

**GARMENT WORKER
NEEDS ASSESSMENT
DURING COVID19**



BACKGROUND

GARMENT WORKER NEEDS ASSESSMENT DURING COVID19

The COVID19 pandemic has severely impacted the garment industry in Cambodia. As of July 2020, over 400 factories have temporarily or permanently closed down and over 150,000 workers are out of work.¹ The garment industry employs approximately 750,000 workers in Cambodia, 89% of whom are women.

CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis demonstrates the disproportionate impact that COVID19 has had on women in Cambodia and around the world. A lot of attention has been placed on the garment industry, but there is little detailed information available from the workers themselves on the impact of the pandemic and what support they need.

The objectives of this needs assessment are to:

- Better understand the needs of women garment workers during the COVID19 pandemic
- Develop evidence-based recommendations for CARE and civil society partners, workers' organizations, employers, brands and government stakeholders in Cambodia on how to best address the needs of women garment workers during the COVID19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

CARE delivered a quantitative survey with 307 female garment workers from 28 May to 5 June 2020. CARE staff acted as enumerators and delivered the survey over the telephone, using Kobo Toolbox to record responses.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

All 307 workers who took part in the survey are female. 52% were under the age of 30 and 68% were married. Nearly all the workers sampled were working or suspended from 46 factories that CARE partners with.

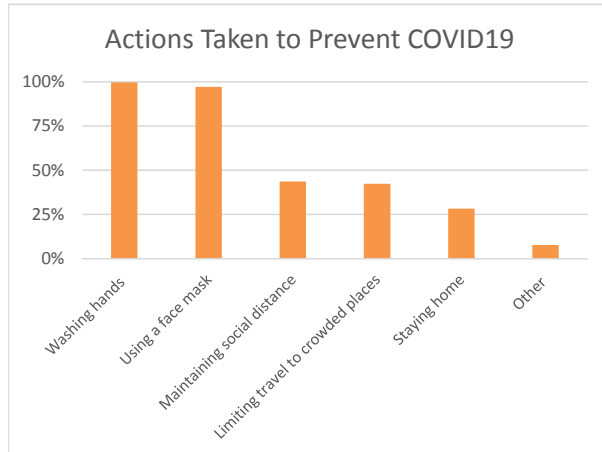
CARE's sample was deliberately targeted to include workers who are still working in the factories, either fully or with reduced hours, and those who have been suspended or laid-off. The percentages of those in and not in work are therefore not representative of the garment industry workforce as a whole. 61% of our sample was fully or partially working in late May/early June, whilst 39% have either been suspended or laid off in the period Feb-May 2020.

In this assessment, CARE has delineated some of the findings by Working Status and Job Role in order to better understand the experiences of workers in different situations during the pandemic.

Sample by Work Status	#	%	Sample by Job Role	#	%
Fully working at the factory	180	59	Supervisor	16	5
Suspended from work	114	37	Line Leader	42	14
Partially working at the factory	7	2	Workers	245	80
Laid off or resigned	6	2	Cleaner, guard (other auxiliary role)	4	1
Total	307	100	Total	307	100

1. Khmer Times (16/07/2020), 'Cambodia's Garment Industry Seeks Urgent Help to Stay Alive'.

COVID19 AWARENESS AND BEHAVIOURS



A huge majority of workers are taking steps to prevent COVID19, but the majority are not socially distancing. Lack of social distancing is concerning and likely stems from the crowded living, commuting and working conditions faced by workers. These findings suggest that awareness-raising efforts have been successful, but more focus now needs to be placed on supporting practical changes in workers' accommodation, commutes and workplaces to enable social distancing.

IMPACT OF COVID19

The **5 biggest problems** workers have faced due to COVID19 are:

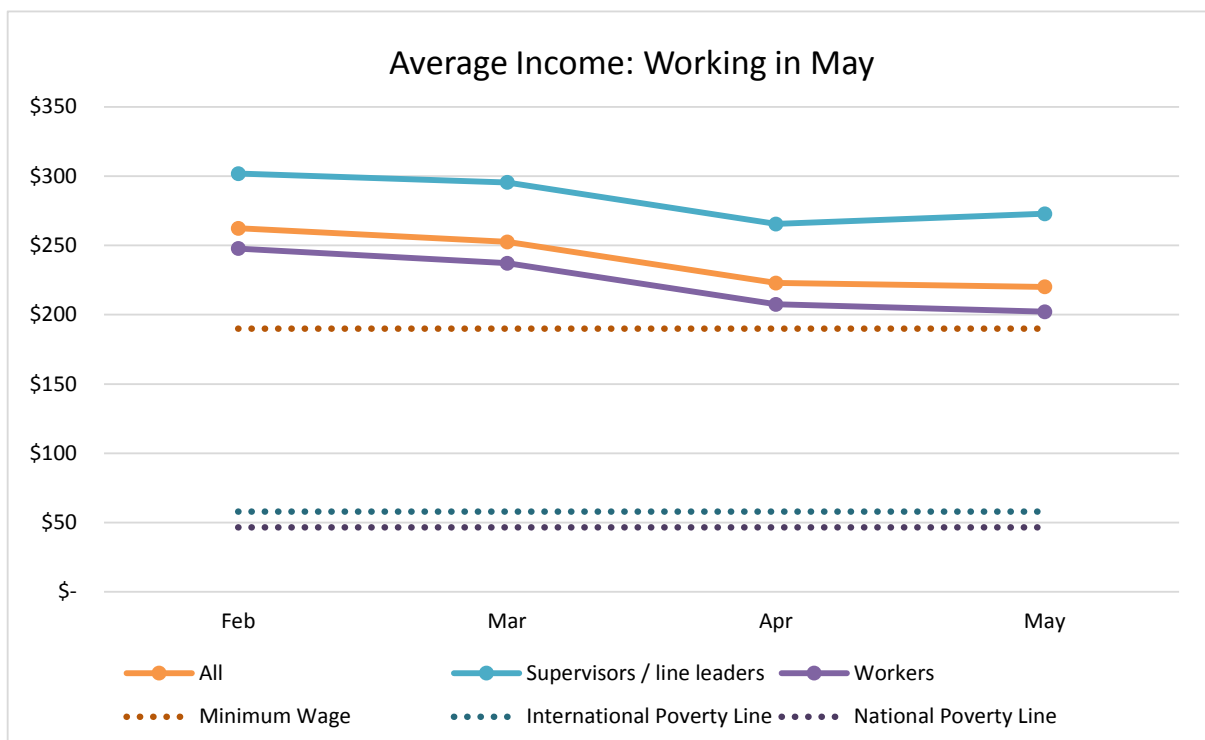
1. Lack of income/loss of job (89%)
2. Increased anxiety and mental pressure (73%)
3. Food insecurity (41%)
4. Mobility barriers (41%)
5. Increased burden of unpaid care work (13%)

The **top 5 forms of support workers want to receive** during COVID19 are:

1. Cash (67%)
2. Access to alternative sources of income (53%)
3. Hygiene materials (42%)
4. Information on preventing COVID19 (42%)
5. Food (29%)

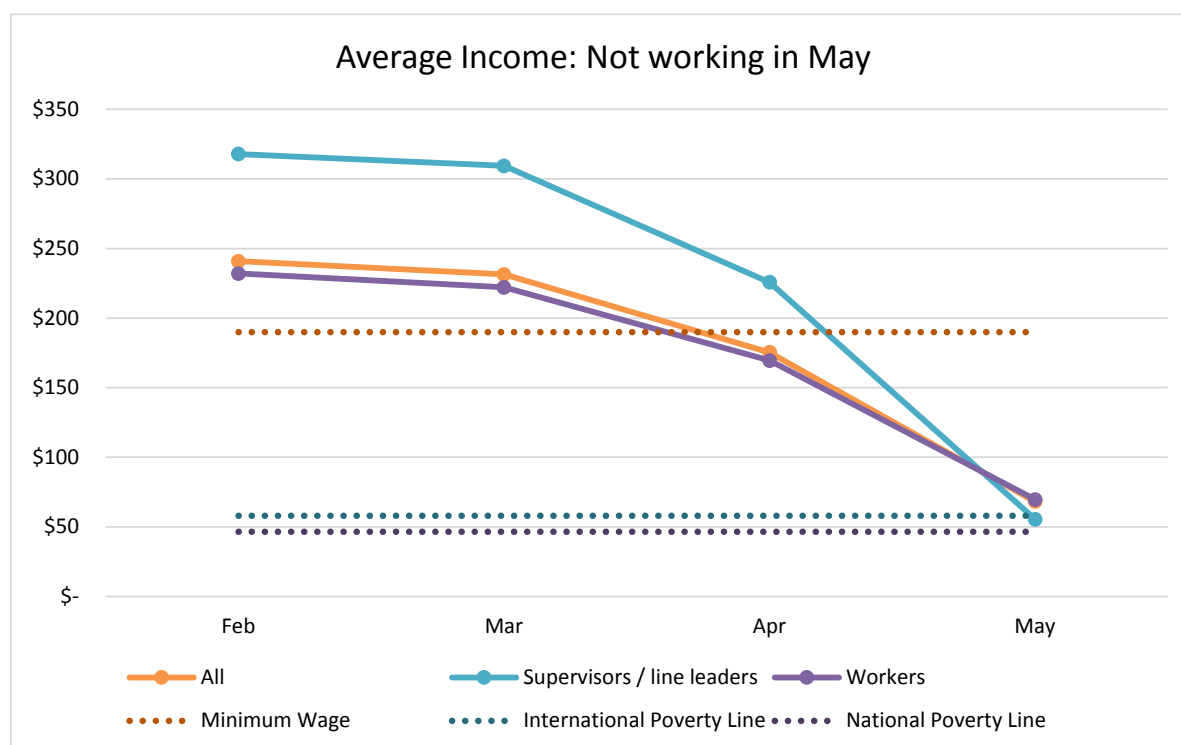
88% of workers reported their income has reduced as a result of COVID19. Between February and May 2020, workers have experienced on average a **42% reduction in their monthly income**. This increases to a **70% reduction in income for those who have been suspended or laid-off**.²

Average income for workers who are still working in the factories has dropped from \$248 in February to \$202 in May, likely as a result of the reduction in overtime hours available.

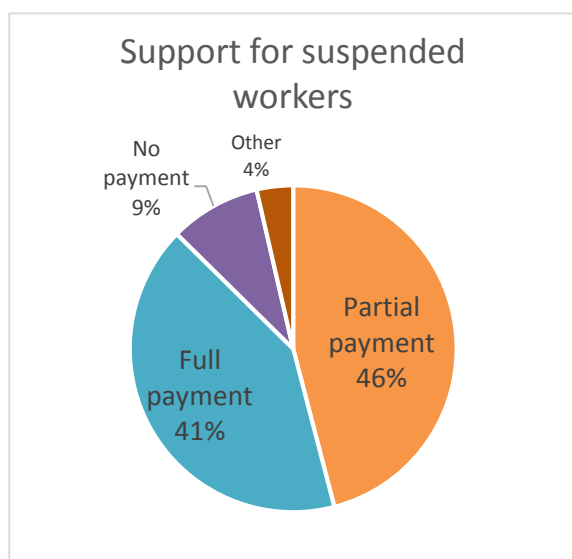


² 'Monthly income' is total take-home pay for the month, including basic pay, overtime pay and bonuses.

For workers who have been suspended or laid-off by May, the average has dropped to \$68 and median income is only \$50. This means that within CARE's sample at the end of May, **50% of suspended/laid-off workers were living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day** and close to the Cambodian national poverty line of KR 6,347 per day.³ **22% of suspended/laid-off workers reported no income at all in May.**



The Cambodian government has worked with employers to provide a \$70 stipend for workers who are suspended. In late May, 87% of workers had received at least some of this payment, but **only 41% had received the full \$70 at the time of the survey.**

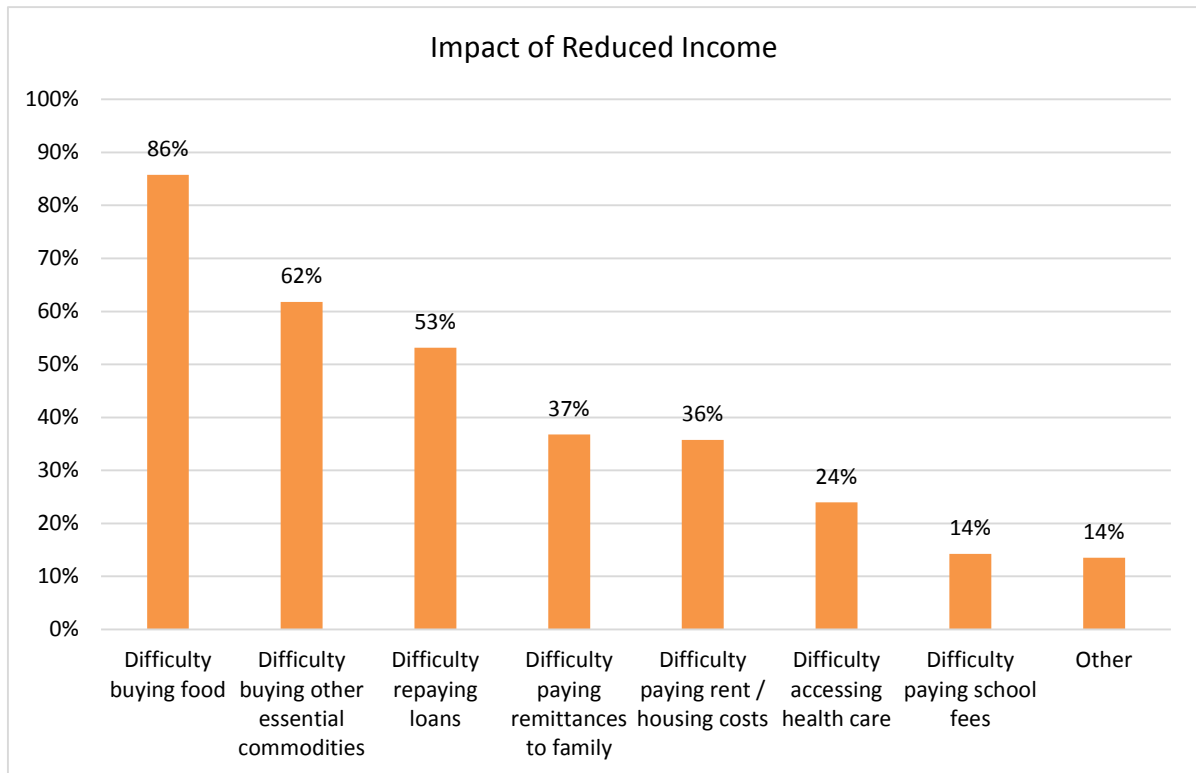


Income in May (USD)		Working		Not Working		All
		Mean	Median	Mean	Median	
All	Mean	220	220	68	50	157
	Median	220	220	50	50	190
Supervisors	Mean	273	231	56	45	224
	Median	231	228	45	45	228
Workers	Mean	202	225	70	50	141
	Median	225	225	50	50	141

Additional payments have been made since the time of CARE's survey, so it is possible that average income for suspended workers has increased as more suspended workers receive the \$70 stipend. Nevertheless, it is clear that suspended/laid-off workers now have incomes significantly below the minimum wage – which is itself, not a living wage—and that **even with the support of the stipend scheme, many are living just above the national poverty line.** Workers are facing a precarious situation, especially as the economic recovery from COVID19 is expected to be slow and uneven, so ongoing support through social assistance and access to alternative livelihoods is vital.

³National Poverty Line for Phnom Penh, calculated by the Ministry of Planning in 2013.

Loss of income has had a huge impact on the ability of workers to support themselves and their families. **84% of workers have reduced their spending on food and other essential commodities.** Food insecurity is particularly acute as the price of food has increased at the same time as workers' incomes have reduced. Workers interviewed as part of CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis reported that they had already used savings and sold their belongings in order to buy food and had even resorted to looking for mushrooms and other wild foods in the forests as they can't afford food at the markets.



Levels of indebtedness are very high among garment workers and is further exacerbating their financial insecurity. **Workers reported average debt of \$3,000 and 53% are having difficulty repaying their loans.** Workers were making average debt repayments of \$158 in May, representing a huge proportion of their monthly income. 13% of workers have taken on additional debt to address the shortfalls in their income, 85% of which come from informal sources which often charge exorbitantly high interest rates.

How are workers replacing lost income?	How are workers reducing expenditure?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 31% found alternative sources of work, including in agriculture and construction 2. 21% sold valuables and assets 3. 13% borrowed money, 85% from informal lenders. 4. 6% of workers reported waiting at home for the factory to open again. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 84% have reduced food consumption 2. 84% have also reduced consumption of other commodities 3. 26% have reduced or stopped paying remittances to their families 4. 14% have renegotiated loan repayments

The COVID19 pandemic has exacerbated the double burden of work faced by many women around the world. Female garment workers in Cambodia have had to shoulder increased childcare burden in particular whilst schools are closed, which is often juggled with the need to keep earning income for the family. **13% of women reported that an increase in unpaid care work at home was one of the top 3 problems created by COVID19 and 36% reported that women have a heavier work-load than men during the crisis** – though 30% reported that the workload of men and women was largely the same.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a ‘shadow pandemic’ to COVID19, with lockdown measures and economic stress increasing the risk of domestic violence in particular and creating additional barriers to accessing support services. Among women garment workers in Cambodia, **33% report that COVID-19 has increased tension and conflict in their homes and 2% identified domestic violence as one of the main problems created by COVID19.** In CARE’s experience, GBV is consistently underreported, so we believe these findings underestimate the real scale of domestic violence happening. Workers interviewed as part of CARE’s RGA reported that the additional stress from losing their job, financial insecurity, travel restrictions and closing of schools can lead to discussions which result in violence in the family.

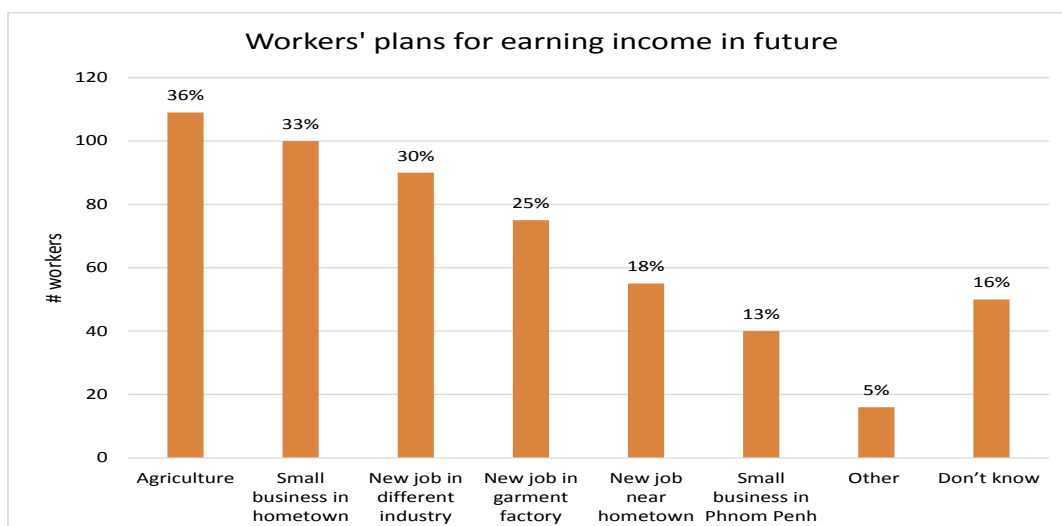
ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Workers are keenly aware of the poor economic and employment outlook, with **94% reporting that it will be difficult to find another job if they lose their job at the factory.**

Workers intend to pursue a variety of options to generate income if they lose their jobs in the garment industry. **The main option identified is returning to work in their home villages either in agriculture (36%) or running small businesses (33%).** If the jobs market in urban centers continues to shrink – particularly in garments, construction and tourism – then reverse migration back to rural areas is likely to intensify. **This will represent a backwards step for workers in Cambodia,** who have been migrating to Phnom Penh in particular for the chance to earn more money and support their families in the provinces.

30% of workers reported they would try look for work in other industries in urban areas, with 25% wanting to look for a new job in a garment factory. The continued retraction of employment in manufacturing and services will make finding new jobs in urban centers very difficult and past economic crises suggest that **more women will be forced to look for work in informal sectors where there are fewer protections for workers,** including in the construction industry, hospitality and sex work.

Workers identified job placement services (48%), support to establish businesses (43%) and technical and vocational training (31%) as key forms of support they would like to receive to help them find new alternative sources of income, but **it is unclear how effective these interventions will be within a shrinking jobs market.**



RECOMMENDATIONS

To support the immediate needs of workers and their families:

- 1. Government and employers should extend and enhance existing social assistance measures to support suspended and laid-off workers throughout 2020.** This should include extending the \$70 stipend, extending and enforcing the freeze on debt repayments and utility costs, and providing additional social assistance to the increasing number of workers who will be laid-off. The economic recovery is expected to be slow and uneven and workers will struggle to find alternative sources of income, so it is likely that social assistance will be needed throughout 2020 and beyond.
- 2. All stakeholders must focus on enabling practical changes in workers' living, commuting and working conditions to enable social distancing and prevent a second wave of COVID19 infections.** Workers are doing what they can, including hand-washing and wearing masks, but social distancing is currently impossible. Factory managers should implement the [tailored guidance created by Better Factories Cambodia](#) and engage with the Transportation Working Group to find sustainable solutions for cramped and dangerous commuting.
- 3. All stakeholders must recognize that there is a shadow pandemic of violence against women and prioritize action to address the increased risk women are facing.** This must include ensuring that GBV response and referral services remain open and are accessible to women. In the longer-term, action to prevent gender-based violence in workplaces, homes and communities must be prioritized – including the ratification of ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment.
- 4. Tripartite stakeholders must ensure that women have equal access to and influence within decision-making spaces about the response to COVID19, including within tripartite dialogue forums.** Women often lack a voice in decision-making during response to crises, so all stakeholders must prioritize ensuring women have equal access to and influence within decision-making spaces. As a starting point, government, employer and worker organizations should ensure at least 50% of their representatives on tripartite dialogue forums are women and take action to support more women into leadership roles in their organizations during the economic recovery.
- 5. Civil society, worker's organizations and donors must focus emergency response efforts on supporting the economic resilience of female garment workers and their families during the crisis.** Awareness-raising on COVID19 has been the focus of a lot of emergency response efforts, but CARE's analysis shows that more targeted interventions are required to support workers. Interventions should target women and other marginalized groups, and include: cash transfers; supporting access to alternative livelihood opportunities; mitigating additional factors that create financial insecurity such as unethical loan requirements and high food prices; supporting access to essential GBV and sexual health services; and supporting action to enable social distancing within workplaces, commutes and homes.

The economic recovery from COVID19 provides an opportunity to build a more sustainable and resilient garment industry which provides decent work to women. CARE's analysis provides some insights for how to support a just and equitable recovery for women who work in the garment industry:

- 1. Strengthen social protection.** COVID19 has highlighted the lack of social protection available to garment workers. The recovery from COVID19 must prioritize strengthening social protection, expanding from the success of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) to create a comprehensive, affordable and accessible social assistance and insurance system. The [Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry](#) offers an opportunity to start this effort in the garment industry.
- 2. Support equitable access to decent, sustainable jobs.** Government, employers and workers' organizations can take a proactive approach to labour market recovery through tripartite dialogue. Efforts should include extending labour protections into the informal economy where many women will look for work, such as construction and hospitality, and to support safe and fair migration. Skills initiatives and job matching will be important for supporting access to work, but they must prioritize marginalized groups – including women – to ensure they are not crowded out of the jobs market.

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