kept increasing. There was no way that we could earn sufficiently to pay off our loans. So, we decided to migrate to Thailand. Both of us needed to work. Then we could pay off the microfinance. At the moment, we only owe the individual that we took loan from."*[73]

5.1.2 Childcare

One of the main reasons for parents deciding to leave their child behind was related to childcare. In the returning migrants survey, parents reported a lack of childcare options in Thailand and the care that could be provided to their children in Cambodia as two of the most important factors influencing their decision to leave children behind (Figure 2, and 85 per cent of parents believed that children were well looked after in Cambodia (Figure 3). The belief that children would have an overall better life in Cambodia than they would if they migrated with the parent was rated as the most important factor in parents' decision to migrate without their child (Figure 2).

[71] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 1).
[72] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 4).
[73] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 1).

Figure 2: Returning migrant survey - Importance of factors in decision for children to remain behind



In the qualitative interviews, some caregivers and KIs reported that parents leave children behind because they trust family members to look after them, as well as stating that children are safer in Cambodia than they would be if they were to migrate with their parents; for example, one KI noted that children who migrate with parents spend their time without a caregiver, which makes them more vulnerable to abuse.[74] Some children also reported that their parents wanted them to stay with family members rather than migrate with them.

> *"My mother told [me] that it is not easy to go there, staying with grand-parents [is] safer."*[75]

Caregivers and children reported that there would be nobody to look after children if they were to migrate with their parents, as parents often do not have the time to look after children due to employment arrangements. Several caregivers noted that children would become a 'burden' if they were to migrate with their parents, and that the parents would be unable to work as often or make as much money if they had to look after their child.

> *"She does not want to take her children with her because there is no one to take care of them in Thailand. If her children were there, her husband and she would not be able to do any work. The children would become their burden."*[76]

In some cases, childcare was a reason for children migrating with a parent as opposed to being left behind. There were a instances where children and caregivers reported that children had migrated with parents to help look after other migrant siblings, serving as free childcare for parents. This suggests that a lack of childcare may be a motivating factor for leaving younger children behind when parents do not have older children who can support with childcare.

[74] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 4).
[75] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 2).
[76] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 8).

"Before my 12-year-old nephew went to Thailand, I needed to give them 2,000 riels per day to go to school. Now he is in Thailand to help his parents looking after his young sibling."[77]

5.1.3 Employment rules and irregular migration routes

One of the reasons parents decide for children to remain behind when they migrate, highlighted across qualitative interviews with parents and key informants, relates to the rules set by employers. In some cases, migrants live in accommodation provided by employers, and employers are often responsible for obtaining the necessary documentation for employees. One parent stated that when they migrated, they did not take their child with them as they were unsure if their employer would allow them to bring their children with them,[78] whilst other parents stated that their employer did not allow children to accompany the parent:

"We worked with a Chinese company at a construction site. They did not allow children in. That's why we could not take our children with us. At first, we brought our children with us. They were there for about a week but the [company] did not allow us to keep children there because the workplace was dangerous for children. So, we brought our children back here to keep them with my mother."[79]

While respondents perceived employers as being the barrier to the migration of children, it has been noted that bilateral laws, such as Memorandums of Understanding between Thailand and neighbouring countries, prohibit labour migrants from bringing their children with them,[80] forcing parents to choose between bringing their children illegally or leaving them at home. Despite this, one parent stated that they took their child to Thailand because they would miss being with their child if they were to leave her behind, and that they were only able to do so because their employer gave permission.[81] Together, findings highlight the need for bilateral agreements and employer policies to enable and support the safe migration of children with migrant parents, to prevent children remaining behind.

Not all migration is regular. Employers in Thailand often use brokers to recruit workers from Cambodia using irregular migration routes, which was noted by respondents as dangerous and expensive for families; on more than one occasion, children noted that parents owed debts to employers and brokers directly associated with the costs of irregular migration.[82] However, irregular migration is necessary for individuals who do not have the documentation required for regular migration, and is a less time-consuming route for those who wish to start earning money quicker and do not wish to wait for the process required for legal migration.[83] Irregular migration routes were also noted across interviews being used by those who migrated when borders were closed and there were no means for legal cross-border migration.[84]

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[77] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 12).
[78] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 1).
[79] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 5).
[80] United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand, *Thailand Migration Report 2019,* IOM, 2019; Schloenhardt, S. *Irregular migration and smuggling of young women and girls in South-East Asia and the Pacific: A review of existing evidence* in *Supporting Brighter Futures: Young women and girls and labour migration in South-East Asia and the Pacific*, IOM, 2019, p 101.
[81] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 1).
[82] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 12).
[83] Interview with key informants, Feb 2022 (KI 3; KI 8,9,10).
[84] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 14).

Due to the conditions of irregular migration (which often takes several days and requires migrants to sleep in harsh conditions), brokers do not allow children to migrate with parents.[85] However, there were instances of children migrating irregularly with their parents.[86] Parents, caregivers and key informants noted the dangerous routes that parents take to migrate irregularly:

> *"The routes that the broker takes [migrants] to Thailand is not easy to travel. Sometimes, the migrants need to walk for one or two kilometres in order to reach the border crossing point. At Obei Chaorn border area, there will be a truck to pick them up after crossing to Thailand. Yet, before reaching that area, the migrants may need to sleep en route in the wood for two or three nights. They have meeting places arranged and they only walk toward each of their meeting places at night. There are several layers of arrangement. It is not a linear and straightforward setting. Plus, they only operate this process at night."*[87]

Irregular migration was a common theme in this case study. To migrate regularly to Thailand, Cambodians must have an employer passport (not a tourist passport), a worker card, a labour visa and an employment contract. In the returning migrant survey, 50 per cent of parents had no documentation when they migrated, and only 12 per cent had all four forms of required documentation. One KI noted that parents lack the education to know that they do not have the accurate documentation, stating that when asked if they have the required documents for migrating, individuals often believe that they do, but in reality only have a tourist passport, which does not allow them to work.[88] Migrating with a broker who engages in irregular migration means that parents do not have to pay upfront for documentation; rather employers will pay for the documents and deduct the costs from their salary. Migrating through a broker also ensures that migrants will enter employment, rather than having to migrate in search for work:

"They sometimes migrate with broker through illegal routes. Going through the broker, there will be employers who are awaiting to accept the migrants to work. So, they will get a job instantly. Those employers promise to process all the required legal paper work for them later. They want to migrate through their connection and network."[89]

5.1.4 Child education

Another main reason for parents leaving children behind was for children to access education. Eighty-three per cent of parents in the returning migrant survey reported that children have access to a better education as a result of remaining behind in Cambodia (Figure 3). Additionally, in interviews, most caregivers and children noted parents wanting children to be able to attend school in Cambodia as a reason for children remaining behind, as education is one of the most important factors to improve children's future opportunities and lift them out of poverty. In general, children also reported that they were happy to stay in Cambodia so that they are able to continue going to school.[90]

[85] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[86] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 12).
[87] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[88] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 11).
[89] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[90] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 5).

"My parents do not want to take me with them. They want me to stay here studying."[91]

Linked to the need for parents to migrate to earn money and support their family, supporting children's education was specifically noted as a reason for parents migrating. One key informant noted that parents migrate in order to pay for schooling[92], and one child noted that their mother who migrated works hard to support their education[93]; however, the primary focus of discussions in interviews tended to be on children being able to stay in school without specifically mentioning the contribution of remittances to fund schooling.

Children's access to education may be particularly important for parents who did not have access to education themselves. It was noted that parents want children to have better opportunities. Indeed, in the returning migrant survey, 12 per cent of parents had no education, and 42 per cent had only some primary education, suggesting that it is common for children remaining behind to have parents with little or no education. This was also supported in key informant interviews:

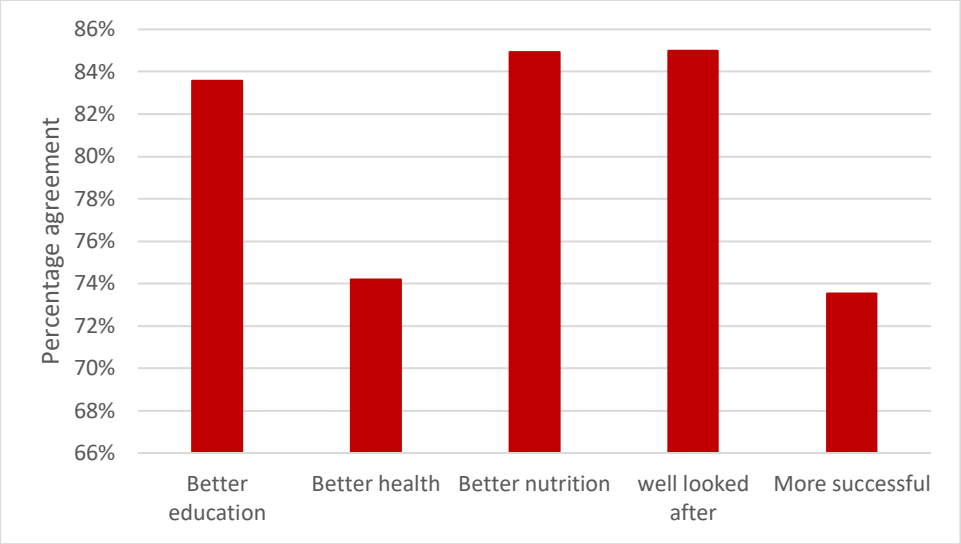
"They are uneducated, so they do not want their children to follow their footprint. They prefer to leave their children and let them pursue their education even though they do not want to be separated."[94]

Other education-related justifications for leaving children behind that were mentioned in interviews included being unsure whether children will be able to access education in Thailand and ensuring that children grow up speaking and learning in the Khmer Language:

"We migrated without our children. We did not bring them along because there was nobody to take care of them in Thailand given that both of us needed to work. We also wanted them to continue their education here in Cambodia because they can study in [their] language too. I want them learn our language."[95]

[91] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 16).
[92] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[93] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 19).
[94] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).
[95] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 2).

Figure 3: Returning migrant survey – percentage of parents reporting positive outcomes of leaving children behind



Further supporting the narrative that education is a key reason for leaving children behind, there were instances of children who were not of school age migrating with parents. In several cases, children and caregivers reported that a younger sibling was currently living away with the parent because they were too young to go to school. Some children had also previously migrated when they were younger, but returned without their parents to live with caregivers in order to attend school:

> *"Before moving here, I lived with my parents in Thailand. While I was there, I helped mom to cook and also pick up the longan fruit sometimes… I went there with them and came here when I was 9 years old to attend school."*[96]

However, there were cases of children's siblings migrating even though they were of school age. One KI noted that parents tend to migrate with their children from age 12-13 so children can start working[97], although amongst families interviewed, there were cases of children under the age of 10 migrating to work.[98] Where school-aged children had migrated with parents (particularly to Thailand), there was no mention of these children attending school, with the narrative indicating that children who migrate with parents do so to work and help increase families' income:

> *"My mother and my two brothers (15 and 9 years old). They have been [living in] Thailand for one year already. They are working in a garden in the daytime and at night time, they have another job, but I am not sure what type of job. My mom decided to bring my brothers to go there, because they are expected to earn money for setting up a business in Cambodia in the future."*[99]

[96] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 3).
[97] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 7).
[98] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 4).
[99] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 4).

One child (aged 12 years) also noted that her family had tried to encourage her to migrate to work and earn money, despite being in school. These findings show that in some cases, earning money takes a priority over education, and this is when children are less likely to remain behind:

> *"My eldest brother also migrated. He went to Thailand since 2021. We called him every day through Facebook. My aunt also coaxes me to Thailand too. She said to go there and work at her work place. It is easy there. I have mixed feelings about that. I want to go too but I also don't want to go. I only want to go there when I feel I miss my brother."*[100]

5.1.5 Summary

In the vast majority of cases, parents choose to migrate from home to earn money, to support their family and to pay off debts. One of the most important factors underlying parents' decision to leave children behind primarily include being unable to provide adequate childcare in the destination country or perceiving the care of children to be better with other family members in Cambodia. Additionally, parents are faced with little choice but to leave their children behind due to employer rules and the routes through which they migrate, which are often dangerous, illegal routes facilitated by brokers who also do not allow children to migrate. The final prominent reason for parents leaving children behind is to ensure that children have access to education.

5.2 The characteristics and circumstances of children remaining behind in Battambang

This section outlines the prevalence of children remaining behind and the characteristics and circumstances of these children and their families, including demographic characteristics such as age, ethnicity and geographical location, as well as other factors such as child contact with parents, caregivers' perceptions of their role as caregivers and sources of family income.

5.2.1 Prevalence and demographic characteristics

Several key informants (KIs) provided insight to the level of migration and children remaining behind in Battambang. Although, within the Battambang province, no official data is collected for children remaining behind[101], KIs indicated that between 10 per cent[102] and 30 per cent[103] of adults in villages migrate, with the majority of parents migrating while their children remain behind.

KIs stated that the age range of children remaining behind ranges from 0-15 years, with the majority of children being under 12 years (as noted in the previous section, children over the age of 12 often migrate to work). This supports previously mentioned evidence indicating that children over the age of 15 more commonly migrate with parents.[104] Boys and girls both remained behind, with findings indicating no apparent gender differences for those remaining behind versus those migrating with parents.

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[100] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 15).
[101] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 1).
[102] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 7).
[103] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).
[104] Jesuit Refugee Service Cambodia, *Quantitative and Qualitative Study on the Impact of Cross-Border Parental Migration on Families Left Behind in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia*, 2018, p.2. Available at: https://jrscambodia.org/publication/Left_Behind_Children_Report.pdf

Within the sample for qualitative interviews, there was one child with a disability (child of migrant parent who was interviewed after returning).[105] Additionally, it was reported on numerous occasions that few parents migrate without their children when they have children with disabilities; rather, parents stay home to look after their child.

All children remaining behind that were interviewed for this case study were Khmer, and KIs noted that all children remaining behind in the villages in which they work are Khmer. The majority of children lived in rural Khmer houses owned by the family, with only two children interviewed living in rented accommodation in urban areas. Similarly, the returning migrant survey indicated that 81 per cent of children were living in a family house in Cambodia (65 per cent owned). Sixty-two per cent of these houses had only one room separate from the kitchen or bathroom. Findings suggest that children remaining behind tend to live in small accommodation in rural areas. The majority of children were in households where both parents had migrated, but some were in households whether the mother was stated to have migrated and the father was not mentioned as present, indicating single-parent households.

5.2.2 Caregivers of children who remain behind

Amongst interviewees, the vast majority of children were left behind with grandmothers. Often, grandmothers were looking after multiple grandchildren, particularly when more than one of their own adult children (i.e. the left behind child's parent) had migrated. For example, one caregiver reported that she was looking after four children remaining behind, three of which were her grandchildren and one was her nephew.[106] Notably, the caregiver was most commonly the maternal grandmother. Some children were also looked after by aunts. It was often the case that aunts also had children of their own to look after. Children living with aunts tended to have previously lived with grandparents who then passed away, or lived with aunts because the grandmother was unable to care for the child. KIs reiterated that children remaining behind tend to be looked after by grandmothers or aunts. Only one child was looked after by a male (grandfather), although children and caregivers sometimes reported that other adults (including males such as grandfathers and uncles) were living with the children and provided a certain level of care (but were not seen as the primary caregiver). There were only two children who were not looked after by an adult relative; in both cases, children lived in a room with a sibling, and in one of these cases, the landlady was referenced as a caregiver.

There were varying degrees to which caregivers were involved in looking after children. Some reported providing all levels of care to children, including cooking, washing children, cleaning clothes and supporting their school work, whilst others reported that they had a minimal role in childcare, only providing occasional food and keeping an eye on the child or providing guidance. Non-relatives reported providing lower levels of care, indicating that children tended to look after themselves, but they would step in if, for example, a child was unwell.[107] However, there were some exceptions where relatives provided minimal care to children remaining behind. A few children lived alone in separate houses from their caregiver and felt that they did not receive care: for example, the following quote from a child explains their grandmother's superstitious beliefs being a barrier to care provisions:

> *"I am the one who looks after my siblings. My mother asked my grandmother (my mother's aunt) to watch over us too. My mother told us to sleep with my grandmother (my mother's aunt) but there is*

[105] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 4).
[106] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 14).
[107] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 13).

an issue. My grandmother believes that she could not accept "two legged animals"[108] to live with [her]."[109]

Several caregivers noted that they themselves were unwell or had a physical disability, such as having troubles with their limbs that inhibited movement, limiting the extent to which they are able to provide care for the children. A few caregivers also stated that an adult living in the home had a physical disability or additional learning needs. Some caregivers were therefore also having to provide care to others in the house, while looking after left children remaining behind.

Caregiver views on looking after children remaining behind

Most caregivers indicated that they were willing to provide care to children while their parents migrated. All caregivers indicated that the parents had consulted them prior to migrating or sending the child to live with them. Some stated that they were happy to look after the children as it allows the parents to earn money and support the family. Some caregivers suggested that they did not want parents to migrate away (primarily for the child's sake as they would miss their parents), but parents had no choice but to move. A few grandmothers stated that they insisted that the child be left with them rather than migrate with the parents, because they would be better able to provide care to the child:

"She does not take her children with her because she is worried that no place for them to stay. At first, she said that she would take her children with her when she found place to stay. But I challenged her if she took them with her, would they be able to attend school? And how would she take them with her? So, I did not allow her to take her children there. Then, she left them here with me."[110]

Caregiver employment

Some caregivers stated that their primary role was to look after children remaining behind, which left no time for employment. However, many caregivers indicated that they are employed and earning an income. In general, families tended to have other people within the family also working, meaning it is not just the migrant parent that is earning an income. Examples of caregiver employment included selling food (particularly rice noodles), supporting the spouse in their work (e.g. carving)[111], and catching rats to sell.

"I sell sugarcane juice and snacks at Banan Mountain. Today, I don't even eat anything yet. I start my business from 8am and I close it at 4pm. I like my job. I can do my business while my grandchildren can tag along and play around the mountain area."[112]

Caregivers' income is also important for supporting children. Several caregivers mentioned that their income is imperative for being able to feed children or support with education costs. Some caregivers' income also went towards paying off family debt. Therefore, while parents migrate to earn money and support the family, this is often insufficient to meet the costs of supporting children.

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[108] Context for this statement was provided by the national researcher, who explained that "two legged animals" refers to a human being. The grandmother believes in a common folk belief / superstition that living with another human being could cause bad luck.

[109] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 19).

[110] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 2).

[111] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 1).

[112] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 10).

"Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I earned about 100,000 riels per month. This was just enough for food. In the morning, I give my grandchildren 1,000 riels each when they go to school. The same for the afternoon session. We need to pay for their tutorial class."[113]

5.2.3 Receipt of remittances from migrating parents

As discussed, one of the main reasons for parents migrating is to earn money to support their family. The majority of caregivers reported that parents send home remittances to support the family, although there was variation in the amount that parents are able to send. Some reported that it is parents' intention to send money home, but first they must pay the debt incurred through employers paying for brokers and migration documents. Others said that parents send money home occasionally or inconsistently.

The amount of money that parents are able to send home differs quite substantially. For example, one caregiver reported that her son sends through 1000 Thai baht each quarter[114] (approximately 108,705 Riel / 26 USD), whereas another reported that their daughter sends 2000 bahts (46 USD) each month.[115] One child reported that her parents send 2,000 bahts each fortnight, noting that this was particularly important because her grandmother (caregiver) is unable to earn an income.[116] Parents who completed the returning migrant survey reported sending an average of 707,588 Riels (172 USD) home per month, with only one parent reporting that they had not sent remittances home. It was also not the case that parents with more children sent home more money: parents with one left behind child (N = 9) sent on average 837,500 Riels (204.72 USD) per month home, whereas those with two left behind children (N = 12) sent home on average only 590,375 Riels (144.30 USD) per month.

Even in cases where caregivers and children receive inconsistent amounts in remittances, it remained the view that parents migrated to support their families and are working hard to ensure that children have the things they need. Where it was reported that families had received little or no income recently, they still reported that the reason parents left was to earn money to support them:

"This year, I have not received money from my mother. Sometimes, she sent us 50,000 riels or 100,000 riels…. My mother helps us to have a better living. She works hard to support our education and living."[117]

5.2.4 Contact with migrating parents

Telephone communication

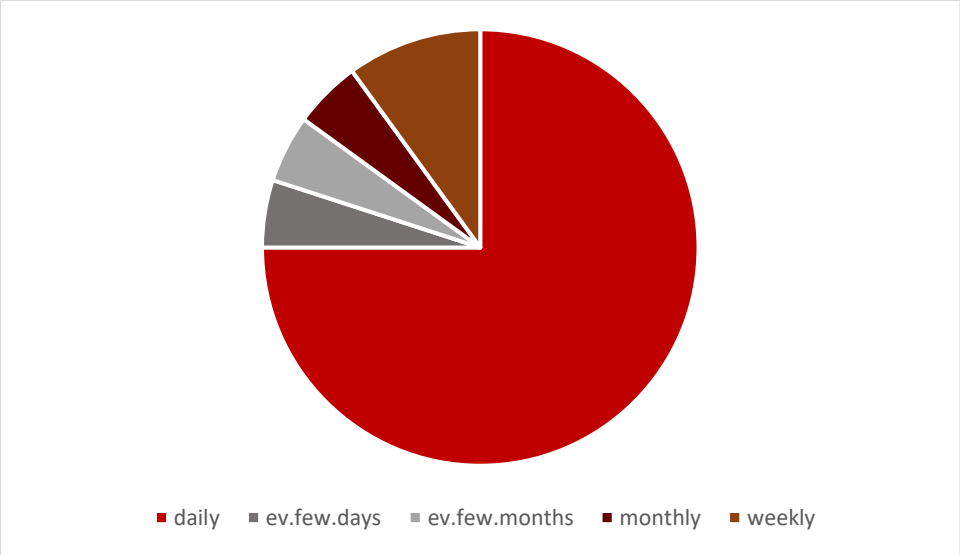
Findings from the interviews with children and caregivers showed that there were variations in the extent to which children have contact with their parents while left behind. The majority of children reported that they spoke to their parents on the telephone, and a couple of children noted that their parents had purchased smart phones in order to enable them to video call and see each other. Where both parents had migrated, children reported that they spoke to both their mother and father, whereas, where only one parent had migrated, children and caregivers referenced communication with that parent; there appeared to be no

[113] Ibid.
[114] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 7).
[115] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 8).
[116] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 16).
[117] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 19).

difference in level of communication by parent gender (beyond a noted absence of fathers for some children in the sample). Some children said that they speak to their parents a few times a week, while others speak to their parent on the phone at least once every day. However, not all children were able to speak to their parents as regularly. One child stated that he only speaks to his mother once a fortnight and for a very short time, as his mother is working and living without electricity, so cannot regularly charge her mobile phone to speak.[118]

In the returning migrants survey, parents were asked how often they contacted their children when they were living abroad, and how often they contacted them. Findings indicated that 75 per cent of parents spoke to their children daily either via message or phone, with nobody reporting that they never spoke to their children.

Figure 4. How often parents communicate with children over the phone when migrating (N=20)



In interviews, parents also noted how important it was to be able to talk to their children on the phone when they were away:

> *"We called our children often too. We missed them so much. Every time we talked, our children asked us to come back home."*[119]

Although it was rare, there were incidents of caregivers in interviews reporting that migrant parents had no contact with their children, with caregivers being unable to reach parents who have left children behind:

> *"When their parents migrated, my 12 years old nephew was about 5 or 6 years old. His father went to Thailand when he was only 7 days old. He went for two years without any news. Then he visited for a month. After he went back to Thailand, he was silent for another two years. We heard nothing from him. We could not reach him."*[120]

[118] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 15).
[119] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 1).
[120] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 12).

A couple of children highlighted that telephone calls are the only form of communication they have ever had with their parents, in cases where parents migrated when the children were very young and children do not have a memory of meeting them:

> *"I [am] very happy while they call and we can talk. I never met them, I have only their photo in my wallet."*[121]

Most children reported that they were happy to be able to speak to their parents and see their face, saying that talking on the phone helps them miss their parents less. When asked about what would improve their situation, children wished they had a smart phone so that they would be able to see their parents' faces.[122] Findings suggest that telephone calls can be an important form of communication for helping parents and children maintain a bond when they are not together, and can help children feel happier with the situation of being separated from their parents:

> *"We talk often through Messenger Chat, so we can see each other's faces. When we do video call, it is good because we don't miss each other that much. Previously, my grandchildren wanted to go with their parents to Thailand because they miss their parents. However, his mother stopped them by promising to buy them a phone. She bought them a phone. They can talk and my grandsons do not miss their parents as much as they did previously."*[123]

While most children in interviews identified telephone conversations as an important way to maintain the relationship with their parents, some children reported that they do not communicate regularly with their parent. Occasionally, this was because children did not want to talk to their parent; some of the children interviewed reported that they do not feel comfortable speaking to their parents on the phone:

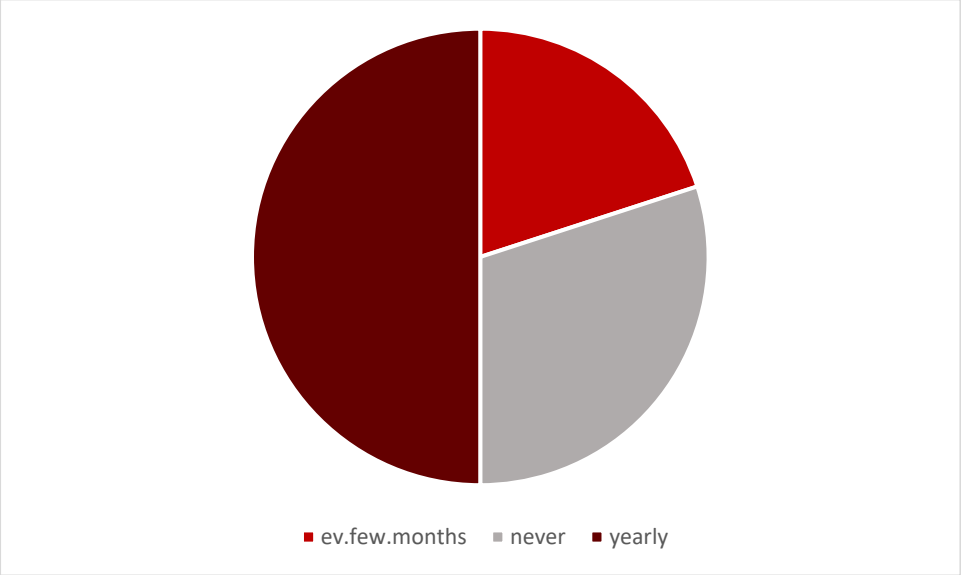
> *"My mother calls me too but I don't know how to talk to her. I can only talk a few words. That's it. When I owned a phone (a month ago), my mother called me several times per day. Now, my phone is stolen. So, we don't have anything to communicate. I have never missed my mother. However, she misses me."*[124]

Parents visiting children

There was variation in how regularly parents return home to visit children remaining behind. In the returning migrant survey, 50 per cent of parents reported that they return once a year, while 30 per cent reported that they never visited their child prior to returning home permanently (or semi-permanently). The remaining 20 per cent returned home every few months (Figure 5).

[121] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 2).
[122] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 9).
[123] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 9).
[124] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 20).

Figure 5: Returning migrant survey: Frequency of parents' visits to children (N = 20)



As previously mentioned, some children reported that they had not seen their parents since they migrated, or do not remember meeting them. There were several cases where children had only seen their parents once or twice, since they migrated. Amongst interviewees, it was more common for children of parents who migrated internationally (to Thailand) to report that they rarely or never see their parents, whereas children of parents who migrated internally (primarily Phnom Penh) tended to see their parents more frequently. Indeed, one KI noted that it is common for parents to migrate to Thailand for several years without returning,[125] and this was mirrored by children and caregivers reporting that parents rarely return home:

> *"My 13 years old granddaughter's parents left for Thailand a long time ago. Her parents left her with me when she was 8 months old. Then, we didn't hear from them. They seemed to disappear, but they did visit once - when their daughter was 10 years old."*[126]

Both caregivers and children highlighted that when children do not see their parents face-to-face frequently, they either do not recognise, or feel they do not know their parents:

> *"She migrated more than 10 years ago and she has only visited twice. Her first visit was when her son was still very young. He did not know or recognise her. He was scared to go close to his mother. During her second visit, he was a bit older. So, when we told him to go to his mother, he did. He also calls me Mother too. So, now he has two mothers."*[127]

KIs noted that in general, migrants return during new year celebrations, as this is when employers allow parents time off work. It was noted by KIs that parents would return home when a child or other member of

[125] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).
[126] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 16).
[127] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 2).

the family was unwell and the parent needed to come home either to care for the child or a family member and because they were concerned.[128]

The migration routes parents take is one factor that influences how often parents return home to visit their children. It is more expensive and difficult for parents to return home frequently when they migrate irregularly. Several KIs mentioned that it can cost between 7000 and 10,000 bahts for parents to migrate through illegal brokers. One caregiver noted the expense of using illegal brokers as a deterrent for parents returning to Cambodia:

> *"If they want to come back, they need to go through the short-cut process. This choice is very expensive. It costs about 5,000 bahts per person. We cannot afford it."*[129]

When children mentioned their parents visiting, the majority indicated that they were happy to see their parents:

> *"They often visited us, several times per year. I did not miss them. Yet, I was happy when they visited because they bought us a lot of seafood to eat. I like seafood and I eat a lot. At night, I slept by my mother side. I like hugging my mother when I sleep."*[130]

There were a few cases of parents migrating internally and visiting their children regularly. For example, one mother reported migrating from Battambang to Prey Thom Village to cut cassava, stating that she returned home every three nights to check on her children, while her husband, who had migrated to Thailand, returned home less frequently.[131] Although there were only a small number of examples of short term migration amongst the children interviewed for this study, KIs noted that it is more common for parents to migrate for short periods of time in Battambang than other provinces in Cambodia, due to Battambang being close to the Thai border. In general, this makes it easier for parents to return across the border regularly. Sometimes parents choose to migrate closer to home so that they are able to visit their children more frequently:

> *"The parents normally migrate to Cambodia-Thailand border such as Sampov Loun, Kam Rieng, Phnom Proek etc. They do seasonal migration. They cross the border in the morning to work in the farms on Thai side and return to Cambodia in the evening. Or they migrate to Thailand based on the season of the fruit harvesting that farms need workers. So, those who are from within Battambang or from the nearby district are likely to travel to work in Thailand during the day and come back to Cambodia after working hours. However, those who are from other provinces (than Battambang) are mostly migrating to Thailand for a long period of time or have gone missing."*[132]

5.2.5 Summary

Key informants indicated that up to 30 per cent of children in Battambang may remain behind when parents migrate, the majority of whom live in rural areas. Findings from interviews suggest that it is most common for children under the age of 13 year to remain behind, when they are considered as less able to work. Children are primarily left with grandmothers and aunts, although there was one instance of children being looked after by a male caregiver (grandfather), and two instances of children living alone without an adult relative. Some

[128] Interviews with key informants, Feb 2022 (KI 7, KIs 8, 9, 10).
[129] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 7).
[130] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 21).
[131] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 4).
[132] Interview with key informants, Feb 2022 (KIs 8,9,10).

caregivers have a very hands-on role in supporting children, while other children tend to look after themselves, with occasional support from caregivers. While most parents send home remittances, there is great variation in the amount and consistency of money sent home to help look after children. Often, caregivers also work to provide financial support to children remaining behind. While the majority of parents do not tend to return home to visit children regularly, telephones serve as an important mode of communication for parents and children to maintain relationships.

5.3 Protection risks and challenges faced by children remaining behind

The following section builds on the information provided thus far about the situation of children remaining behind, outlining the challenges and protection risks that these children face and providing a narrative for how the discussed circumstances of children who remain behind can increase child protection risks. As will become apparent throughout this section, many of these challenges and risks are interlinked.

5.3.1 Poverty and access to basic needs

As previously discussed, the primary reason for parents migrating is to earn money to support their family. However, despite this, most children remaining behind amongst those interviewed in the present study continue to live in poverty. This supports other research that suggests that children who remain behind, particularly with grandmothers as caregivers, remain socioeconomically disadvantaged.[133] Many KIs stated that children remaining behind live in poverty with limited access to essential items. These issues were reiterated by caregivers and children themselves. These include limited access to food and poor nutrition, and access to treatment when children suffer ill-health. Caregivers reported being unable to afford to send children to school.[134] One non-relative caregiver noted that the children she was looking after were often physically unwell with a flu or fever[135], and key informants noted that children remaining behind are sometimes malnourished.[136] Several grandparents reported worrying about having to provide care to unwell grandchildren, as well as being unable to afford to pay for healthcare for children.[137] Children and caregivers often do not have enough food to eat each day and sometimes have to skip meals.

> *"Even though, I spend about 5,000 riels [$1.21] per day to buy rice grains, it is not really enough for our daily consumption. We are lacking of rice and money (pocket money) for going to school."*[138]

Some caregivers also provided examples of how they cannot afford things that children request, such as toys or a phone to contact parents. This was noted as particularly challenging in instances where parents do not consistently (or ever) send money to the family.[139] This supports past research that indicates caregivers continue to struggle to financially support children when parents have migrated, even when parents send remittances.[140]

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[133] Zimmer Z. & Van Natta, M. *Migration and left-behind parents and children of migrants in Cambodia: a look at household composition and the economic situation,* Asian Population Studies, 14(3), pps. 271-289, 2018.
[134] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 4).
[135] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 13).
[136] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).
[137] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 2).
[138] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 9).
[139] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 5).
[140] IOM, *Migration impacts on Cambodian Children*, 2019. p.88.

5.3.2 Child labour

Child labour was highlighted as a common risk amongst children remaining behind in this study. When asked the extent to which parents agree that remaining behind poses risks to the children in the returning migrant survey, the risk of child labour was amongst the most common perceived risks, second only to neglect: nearly a third of parents (31 per cent) agreed that children are at higher risk of being made to engage in child labour as a result of remaining behind (Figure 6).

Findings from interviews show that the risk of child labour is linked to poverty; several children (boys and girls) reported that they work to help support their family and provide an additional income. One particular child labour role that was reported by caregivers and children was catching animals; some children regularly catch rats or go fishing so that caregivers can sell this food. Children carrying out this role also means that families themselves have some food to eat. Other jobs that children carry out included packing cow dung, fishing, picking and selling plants or flowers and shooting mice. Fishing and animal catching were seemingly more common for boys.

> *"My grandsons catch rats and fishes for me to sell. Some days, they can catch it and some days, they cannot. When they cannot find any rats nor fishes for sale, they go fishing and collecting snails by the creek nearby and pick wild vegetable growing around the village to cook as our meals. My grandchildren like eating this kind of food."*[141]

Children often said that they work either before or after school. Some children worked every day, whereas others worked only two or three days a week. While children did not tend to mention that they work instead of going to school, several KIs noted that children miss school in order to work to support the family, particularly if the labour that they engage in is seasonal. In some cases, caregivers will also encourage children to miss school in favour of working for an income to support the family.[142] One KI noted that, sometimes, the grandmother will take care of younger children while older children work to earn money to support the family.[143]

In general, children had mixed views towards their work. Some children did not mind working and enjoy earning money or consider it as their play time, while others said they do not enjoy their work, reporting that it is difficult or can be dangerous. Some children reported that they like to work to support their caregiver.

> *"After school, I always go. [I work] seven days per week and around five hours per day. I don't like [working]. Last time during fishing, I used to fall down into the water. Per day, I can earn around 30,000 to 40,000 riels [7.30 - 9.78 USD] and selling fish [I earn] around 19,500 riels. Some people, they pity me and my brother and sister, they give some money as well."*[144]

Children often also engage in unpaid labour. When children were asked if they did any work, several children reported carrying out unpaid labour tasks such as helping with household chores such as preparing food,

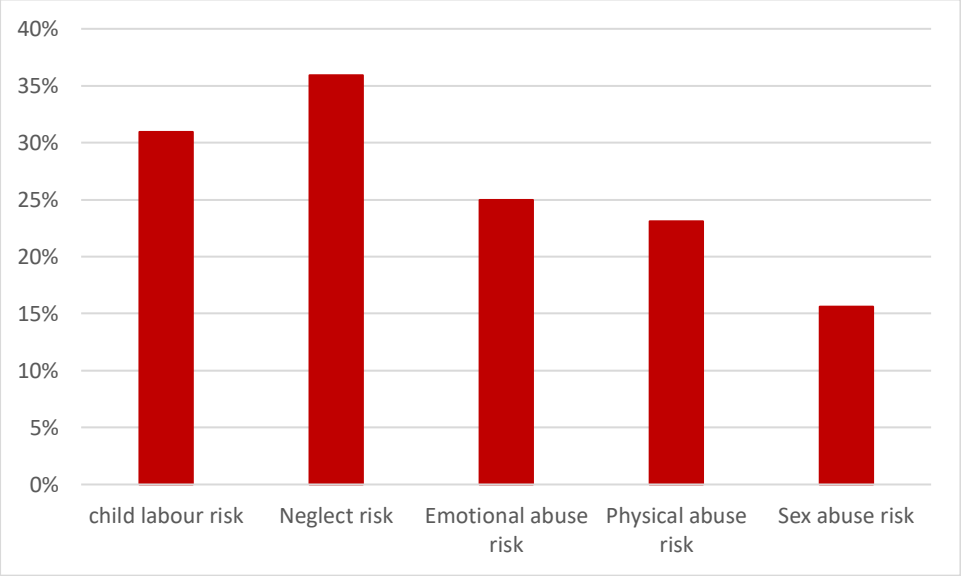
[141] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 9).
[142] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 11).
[143] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 12).
[144] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 10).

catching food for the family, or helping look after livestock. The household chores were seemingly more commonly reported by girls.

Whilst child labour was common amongst children who remained behind, this is not necessarily a direct outcome of children being in this situation in all circumstances, rather a reflection of the level of poverty these children face and the pressure for families to try and maximise their income. Indeed, amongst some parents and children who were interviewed with parents having returned, it was noted that children now support the work that these parents do back home in Cambodia or continue to work despite the parent being home:

> *"I don't work but I help my family finding food. I catch animals, birds, and fish. When I lived with my grandmother, I was the one who found food to feed the family. Since my parents are back, I sometimes can catch different animals to cook as our meals too. Sometimes, we sell what I caught and keep some for the family to eat. This activity is part of my play activities and time. I enjoy it."*[145]

Figure 6: Returning migrants survey – percentage of parents perceiving risks to children as a result of leaving them behind



5.3.3 Limited access to education

As discussed above, enabling children to access education was one of the key reasons parents decided not to migrate with their children (both in the survey and as mentioned by parents in interviews, in instances of internal and international migration). Most children who were interviewed reported that they are in school and that they enjoy school because they like having the opportunity to learn and to see friends. However, findings from interviews suggest that children still lack the resources to fully engage in education or attend school consistently.

Several children indicated that they do not attend school consistently. Some children made reference to being happy when they have the money to go to school, suggesting that this is not always the case. One child reported that they sometimes miss school to engage in child labour.[146] Caregivers also reported that they need

[145] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 13).
[146] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 12).

to give money to children to go to school (including costs for tutorials and food) but that they cannot always afford to do this. These findings suggest that children may not have access to education full-time.

> *"I am happy the most when my mother[147] gives me money to go to school. I need 3,500 riels or almost 5,000 riels [1.22 USD per day to spend at school."*[148]

There were also instances of children being held behind in school due to failing a year, suggesting that some children who remain behind have difficulties with engaging and performing well in education. This may be linked to missing school for various reasons, including caregivers being unable to afford school, children missing school for the purposes of labour, or a lack of support with education at home due to low education levels of caregivers. KIs indicated that education is not a priority for families of children remaining behind, often due to the poverty they are facing.

KIs also reported that children remaining behind often miss school. One KI noted that there have been incidents of left behind adolescents skipping school to engage in risky behaviours such as drinking alcohol due to reduced parental care.[149] Parents who returned home also noted that caregivers did not take their children to school consistently:

> *"Before going to Thailand, I always dropped off and picked up my first son from school. He studied at a school that is located close to the main road and a good school. However, when we migrated to Thailand, nobody dropped him at school and picked up him from school. So, he could not attend school regularly. Right now, he is studying at a school in a monk monastery nearby our house."*[150]

A couple of children who were interviewed reported that they no longer go to school, while others reported that their school-aged siblings do not attend school. One child reported that they will not be able to complete education beyond grade 9 because the family is unable to afford the cost of sending them to high school, as it is a long distance from the village.[151]

When asked what would help improve circumstances for children or what further support families needed, children and caregivers often referred to needing support related to education. On more than one occasion, children reported that they love going to school and wish they could continue their education so that they can reach their aspirations:

> *"I wish I could continue my studies at high [school] level and I could [provide] support back to my mom. In the future, I want to become a gold seller."*[152]

Some caregivers of children who remained behind reported that they need help to provide school materials for children in education, and children noted that they did not have enough access to educational resources, including school uniforms, stationery, school bags and sport equipment[153], in addition to lacking money for food at school. This shows that despite parents migrating without their children in order to support children's

[147] Child referred to their aunt as their mother.
[148] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 20).
[149] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[150] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 2).
[151] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 20).
[152] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 9).
[153] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 12).

education, children remaining behind continue to lack the resources necessary to engage in education. Children also highlighted that they lacked access to educational resources:

> *"I wish I [could] have one more set of my school uniform as now I have only one. I love my school uniform. I wash it two times a week (Thursday and Sunday) and sometimes it smells [bad]. I also need more books, pencils and pens as [I only have] one. I don't have colours [like] my friend. If I could, I wish to have [some] so that I could draw pictures."*[154]

Together, these findings suggest that despite parents' views that children remaining behind will be in a better position to access education, in reality, significant barriers persist to accessing education for children who remain behind.

5.3.4 Children taking on caregiving roles

Although left behind with a carer, there were many instances of children having to look after the caregiver or another adult family member when they are unwell. For example, one caregiver (aunt) reported that the children help bathe them when they are unwell.[155] Children also reported bathing caregivers, washing clothes and cooking food for caregivers and other family members. Several caregivers and children mentioned that when their caregiver is unwell, children provide care in the form of "coining"[156], accompany caregivers to hospital appointments and buy medicine for them. Several children and caregivers also noted that children often cook and clean for themselves and their caregivers if caregivers are unable to:

> *"I stay with my grandmother. She has [a] problem with her both hands. Her hands' bones twist, so that she cannot carry anything heavy. She still can cook meals for us. I help her cooking for us too. I also wash my own clothes. I take care of my grandmother too. At night when she cannot get up, I help lifting her up. I help when her medicine runs out and when she cannot walk. My grandmother has 13 different kinds of illness. She feels pain in her wrists and hands. Her legs get swollen. She [has diabetes]. Her body acid increases. She has heart fat and so on."*[157]

One respondent (grandfather) reported that the child's father had left the child in Cambodia to help look after him[158], suggesting that the caring role children provide for families can be a driver for leaving children behind.

Children often reported taking care of siblings. Some children cook and clean for their siblings, as well as supporting them with school work and helping them learn. Children also took on quasi-parental roles with respect to younger siblings, with several reporting that they would go out to find their sibling if they are out too long and provide instructions to younger siblings. Often, children reported doing these things because their caregiver is physically unable to, or because the caregiver is working. In a few cases, children noted that it was their role to look after their sibling, with the caregiver only providing a supervisory role:

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[154] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 8).
[155] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 17).
[156] "Coining involved repeated downward pressured strokes in linear fashion over lubricated skin using a hard object with smooth edge, such as coin, jade or buffalo horn.", From: Tan, AK & Mallika, PS*, Coining: An ancient treatment widely used among Asians,* Malaysian Family Physician, 6(2-3), 2011, pps.97-98.
[157] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 17).
[158] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 7).

> *"[I] Advise him [sibling] to go to school and try to study hard, find him when we lose him - last time he went to play far from home with his friend. I buy medicine and take care of him when he sick and report to [our] aunt to bring him to see doctor. I wash his clothes and cook for him and others at home."*[159]

In general, children reported that they were happy to provide care to their caregivers, siblings and other family members. Some indicated that they like looking after their younger sibling and see it as an important role, and others noted that their siblings need the support. Some children stated that they were happy to look after their younger siblings because they like living with them and are the only siblings left at home.[160] Others recognised that their caring roles allow parents and caregivers to focus on work and support the family financially. Often, the care between siblings is reciprocal; siblings help each other and take turns in carrying out domestic roles within the family.

> *"I teach my 11-year-old brother, help him to read and write when I am not going to shoot the mice at night. I also take care of them [siblings] in the day-time and tell them not to go far from home as my youngest brother experienced drowning. So, I need to take care of them!... I am happy [to take care of them] as it helps my parents concentrate on their work and my grandma can travel at day time to earn money."*[161]

5.3.5 Neglect

Findings indicate that children remaining behind are highly vulnerable to experiencing neglect. In interviews, parents highlighted that they were concerned their children would not be provided with adequate care while parents migrated without their children, or that they were aware that their children had experienced neglect when left with their caregivers. One grandmother mentioned that she was aware the child's parents wanted to return home because they were concerned that she would not be able to look after the children.[162] One returned parent stated that she had not gone back to Thailand with her husband to work because she was concerned about her mother-in-law's capacity to look after her children on top of other responsibilities:

> *"We are concerned about my mother-in-law. If I went to Thailand, I would leave my children with my mother-in-law. It is going to be a lot of work for her. She needs to take care of our children, my sister-in-law's children, and her cows… I am worried when my mother[-in-law] is unwell and my children are sick. I am worried that if my children go to school by themselves, they may be exposed to a traffic and have an accident."*[163]

In the returning migrant survey, neglect was the highest perceived risk for children who remain behind, with 36 per cent of parents agreeing that children were more likely to experience neglect as a result of remaining behind (Figure 6). These findings show that despite the majority of parents believing children are well looked after in Cambodia (in the survey), some parents recognise that children remaining behind are at risk of neglect.

As outlined in previous sections, there are they several examples of children's basic needs not being met, which relates to neglect: many left behind children and their caregivers are living in poverty, meaning that

[159] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 12).
[160] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 12).
[161] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 2).
[162] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 9).
[163] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 4).

they cannot afford access to basic items such as food or afford for the children to attend school consistently. In some instances, caregivers play a minimal role in looking after children, or there are limitations to the level of care that they can provide due to age, physical health or work and other care commitments; these children often have to care for themselves and each other. Caregivers and children frequently highlighted circumstances demonstrating certain levels of neglect. Caregivers often struggle to provide care for their children, particularly older grandparents, who frequently referenced being tired and finding looking after children exhausting. Some worried about their capacity to work and provide care for their children:

> *"For a living, in the morning, I sell traditional Khmer noodles and Kola noodles, whereas in the afternoon, I sell shaved ice and sugary drinks. However, I have been unwell recently, so I have not sold shaved ice for a while… [because] I am afraid that I will become sicker. Then there will be no one to support my grandchildren… Besides selling snacks, I also prepare food and wash clothes for my grandchildren. I am getting tired too. It is exhausting... I can't rest just now since we only have enough to feed us from hand to mouth."*[164]

One caregiver highlighted that they do not do much in the way of care for the children, providing a narrative suggesting that she believes it is the children's responsibility to care for each other, and that she finds the minimal role she provides burdensome. The level of care this family member was able to provide was also linked to superstitious beliefs that having others living under her roof would cause harm:

> *"Just to keep an eye on those girls, I feel very exhausted telling them to refill the water in their big jars for use, wash dishes, and collect cooking woods. They just don't do it. I am tired of repeating it. I have a well on this land where my house is. It is not far away that they need to walk a long distance for water. They need to pump and carry the water from the well to refill those big jars at their house. So, they can use it for showering and cooking and so on…Those girls don't help each other. For example, when it comes to cooking, they just wait for one or another to do it. Sometimes, my daughter cooks rural traditional soup and we give them a bowl to share… I can't allow them to live in my house. A fortune teller told me that I cannot accept "two legged animals" to live with me because it will cause me trouble. I can't live happily. I will have bad luck and I will become sick all the time. So, I told them to sleep and stay at their house and I will keep an eye one them."*[165]

KIs also referred to neglect as a common concern for children remaining behind. In addition to highlighting how poverty and being elderly is linked to neglect, other factors included caregivers having large families with many children to look after (i.e. limiting their capacity to provide enough care to each individual child),[166] in addition to caregivers lacking education or parenting skills. This is seen as a particular issue in rural areas. Some provided examples of children within the villages in which they work experiencing neglect:

> *"There was a case that parents left their son with an aunt. The aunt used the boy to do many things including household chores. They did not give him food. The boy could not attend school regularly. When the mother found out, she took the boy to join the monks, so that her son could have a shelter and study."*[167]

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[164] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 10).
[165] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 17).
[166] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 2).
[167] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).

One returned parent outlined that her mother (the children's grandparent) neglected her grandchildren whilst the mother migrated to work:

> *"When my children lived with my mother, she did not treat them well. My older daughter was tasked to wash clothes, dishes, and other cooking tools. She needed to get up at 5 am to do household chores before she went to school. When I returned from Phnom Penh and met my daughter, my heart was so broken. Her skin was darker. She was skinnier. She could not attend school regularly. She had no nice clothes to wear. She cried. My mother used her as if she was a servant who was supposed to serve everyone in the house. I can't believe how a biological grandmother could treat her own granddaughter this way."*[168]

5.3.6 Physical, emotional and sexual abuse

Children remaining behind are also vulnerable to abuse. Multiple KIs stated that children who remain behind are often exposed to violence. Several children and caregivers discussed instances in which children had been beaten. Caregivers can be emotionally and physically violent towards children, including insulting and beating them when children make mistakes or misbehave. For example, one boy stated:

> *"My aunty and my grandmother just slapped and insulted me this morning because I got up late. I don't like my aunt."*[169]

Additionally, when asked what support he needed and what would help the situation of children who remain behind, this child asked for a watch so that he could know the time and not get in trouble with his caregivers. He also asked that in the future, other children should not be allowed to have the experiences he had relating to abuse from caregivers. This demonstrates that children remaining behind are aware of, and impacted by, the physical and emotional abuse they experience from caregivers.

> *"Sometimes, my aunt hits me. For example, I got hit recently because I made the soup pot fall down. It was my mistake."*[170]

There was also one reported case of financial abuse by a caregiver:

> *"When my mother was not at home, my aunt scolded me all the time. When my father was here, he always gave me money. I saved the money in my piggy bank. My aunt borrowed my money in the piggy bank. When I asked her for my money back, she did not give it to me. She always said she would give me the money when my mother returned from Thailand. Then she paid me back the money and asked me not to tell my mother."*[171]

On more than one occasion, caregivers reiterated children's statements, indicating that they beat their children when they misbehave or cause stress. Caregivers stated that they beat the children because they are tired as a result of working and struggling to look after children, or because they are worried about children. Caregivers also indicated that they are under stress due to living with debt or in poverty:

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[168] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 5).
[169] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 10).
[170] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 1).
[171] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 18).

> *"I have a debt. I borrowed from a kind of shark loan for 500,000 riels [122.21 USD] and promised to pay this back in a month. The interest is 30,000 riels [7.33 USD] per day. I need to pay back everything in 20 days. We are struggling. We do not have enough to eat for three meals per day. I am too tired to look after many children as their caregiver since their parents are not around. I beat them too sometimes because I am too tired."*[172]

KIs identified several additional reasons for caregivers being verbally, emotionally or physically violent towards children remaining behind. It was noted that caregivers take out their frustrations on these children, particularly if parents have not sent remittances to help look after children. One KI noted that children are vulnerable to abuse when the parent does not have contact with the child.[173] Several highlighted that one of the reasons grandparents and caregivers use violent discipline methods is because they have not received any education on positive parenting. While positive parenting programmes are available, older caregivers looking after children who remain behind are excluded from this support or are less receptive to classes:

> *"The majority of the NGOs work on educating parents who are at reproductive age about positive parenting. However, there are no such activities with older women (grandmothers). When we talk with the elderly about positive parenting, they say they can't stand their grandchildren. So, they have to violently discipline them."*[174]

Exposure to drug and alcohol misuse was also noted as a risk to children, which also increases the risk of neglect and abuse. One KI provided a specific example:

> *"There was a child who was left with a drunken grandmother. When the grandmother was drunk, she beat her granddaughter. The way she abused her was that she beats the girl and walked her across the streets in the community. She cursed her. She beat her because she was upset that the girl's parents did not send money home. We mediated with the grandmother."*[175]

Sexual abuse was frequently mentioned as a protection risk by KIs, who noted that children of any age are vulnerable, but particularly young teenage girls who live with other male relatives, including grandfathers and brothers. Uncles were mentioned commonly as perpetrators, but neighbours were also seen as threat. Multiple KIs regarded adults with addiction problems as particularly likely to sexually abuse children remaining behind. [176]

> *"Children who are particularly vulnerable to these risks are children who live in remote area. Children who their mother or father re-married and left them with relative. Children particularly girls who live with grandfather, uncle, biological brother and so on are at risks of sexual abuse committed by these people."*[177]

In interviews, one girl disclosed that she had been sexually abused multiple times by a neighbour. The neighbour had asked her grandmother if the child could help him catch fish. The girl disclosed that she did not tell anyone for some time because she was fearful of how people would react and of getting into trouble. This

[172] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 12).
[173] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[174] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).
[175] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022, (KI 5).
[176] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).
[177] Interview with key informants, Feb 2022 (KIs 8,9 & 10).

girl had also been abused by other men in the village who exposed themselves to her. The girl eventually reported this to her mother when she returned, and the man was arrested.[178] In an interview, the girl's mother also discussed her daughter's experience, stating that, once people in the community heard about the incident, the child experienced stigma, with parents refusing to let their children play with her.[179] In this case, the girl was also neglected and physically abused by her caregiver (grandmother), who was also an alcoholic. The girl did not tell the caregiver about the sexual abuse as she was worried about not being believed or being blamed and beaten by her grandmother.[180] This case highlights how protection risks can often be interrelated, with children who are at risk in their home when remaining behind also being placed at increased risk in their community. KIs noted that boys can also be victims of sexual abuse.[181]

Although there were instances of physical, emotional and sexual abuse that arose throughout interviews, relatively few parents in the returning migrant survey viewed abuse as a risk when leaving children behind (Figure 6): only 16 per cent of parents agreed that their children were at increased risk of sexual abuse as a result of remaining behind, while 23 per cent agreed there is a risk of physical abuse, and 25 per cent agreed children are more at risk of emotional abuse. This suggests that parents may not be fully aware of the risks associated with children remaining behind.

5.3.7 Other challenges – mental health and risky behaviours

One of the outcomes noted for some children who remain behind is emotional problems; key informants noted that children who remain behind often feel sad, particularly because they miss their parents, lack love and care and feel different to other children around them, and in some cases, are rejected.[182] Many children reported missing their parents (and in some cases, missing siblings who migrated with the parent) and being unhappy about their parents migrating without them.[183] For example, one child discussed the negative impact their parents leaving had on them emotionally, in addition to highlighting that during this time, their education was also impacted; the child failed school and had to retake a year:

> *"A long time ago, my parents went to Thailand to work as construction workers. They left me with my grandmother. There were only 2 of us at home. When they got in a vehicle [to leave], I cried. When I heard people playing sad songs, I cried too. At that time, I failed my class and needed to repeat my class two times."*[184]

KIs noted that children who remain behind are likely to engage in risky behaviours. Several children and caregivers noted that they live in dangerous neighbourhoods, with several mentioning drug use being common in their neighbourhood. Caregivers and parents worry about children becoming involved with these individuals and taking drugs themselves. Although no children or caregivers reported that children had engaged in these activities, KIs noted that they had experienced cases where children remaining behind had engaged in alcohol or drug use, because their caregivers were not able to monitor their activities.

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[178] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 5).
[179] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 5).
[180] In-depth interview with parent, Feb 2022 (Parent 5).
[181] Interview with key informants, Feb 2022 (KIs 8,9,10).
[182] Interviews with key informants, Feb 2022 (KI 3, KI 11).
[183] For example, interviews with Child 10, Child 14, Child 15, Child 16, Child 18, Child 21, Child 3
[184] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 18).

5.3.8 Summary

Children who remain behind face a number of challenges and are vulnerable to a range of protection risks. Most continue to live in poverty despite the majority of children remaining behind while parents migrate to earn money to support the family. Children remaining behind often have to engage in child labour to provide financial support to families. Children often lack consistent access to education. Due to caregivers often being elderly grandparents, children often have to assume the role of a caregiver for themselves, their grandparents and their siblings. Without parents being home to support and supervise children, children remaining behind are at risk of neglect and physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Children who remain behind may also be exposed to alcohol and drug misuse by caregivers and community members.

5.4 The impact of COVID-19 on children remaining behind

There were several ways in which the COVID-19 crisis has impacted the situation of children remaining behind in Battambang. A core theme across respondents was that children remaining behind have sunk further into poverty. This is due to migrant parents and caregivers experiencing a loss in income. During lockdowns, migrant parents had been unable to work at all or were forced to work reduced hours, and businesses had been unable to pay parents for completed work. As a result, caregivers had seen a reduction in remittances where parents did not have income remaining after paying for living costs, with responses often referring to parents who migrated to Thailand. This has meant that caregivers have been forced to try and earn additional income to support children:

> *"When they [the parents] did not send money to us, I needed to earn money in order to give it to my grandchildren for them to take to school. My grandchildren cried because they received less pocket money for going to school. They used to get 1,500 riels per day, but now they only get 500 riels (0.12 USD) per day from me."*[185]

Interviewees indicated that in some cases, the COVID-19 crisis has meant that parents have returned home, meaning fewer children remained behind during COVID-19. This is supported by the documented number of migrants returning from Thailand to Cambodia (over 260,000 by December 2021, as reported by Cambodia's National Committee for Counter Trafficking).[186] Many Key informants noted that parents returned upon losing their jobs and being unable to obtain alternative work in their migration destination. Others stated that parents returned home in order to be closer to their children and family during the pandemic.

In the returning migrant survey, parents were asked to report which factors influenced their decision to return home during the pandemic (Figure 7). The most important reason was parents wanting to be closer to their families, followed by concerns about themselves or their family members catching COVID-19. Amongst these families, job losses played a less important role in the decision to return home. However, this may be due to the delay between COVID-19 and migrants' return to Cambodia in the survey sample (July 2021); the employment effects may have played a more important role for those who returned at the start of the pandemic.

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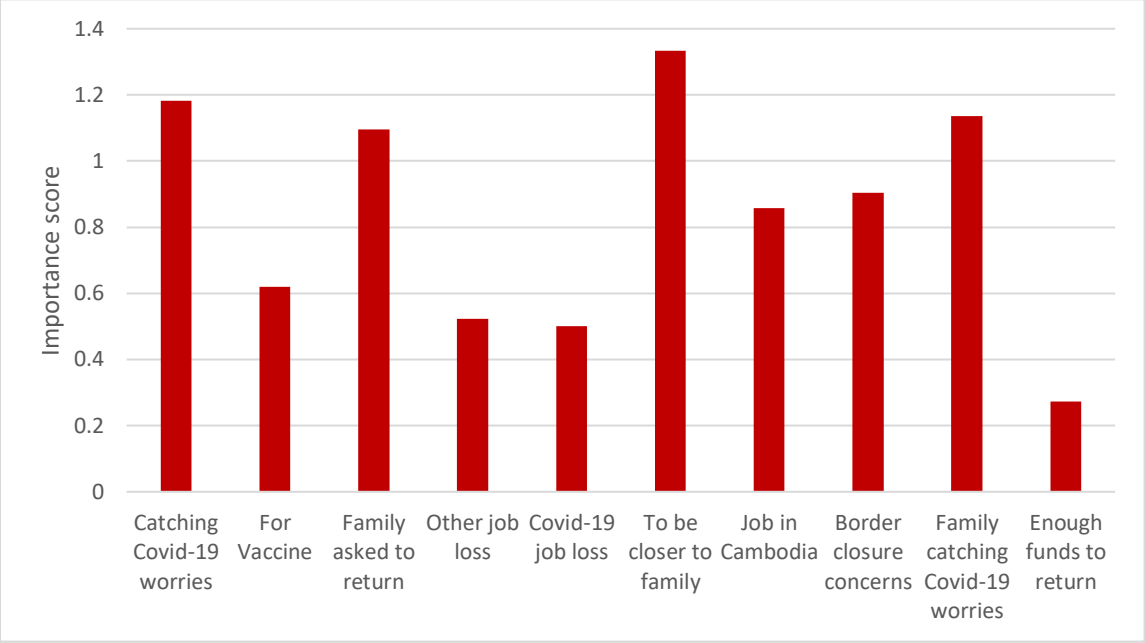
[185] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 9).

[186] Statement by Chou Bun Eng, *Ministry of Interior secretary of state and permanent vice-chair of the NCCT*, December 20th, 2021. (News report). Available at: https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/over-260k-migrants-return-covid-19-outbreak.

Figure 7. Returning migrant survey – Reasons for returning



It was also noted by KIs and a caregiver that parents who have lost their jobs within Cambodia during COVID-19 lockdowns chose to migrate abroad in order to try and seek employment and income to support the family, meaning there are now new cases of children remaining behind.[187] In most instances, these parents will have used irregular migration routes, due to border closures. KIs also mentioned that some parents have migrated internally.

Many children and caregivers reported that children had been unable to go to school during COVID-19. A couple of children mentioned that they engaged in remote learning, although this was uncommon. It was also noted by one KI that, as a result of COVID-19 school closures, some children had migrated with parents to work and support the family. This creates risks for migrant children, including dangerous migration routes, child labour, and lack of access to education when schools reopened:

> *"There was a family who migrated domestically and the parents took their children with them. They said that during COVID-19 pandemic, the school was closed. Their children did not need to attend school. Additionally, they said that their children were grown up enough to do some work. So, they took all their children with them. All of them work."*[188]

In contrast to returning home, some migrant parents have been unable to travel back to Cambodia from Thailand due to borders being closed. As a result, some children who remained behind have not seen their parents since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Several children and caregivers noted that this was the case, stating that parents cannot afford to return through irregular routes. There were also cases of children's parents catching COVID-19 whilst remaining in Thailand, which resulted in them losing further income.

[187] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6); In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 20).
[188] https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1085122 Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).

5.5 Access to protection services for children remaining behind

There were several forms of support that children remaining behind and their caregivers receive, which arose in interviews with children and caregivers. However, it should be noted that in the majority of cases, this support is provided to families living in poverty generally, and is not bespoke or specifically targeted to children remaining behind.

The most common form of support that children and caregivers reported receiving was food; many families mentioned that they had been provided with food, specifically rice and other goods such as stock powders, soy sauce and cooking oil. Food was primarily provided by NGOs, although some mentioned also receiving food from local government commune leaders and from neighbours.

Many caregivers reported that they receive financial assistance from the Cambodian Government in the form of an IDPoor card[189] due to living in poverty. The amount of financial assistance differed between families, ranging from 120,000 to 320,000 riels (29.33 – 78.22 USD) per months. Some caregivers also received small, one-time payments from NGOs.

A few caregivers highlighted that NGOs had provided support to help them set up businesses and become financially independent. Some had received direct financial support to start a business, while others had been provided with physical resources. For example, one caregiver received cages and food to be able to raise chickens.[190] KIs noted that the government (such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs) provide vocational courses and funds to start businesses, in areas such as baking, beauty and seamstry.[191]

NGOs in the Battambang area provide valuable support, especially in relation to access to education. This included providing several children with bicycles or other forms of transport (primarily tuk-tuks), which enabled them to travel to school and providing support for school uniform and other school supplies. In one case, a child reported that they had received a school scholarship.[192] Another child (who was living in a rented room with a sibling without an adult relative caregiver) stated that they receive educational support from an NGO, which provides travel to school, as well as additional educational lessons and food after core school hours.[193] NGOs also provide help to build houses, to ensure that the children had a home in which to live, and provided furniture and other items for the home.

KIs noted that there are parenting programmes in place to teach parents. However, no caregivers in the present study mentioned that they had received this support. It was noted that caregivers of children remaining behind often miss out on this support, as these programmes primarily target parents and those of childbearing age and exclude grandparents. KIs also referenced community outreach work that is carried out by the government and NGO partners, but again this tends to cover general issues such as gender discrimination, violence, abortion and child abuse, and does not target children remaining behind or their caregivers.[194]

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[189] ID Poor is the National Standardised poor identification service, implemented by the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia as part of national efforts to reduce poverty. ID Poor cards provide households living in poverty with financial assistance., https://www.idpoor.gov.kh/

[190] In-depth interview with caregiver, Feb 2022 (Caregiver 8).

[191] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 2).

[192] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 20).

[193] In-depth interview with child, Feb 2022 (Child 14).

[194] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 5).

According to NGOs, some children only need support in the short term in one specific area, such as with education, whilst others require bigger packages of support. One NGO stressed that they try to not provide support for a long period of time because they do not want the family to become dependent on NGOs:

> *"We try not to work on the case for the long term - we don't want the family to be dependent on NGO. [We work] on sustainable help – [providing] knowledge about how to get help and use other resources in the community. We help build capacity for families to help themselves. The case is closed when they have food, and when they have ability to help themselves and earn money, when the children have nutrition, when the child has a caretaker who loves the child and has knowledge, and when the child has a vocation and legal documents."*[195]

It was noted that some children have access to an NGO social worker in cases where there are child protection concerns. One NGO provided an example of how social workers can support children who have remained behind and are not living with a caregiver:

> "*When we come to follow up, we have to talk to the children. We first ask them what happened to their family, [and about their] education, food and siblings. After that we have to tell them - how will you manage the food? How will you take care of things every day? We have to tell them about hygiene and food. We have to tell them to know about these things because they are young. They don't know, they don't learn from school and nobody tells them. The social worker has to tell them how to look after themselves."*[196]

Several individuals were noted as playing an important role in the provision of support for children remaining behind. A high proportion of caregivers mentioned the role of the local village and commune chiefs and councils. Several caregivers were able to go to their chief and ask for help (or the chief would visit them), who then informed families of the support that was available to them; caregivers specifically mentioned the provision of IDPoor cards through communications with the chief. NGOs and other KIs also noted the role the chief of the commune council plays in supporting children remaining behind; NGOs and community council representatives stated that they work with the chief to identify children, or report children in need of support to the village and commune chief in order to have the children signposted to support from other NGOs or to be referred for an IDPoor card.[197]

Interviews highlighted the several limitations in terms of the support provided to children remaining behind and their families, whether by government or NGOs. First, very little support is aimed specifically at children who remain behind. Rather, support is provided to families in poverty and those with child protection needs more generally. It was noted that, often, NGO support is reactive; support is primarily provided where child protection concerns have already been identified and the child has experienced abuse or neglect, rather than being provided as a preventative measure to children remaining behind, generally.[198] One of the main limitations to support noted by all KIs (government and NGO) is that support providers have limited resources and eligibility criteria which target only on the poorest children in the community. They stated that many children need support who do not meet the thresholds for support:

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[195] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 11).
[196] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 12).
[197] Interviews with key informants, Feb 2022 (KI 5, KI6, KI7).
[198] Feedback provided by key stakeholder (Director of PoSVY) during validation meeting.

> *"In my opinion, we have not provided sufficient support. We only do so, based on what we can offer within our capacity. Sometimes, we do not provide support to the families that own a two-storey house or big house, then they get upset with us. They said their house is big but it is so empty. They owe a lot of debts and they lose their money in the rice production. They need support too. However, the District Administration denies their claim because they are not in the criteria because they own a big house."*[199]

Key informants also noted that support is often only provided on a short-term basis. NGOs lack the resources to be able to follow-up with children or provide long-term support:

> *"The poorest child is the child who lives with poor grandparents. We provide food for 6 months. We can't help them fully. It is hard for us. We provide school uniform and materials, but we can't provide food every day or forever. It is only from time to time and temporary. There are about 50 children per year that we can identify and support. However, there are still many more poor children that we have not identified."*[200]

All children and caregivers reported that they were happy with the support that had been provided and that support had helped them. However, as illustrated throughout this report, many children remain in poverty, continue to have difficulty accessing food and education, and remain exposed to protection risks such as abuse and neglect. This shows that the support available to children remaining behind is currently not sufficient to meet their protection needs.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The inevitable conclusion from this research is that poverty is the underlying reason for parental migration: for the most part, children remain behind to enable parents to earn money to support the family. Parents make the choice for their children to remain behind based on the lack of availability of childcare at their migration destination, to enable children to access education in Cambodia and as a result of employer rules and modes of migration (i.e. irregular routes) making it difficult to take children with them. Children do not have agency in the decision to remain behind, but many say they support their parents' decision. Children remaining behind in Battambang tend to live in rural areas, and are primarily looked after by grandmothers and aunts. The majority of children remaining behind receive remittances from parents, although there are inconsistencies in the frequency and amount of money sent home. Most children keep in regular contact with the parents, but there are instances where children and parents do not communicate.

Children remaining behind face a range of challenges and protection risks. Despite remittances, most children remaining behind in Battambang live in poverty, lack access to sufficient food, have inconsistent access to education and often engage in child labour. Many children remaining behind have caring responsibilities, particularly for elderly caregivers and younger siblings. They are also at risk of neglect and physical, emotional and sexual abuse due to caregivers' lack of capacity to provide care, as well as other dangers, including exposure to alcohol and drug misuse. COVID-19 has led to some parents returning home and some parents migrating with children, due to school closures. However, some parents have continued to migrate without children, and many children have been unable to see their parents since the pandemic began, due to border closures and resulting difficulties for parents returning. There is limited support available to children remaining

[199] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 6).
[200] Interview with key informant, Feb 2022 (KI 4).

behind: while some children have received financial support, food and educational support from NGOs and communes, this is not always sufficient to meet their needs. Available (if limited) support targets families in poverty, rather than specifically targeting children who remain behind or their caregivers. NGOs and local governments also lack the resources to provide long term support to children.

Based on the case study findings, the following recommendations are made:

- MoSVY should conduct a national-scale study to learn about the needs of children remaining behind, to support the development of policies and programmes to meet these needs and increase dissemination of knowledge on the situation of children who remain behind to parents and communities. Policies to be considered include the development of formal kinship care arrangements;
- MoSVY should reconsider the criteria for families in poverty receiving financial support, with consideration of the risks posed to children who do not receive support ;
- MoSVY should develop a national systematic recording of children remaining behind by local authority to track these children and identify those in need of support;
- Local authorities should be encouraged to keep a list of all parents who have migrated and put parents under a duty to report the placement of their children with relatives or other caregivers to enable easy identification of children remaining behind. Local authorities should be encouraged to monitor children remaining behind to ensure the arrangements made for such children are adequate and, in the event that they are not, to make a referral to the district social services office or DoSVY (at the provincial level);
- MoSVY should consider incorporating children remaining behind as a distinct group within the Primero (child protection case management) system and should strengthen the availability of targeted services (including preventative services) to children remaining behind and their family; including targeted financial support for food and education costs, the provision of educational resources for children, parenting support programmes for elderly caregivers, and increased support for elderly caregivers' physical healthcare needs – this could be achieved through partnerships with NGO service providers;
- MoSVY and DoSVY should further support the collaboration and coordination between the different key actors (village chiefs, commune leaders, NGOs, social services workforce, schools, religious leaders), to ensure the protection needs of children remaining behind are met;
- MoSVY and the Ministry of Education should work together to increase the capacity of schools to identify children at risk of dropout or missing school due to remaining behind status, through the appointment of a teacher to act as a focal point for children remaining behind to monitor attendance and welfare of such children and work in cooperation with the CCWC;
- MoSVY should work to assess the risk of drop out of school for children remaining behind to include them in the government cash transfer programme in order to bring them back school and to engage adolescents in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training programme;
- MoSVY, DoSVY, CCWC and NGOs who provide positive parenting programmes should ensure that grandparents and non-parent caregivers are included amongst those targeted;
- MoSVY should ensure that migrating parents are supported (pre-departure) with support/skills/information on how to continue to provide support to children who remain behind (including regular contact with children), particularly related to emotional risks highlighted in the case study;
- MoSVY should ensure parents are provided with financial and debt management support and support for income generation and employment opportunities in rural Cambodia to reduce the need for parents' migration;

- MoSVY, CCWC, MoI, local authorities and NGOs in the area should utilise existing SBCC platforms (such as Cambodia PROTECT) to increase their effort to build awareness of positive parenting and child protection issues for families with children remaining behind, including how to report abuse. Communications should aim to increase awareness amongst local authorities, caregivers, parents and communities of their responsibility and role in providing protective roles for children remaining behind. Other communications to be considered include producing leaflets and posters and community theatre groups for communes to raise awareness of the needs of children remaining behind, particularly the need for parents to communicate regularly with their children. Such information should also include the impact of irregular migration on the ability to maintain contact with children remaining behind.

7. APPENDICES

7.1 Ethical protocol

7.1.1 Harm / benefit analysis

A fundamental principle of ethical research with human (and in particular, child and youth) participants is 'do no harm'. This means that the welfare and best interests of participants are the primary considerations guiding the design of the methodology and data collection methods.

UNICEF's and Coram International's ethical guidelines require a consideration of whether the research needs to be done, if children need to be involved in it, and, if so, in what capacity. An analysis of potential harms of the research on children and other participants, is required, along with an assessment of the benefits of the research. Strategies are required to ensure that children are not harmed as a result of their participation in the research, and that distress due to their participation is minimised.

Benefit analysis

It is important to establish that the research will bring benefit to children and their communities more generally and that it is necessary (the research process will bring about *new* information or knowledge). It must also be demonstrated that it is necessary for children to be involved in the research as participants.

The justification and rationale for the research is set out in the study's inception report. In summary, the main objective of the research is increase understanding of drivers and impacts of migration for children in the ASEAN region. This research specifically focuses on understanding drivers, prevalence, protection risks and access to support for children in Cambodia who remain behind when parents migrate. The research will inform efforts within ASEAN to support children affected by migration. The research is timely: ASEAN has recently adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration. This research is therefore crucial to supporting the implementation of this declaration and the rights of children to be protected from the impacts of migration be realised.

There are very limited existing data and analysis on children left behind in Cambodia. In order to strengthen child protection and support services for this group of children, it is important to produce robust evidence on drivers and factors that lead to children remaining behind, the protection risks and challenges that these children experience, and where there are gaps and challenges to support currently being provided to children left behind. This research is therefore crucial in providing the evidence needed to inform child protection and support services for children left behind in Cambodia.

The research will involve primary qualitative data collection, including key informant interviews with stakeholders and a series of interviews with children, and caregivers of children, who have remained behind when a parent has migrated, in addition to a survey of returning migrants who have children remaining behind in Battambang, Cambodia. All primary data collection will be conducted in Battambang, Cambodia. The research will also collect and analyse existing data that provides insight to the prevalence and drivers of parents migrating while children remain behind in Cambodia. These methods have been selected as this research is an in-depth case study; interviews with children and caregivers are essential to understand the

experiences of children who remain behind when parents migrate, and Battambang is an appropriate location for research, due to being the second largest city in Cambodia, and a known area for migration into Thailand, due to being close to the Thai border.

Harm analysis

Children and carers involved in the research could face secondary trauma, as there is a potential for discussing quite sensitive material related to the challenges they experience when being left behind (e.g., personal experiences of child protection harms, emotional implications of being separated from parents, vulnerabilities connected to accessing support). It should be noted that the data collection will be carried out according to the 'do no harm' principle – that, where the data collection is likely to cause harm to participants, the needs of the participants will be paramount. Nonetheless, the importance of child participation in the data collection is recognised; it is also recognised that, provided the right conditions are in place, children can find it empowering to discuss their experiences and understand that this may contribute to developments in support for left behind children.

To minimise potential harm caused to child participants, children will be given the option of carrying out the interview with a trusted adult (e.g. a parent / carer or NGO support worker, where appropriate), or a friend. In addition, the researcher is highly qualified and experienced at interviewing children and will use sensitive, age-appropriate tools and techniques.

Front-line professionals and experts could face risks to their employment should it be discovered that they have expressed views that are contrary to dominant social norms, values and beliefs. However, this risk will be mitigated through carrying out individual interviews with experts and professionals where there are sensitivities (i.e. not FGDs) and through following strict anonymity and data protection protocols (see below).

Harm minimisation strategies

It is important to ensure that all necessary measures are taken to minimise physical and emotional harm to participants and to researchers. The following strategies will be used to minimise harm and ensure the meaningful participation of children, parents / carers, professionals and experts in the research.

Selection and training of researchers

All researchers have necessary qualifications, knowledge and considerable experience carrying out data collection with professionals, government representatives, youth, children, families and community members, including on sensitive topics. The national research consultant has been recruited on the basis of their knowledge or experience of the child protection systems in place in Cambodia and extensive experience in conducting child-friendly research.

International researchers have all undergone criminal history checks and all researchers, including the national researcher, are required to sign a code of conduct as part of the contracting process.

Researchers will all be involved in an orientation session prior to the pre-testing of tools and data collection. This will be led by the Team Leader / International Experts and will cover the purpose and aims of the research, ensuring familiarity with the data collection tools and training on the ethical protocol and tools.

Pre-testing tools

The data collection tools, along with the ethical tools (information sheets and consent forms) will be piloted on a small sample of research participants in Cambodia, in order to test the understanding and utility of the tools and their cultural appropriateness, allowing for tools to be adjusted before data collection commences.

Recruitment of research participants

Researchers will need to ensure that recruitment of participants does not increase the risk of them suffering from harm through the experience through re-traumatisation (through, for example, discussion of traumatic experiences). Selection of participants will be done through consultation with NGO service providers who work with them, to ensure participants are only involved where they are unlikely to experience secondary trauma through the interview process. Participants will only be recruited from the age of 12 years.

Similarly, front-line professionals will be selected on the basis of them having an existing role in relation to the protection and support of children affected by migration, including children who remain behind, and will therefore already be known to the community in this capacity.

Design of data collection tools and data collection approaches and processes

The topics that may be covered in the research may cause distress to some participants (i.e. when asking children about the challenges they experience as a result of being remaining home while their parents migrate). Throughout interviews, researchers will be led by the 'do no harm' principle, which requires that the data collection be considered secondary to the need to avoid harm to research participants. This will be covered in-depth in the orientation session, with practical examples being given.

Where it is clear that the interview is having a negative effect on a participant (e.g. the participant breaks down, becomes very quiet and withdrawn, becomes shaky etc.), the researcher will be advised to suggest stopping the interview and will suggest follow up support to the participant. Where participants reveal current or past experiences of violence or exploitation, the researcher will convey empathy, but will not show shock or anger, as this can be harmful to persons who have experienced violence (please refer to section below on how child protection disclosures will be addressed). These matters will be covered in-depth during the orientation session with the researcher.

In order to reduce the risk of stress or harm to participants:

- Data collection tools have been designed in a manner that avoids direct, confronting questions, judgement and blame. They have also been developed to ensure that they are relevant to the cultural context. Pre-testing these tools will ensure that they are relevant and appropriate and that they avoid confronting or culturally insensitive questions.

- Interviews may cover particularly sensitive or traumatic material, and it is important to ensure that participants feel empowered and not solely like victims. Interviews will finish on a 'positive or empowering note' through asking questions about what would improve the situation of children in their community who remain behind. This will help to ensure that participants do not leave the interview focusing on past traumatic experiences.

- In order to reduce stress caused to children and parents / carers in individual interviews, children and parents / carers will be provided with the opportunity to participate in data collection with a trusted adult or friend if this would make them feel more at ease. Researchers should identify staff at the referring NGO that are available to accompany participants, if requested.

Ensuring the safety of participants and researchers

Interviews with children and caregivers and the returning migrant survey will be conducted in-person, as Cambodia has lifted COVID-19 restrictions. Interviews will be conducted at a central location of the referring NGO. However, throughout the research, the COVID-19 situation will be continually monitored, and if the research is considered to put participants or researchers at risk, interviews will be conducted via Zoom / WhatsApp / Skype etc. Key informant interviews will be primarily conducted remotely. If COVID-19 restrictions are implemented, the returning migrant survey will not be implemented.

For remote KIIs, researchers will communicate with participants to ensure that they are in a private but central location during the virtual interview, including NGO offices. However, where preferable for participants, interviews maybe carried out where participants are located in their households. All data collection will take place in daylight hours.

Coram International will take measures to support the mental wellbeing of researchers. Coram has a Mental Health First Aid focal point within its staff and researchers will be provided with the opportunity to de-brief with the manager of the research project or member of staff responsible for supervising data collection. Researchers will be sign-posted to counselling services if required.

Responding to trauma, distress and protection disclosures

During the data collection process, child participants may disclose information that raises child protection concerns – i.e. that they are at risk of significant harm. As participants will be accessed through non-government service providers, it is likely that they will already have accessed necessary services and support for past child protection issues. However, to ensure that participants who have protection concerns are identified and responded to appropriately, a focal point will be identified in UNICEF Cambodia and the NGO through which participants were recruited. The researcher will inform focal points of cases in which there are child protection concerns, so that concerns can be responded to appropriately (i.e., NGOs and UNICEF representatives will decide whether to make an immediate formal child protection referral or, where this is not required, a service provider to refer the child or family to will be identified). The researcher will be provided with in-depth training on the child protection protocol.

It is also possible that adult participants disclose past or current traumatic experiences. In these cases, it is essential that participants provide consent to any protection referrals. Participants will be given a list of service providers that they are able to contact to receive support or assistance.

7.1.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Researchers will ensure that participation in research is on a voluntary basis. Researchers will explain to participants in clear language that participants are not *required* to participate in the study, and that they may stop participating in the research at any time. Researchers will carefully explain that refusal to participate will not result in any negative consequences. Incentives will not be provided to participants in order to ensure that participation in the research has not been induced. However, where transport costs are incurred, they will be reimbursed. These matters are set out clearly in the study's participant information sheets. Participants will be clearly advised that their participation or lack of participation in the study will not lead to any direct benefits or sanctions / removal of benefits.

All research participants will be required to give positive informed consent in order to participate in the study. Researchers will use information forms in all interviews, and will obtain verbal consent; Consent forms will not

be used as formal consent forms may be intimidating to individuals (particularly children) who are not used to the process, and may hinder discussions in interviews. Coram international and the national consultant have extensive experience and expertise gaining consent from children, particularly the age group in this research (12-17 years). Consent will be verbally requested and interviewers will make a note of whether consent has or has not been given. All participants will be given an information sheet containing information about the study and ethical protocol, along with the contact details of service providers and health care providers in case the participant requires access to services following the interview. For the quantitative survey for migrants returning through the Duong border, the enumerator will read participant information included in the 'introduction' section of the survey. For interviews with children, caregiver consent will also be required.

At the start of each interview, research participants will be informed of the purpose and nature of the study, their contribution, and how the data collected from them will be used in the study, verbally and through an information sheet (Annexes 2 – 4), which will be made available in the language of research participants. The information form explains, in clear, appropriate language, the nature of the study, the participant's expected contribution and the fact that participation is entirely voluntary. Researchers will be advised to talk participants though the information form and ensure that they understand it. For participants who are unable to read, the researcher will read the consent form to the participant.

If unsure, researchers will request the participant to relay the key information back to them to ensure that they have understood it. Participants will also be advised that the information they provide will be held in strict confidence (see below). The researcher will also verbally provide information about how information provided will be stored securely and outline the child protection policy, particularly in relation to the safeguarding protocols (i.e. notifying the UNICEF / NGO safeguarding focal point), should any child protection concerns arise during the interviews.

In addition to seeking consent from individual participants, it is important to seek the support of the relevant Government Ministries / Departments. In order to achieve this, letters will be sent to the key Government Departments along with key NGOs (where necessary). The letters will explain the purpose and nature of the study and the purpose of the data collection, and requests assistance from these institutions to access research participants.

7.1.3 Anonymity and data protection

The identity of all research participants will be kept confidential throughout the process of data collection as well as in the analysis and writing up study findings. The following measures will be used to ensure anonymity:

- Interviews will take place either in person or remotely in a secure, private location (where possible, in a room within a service provider's office / government office etc.) which ensures that the participant's answers are not overheard;
- Researchers will not record the name of participants and will ensure that names are not recorded on any documents containing collected data, including on transcripts of interviews;
- Researchers will delete electronic records of data from laptops immediately after they are sent to Coram International (in a password-protected and secure SharePoint account);
- Coram International will store all data on a secure, locked server, to which persons who are not employed by the Centre cannot gain access. All employees of Coram International, including volunteers and interns, receive a criminal record check before employment commences;

- Transcripts will be saved on the secure server for a period of three years and will then be deleted; and
- Research findings will be presented in such a way so as to ensure that individuals are not able to be identified.

All participants will be informed of their rights to anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process, verbally and in information sheets. All efforts will be made to avoid gathering information that may result in a compromise to participant confidentiality; in any cases where this is not possible, participants will be informed. This may occur where, in a particular, named setting, the background information relating to a participant may make it possible for them to be identified even where they are not named. Researchers will then ask participants whether they wish to have this information removed from any published report of findings (e.g., location, specific job title etc.). However, the interview topics are not particularly sensitive as they will not relate to specific incidents or cases and will focus on generalised issues facing children affected by migration and gaps in legal and operational frameworks in the child protection system, and how these impact the work of their agency / team. The physical or professional risks to participants are therefore minimal.

It is noted that interview transcripts will be typed or hand written in real time (where possible, interviews will be carried out with two researchers – one conducting the interview and another recording notes from the interview). Audio recording will not be used as this could be intimidating and may lead to participants feeling unable to communicate freely and provide more authentic information.

7.1.4 Protection from harm when conducting research online / remotely

For conducting interviews and/or focus groups online / virtually (i.e. video call / phone call), the following measures will be put in place alongside the general safeguarding, child protection and data protection policies to protect participants and researchers.

General online safeguarding

When using an online video call platform (such as Zoom), a waiting room will be used to ensure only invited attendees are on the call. A member of the research team will be the host of the meeting, with full control over sharing rights and attendees. The host will only allow invited attendees out of the waiting room into the call. All meetings will be password protected, and the password will only be shared with invitees. In the event of an uninvited participant / intruder joining the call, the host will remove them, or, as a last resort, end the call, and contact the participant to rearrange the interview and provide a new password protected invite.

The sharing / showing of inappropriate content

One risk of online interviews/calls is the potential for the sharing of inappropriate content. This includes the sharing of any offensive images, videos, text or audio messages in the call, or the visibility of inappropriate content on a call participant's video (for example a poster, object or participant clothing). To mitigate this risk, the host of the call (researcher) will remove any participants who share inappropriate content in the call and follow any necessary safeguarding procedures. If mildly inappropriate content is in view, request that this is corrected / removed. If seriously offensive or inappropriate content is shown, or if participants refuse to remove mildly inappropriate content, the participant will be removed from the call, and appropriate follow-up support will be provided to anyone remaining on the call. Where possible, private chat functions will be turned off, so as to minimise the chance of sharing of inappropriate content amongst call participants.

7.1.5 Protection from COVID-19-related risks

For face-to-face data collection, including children and families, the following measures will be put in place in order to protect researchers from COVID-19 infection.

Vaccination

It is noted that the national researcher is fully (double) vaccinated.

Participant Recruitment: screening

When researchers have determined participants are suitable and willing to participate in face-to-face data collection, they will undertake screening questions to establish whether participants:

- are experiencing any flu-like and/or COVID-19 symptoms;
- have been diagnosed with COVID-19;
- have been in close contact with any individuals experiencing any flu-like and/or COVID-19 symptoms;
- have been in close contact with any individuals diagnosed with COVID-19;
- are shielding or caring for individuals vulnerable to COVID-19;
- are defined as either Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or Clinically Vulnerable;
- are content and confident to participate in face-to-face data collection, specifically any activities in which they may be asked to engage e.g. group activities with other participants in a central location; and
- have any specific concerns regarding participating in face-to-face data collection.

Participants who respond to screening questions which indicate they have COVID-19, have a high risk of infection and/or are shielding or caring for individuals vulnerable to COVID-19 and/or are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable will not be recruited for face-to-face data collection.

Researchers will ensure that, when recording responses to screener questions, no inferences are made to the actual health of participants. Researchers are not health professionals. The screening questions are to be used to reduce potential risk to others involved in research (including research participants and researchers).

Researchers will be informed that they must inform participants that if their health situation changes between the time of recruitment and face to face data collection they can no longer participate.

Participants will be provided with a telephone number, website, email, and contact address which participants can contact if they become infected with COVID-19 between recruitment and participating in any face-to-face data collection exercises. This information will be included in the information sheet on access to services for responding to trauma or protection needs (to be developed in collaboration with UNICEF and national researchers).

Researchers will inform participants of the implications of participating in any face-to-face data collection, specifically any contract tracing applications and actions required which apply to the country where face to face data collection is being undertaken.

Preparations for Face-to-Face Data Collection

During face-to-face data collection, the researcher will:

- Position themselves in a location where they are able to adhere to social distancing requirements (i.e. position themselves 1.5 metres away from persons);
- Ensure participants adhere to social distancing requirements (i.e. position chairs 1.5 metres apart);
- Carry tissues and sanitary wipes and throw away in a bin any which are used – ask participants to use hand sanitiser on entering and leaving the interview room when applicable;
- Avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes;
- Avoid any physical contact such as shaking a participant's hand;
- Be aware that asking individuals to participate in research may cause unnecessary stress and concern and to take steps to offer assurances to mitigate such concerns; and
- Wear a face mask, face shield and provide the same to participants.

The researcher will be required to sign an undertaking that they will comply with these requirements, along with other ethical requirements as part of the contracting process.

The researcher will ensure that if there has been a time delay between recruitment and data collection, the screening questions to establish COVID-19 risk are repeated before face-to-face data collection commences. The researcher must ensure that any participants whose screener responses raise concerns are asked to withdraw from the data collection activity and/or re-directed to completing the activity via an alternative data collection method e.g. online, telephone.

All information sheets and other materials shared during interviews will be done in a way to reduce risk of infection, including:

- Supplying sanitary cleansing wipes to clean data collection support materials;
- Cleaning data collection support materials before and after being handled by participants;
- Producing data collection support materials in a durable material which is easy and effective to clean; and
- Providing instructions on how to handle and transfer materials to and from participants e.g. putting information on the ground, garden walls (as appropriate depending on the environment) and stepping back in accordance with social distancing requirements to allow participants to retrieve information.

As noted above, the researcher will provide participants a telephone number, website, email, and contact address which participants can contact if they become infected with COVID-19 following a face-to-face data collection exercise.

7.2 Sample for in-depth interviews

7.2.1 Child sample

Child	Gender	Age	Dwelling	Caregiver	Migrant parent location	Time spent left behind
1	Male	15	Rural Khmer house	Aunt	Thailand	10> years
2	Male	14	Rural Khmer house	Grandparents (and uncle)	Thailand	12 years
3	Female	12	Rural Khmer house	Grandparents	Thailand	3 years
4	Male	12	Rental Room	House owner	Thailand	-
5	Female	12	Rural Khmer House	Grandparents and auntie	-	Regular short-term migration (4-5 days)
6	Male	13	Rural Khmer House	Now mother (previously grandparents)	Thailand	Few weeks
7	Male	11	Rural Khmer House	Now mother (previously grandparents)	Thailand	-
8	Female	11	Rural Khmer House	Now mother (previously grandparents)	Phnom Penh (previously Sihanoukville)	-
9	Female	13	Rural Khmer House	Sister	Phnom Penh	4-5 years
10	Male	12	Rural Khmer House	Grandparents	Phnom Penh	1 year

11	Male	12	Rural Khmer House	Aunt and Uncle	Sihanoukville	1 year
12	Female	14	Rural Khmer House	Grandmother and aunt	Sihanoukville	2 years
13	Male	14	Rural Khmer House	Parents (was living with grandmother)	Thailand	-
14	Female	11	Rented room	Sibling	Thailand	4 months
15	Male	12	Rural Khmer House	Grandmother	-	3-4 months
16	Female	12	Rural Khmer House	Aunt	Thailand	10> years
17	Female	11	Rural Khmer House	Grandmother	-	-
18	Female	13	Rural Khmer House	Mother	Thailand	2-3 months (plus past both parents migrating in 2020)
19	Female	15	Rural Khmer House	Grandmother (but does not live with grandmother)	Phnom Penh	Few months
20	Male	15	Rural Khmer House	Aunt	Thailand	10> years
21	Male	11	Rural Khmer House	Grandmother	Phnom Penh (previously Thailand)	8 years

7.2.2 Caregiver sample

Caregiver	Gender	Age	Relationship to Child/ren	Disability
1	Female	35	Aunt	
2	Female	60	Grandmother / Aunt	No (but family member yes)
3	Female	52	Aunt and Grandmother	
4	Female	60	Grandmother	
5	Female	37	Aunt	No (but husband yes)
6	Female	56	Grandmother	Yes
7	Male	76	Grandfather	Yes
8	Female	-	Grandmother	No
9	Female	67	Grandmother	No (but husband yes)
10	Female	67	Grandmother	No
12	Female	-	Aunt	No
13	Female	50	Non-relative landlady	No
14	Female	50	Grandmother / Aunt	No
15	Female	35	Aunt	No (but other family member yes)
16	Female	60	Grandmother	No
17	Female	65	Great Aunt	Yes
18	Female	55	Grandmother	No (but other family member yes)

7.2.3 Returned parent sample

Returned migrant parent	Gender	Age	Disability
1	Male	41	No
2	Female & Male	F = 35 M = 45	M = yes, F = no
3	Female	39	No (but husband yes)
4	Female	36	No (but one son yes)
5	Female	29	No

7.2.4 KII sample

KII	Organization	Type	Role
1	Provincial Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (PoSVY)	Gov	Social worker
2	Provincial Department of Women Affairs (PoWA)	Gov	Director
3	Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (PoSVY)	Gov	Director of Child Welfare and Rehabilitation Office
4	Office of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (PoSVY) of Thmar Kaul District	Gov	Director
5	Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC)	Gov	Woman and children focal point (Thmar Kaul district)
6	Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC)	Gov	Woman and children focal point (Bavel district)

7	Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC)	Gov	Woman and children focal point (Knach Romeas Commune)
8/9/10	Provincial Council Officials	Gov	Deputy Governor; Chief of Provincial Council; Deputy Chief of Provincial Council
11	Komar Rikrea	NGO	Director
12	Children's Future International	NGO	Director