

Cambodia: Partnering for systemic change against Online Child Sexual Exploitation Advocacy Briefing Paper

Context Update: September 2024

In Cambodia, the rapid growth of internet access, combined with limited digital literacy and insufficient measures to protect children from Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE), has created a rise in child online protection risks. The 2008 Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation is the main relevant legal instrument; however, it does not criminalise all forms of OCSE.

According to the Disrupting Harm study (ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF, 2022), 11% of children aged 12-17 experience some form of OCSE.¹ Terre des Hommes Netherlands and other development partners have worked with the Cambodia National Council for Children (CNCC) and the Inter-Ministerial OCSE Technical Working Group to launch and implement a National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to OCSE 2021-25.

The **2022 Out of the Shadows Index** reveals significant gaps in Cambodia's efforts against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSEA). The country faces² critical challenges, with scores of 53.9 for Prevention and 46.9 for Response. Gaps in prevention include weak legislation and insufficient education. Response deficiencies involve law enforcement concerns, inadequate training, and a lack of case data.

Prevention

53.9

- Weak legislation
- Insufficient education

Response

46.9

- Law enforcement concerns
- Inadequate training
- Lack of case data



In partnership with two NGOs-AusCam Freedom Project and APLE Cambodia- along with CNCC and the ICT Policy Department of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC), Terre des Hommes Netherlands implements child participation and policy-influencing initiatives to strengthen Cambodia's national protective systems by advocating national-level government bodies through dialogues between representatives of children and youth, government officials, and local and international NGOs. Between 2023 and 2024, the 4th Universal Periodic Review cycle provided a major opportunity to advocate for children's rights.

¹ [ECPAT, Interpol, & UNICEF. \(2022\). Disrupting Harm in Cambodia: Evidence on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.](#)

² [Ignite Philanthropy & Economist Impact. \(2022\). Out Of The Shadows Index 2022. In Out of the Shadows. Ignite Philanthropy.](#)

Reflection on achievements by Terre des Hommes Netherlands and partners: November 2023 - September 2024

Empowering Youth as Agents of Change

Change agents participated in key actions with government bodies: Through comprehensive capacity-building programmes, children and youth groups have emerged as powerful advocates for online safety. This peer-led approach has significantly enhanced the reach and effectiveness of our awareness campaigns. As a result, we've seen a marked increase in reported OCSE cases- from zero in 2022 to 38 by the end of 2023—demonstrating greater awareness and willingness to report children and communities.

Presentation of "Cambodian Children's Voices Against Online Sexual Exploitation position paper" to the Technical Working Group in charge of monitoring the implementation of the National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to OCSE 2021-25, amplifying children's perspectives in policy discussions.

Selecting key recommendations related to child rights in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Children and youth considered that accelerating the adoption of the Child Protection Law, fighting against gender-based violence and discrimination across the educational and health sectors, eradicating child marriage and protecting them from online risks and how they affect their mental health were urgent priorities.

Strengthen Private Sector Partnerships through the line Ministry

Collaboration with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications led to the development of a Draft Code of Conduct for Internet Service Providers (ISPs), establishing industry-wide standards for child protection. The "Safe Online World for Girls" campaign, launched with influential social media personalities, has reached over 28,218 engagements from children aged 13 to 17, significantly raising OCSE awareness.

Enhance collaboration with Law Enforcement

Fostering robust collaboration between ISPs and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) has streamlined the process of addressing OCSE cases. Developing a standardised information package for law enforcement officers has equipped them with the necessary tools. This has resulted in OCSE skills training for 299 LEA officers at both national and sub-national levels, offline awareness meetings on OCSE for 86 LEA officers, and seven child-friendly case mentoring sessions for 16 LEAs. Comprehensive capacity-building programmes for LEAs have significantly improved OCSE understanding and reporting mechanisms.

Government Engagement and Policy Impact

The CNCC received strategic support in conducting the mid-term review of the National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to OCSE 2021-2025, leading to the integration of key recommendations into the National Action Plan on Violence Against Children (NAP VAC) 2025-2030.

Key successful strategies for systemic change

1

Peer engagement and child & youth participation

Engaging children and youth in advocacy efforts is our core strategy and is becoming increasingly effective. Not only does it allow us to learn from and empower children, but it also increases the legitimacy and depth of the recommendations produced. By actively involving children and youth in the advocacy process, we create a powerful synergy between their fresh perspectives and our expertise.

2

Leverage human rights mechanisms

TdH NL Cambodia spearheaded efforts to coordinate contributions from local and international NGOs and facilitate meaningful participation of children and youth in the various opportunities provided through the Universal Periodic Review process. These included submission of country reports, preparatory workshops, and development of joint statements. We learned that leveraging human rights mechanisms effectively mobilises partners and counterparts around a common project, accelerates joint advocacy efforts.

3

Policy Influencing

Influencing the content of and endorsement of policy documents—such as national plans, guidelines—is a resource-intensive and long process. Nevertheless, it remains a key strategy to build the capacity of government agencies, and increase accountability. Through our efforts through SCROL, we've successfully followed up on previously endorsed policies and contributed to new ones. Adapting to government changes is regularly required to ensure our efforts are relevant. For instance, we've linked our work to the development process of the new National Action Plan to End Violence Against Children.



Key learning and strategies that need to be strengthened

1

Parental Engagement

Engaging caregivers is crucial in complementing our child participation and policy-influencing initiatives against OCSE. We propose a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to strengthen parental engagement encompassing needs assessments, tailored education programs, workshops, support groups, and user-friendly resources. This multifaceted strategy aims to equip caregivers with essential knowledge and skills, focusing on digital literacy and online safety measures, to effectively protect children from OCSE. By fostering peer support networks among caregivers, we can build a more strong defense against OCSE and empower parents to confidently navigate the challenges of the digital age.

2

Collaboration with the Internet and Tech Industry

Collaboration with the private sector is an emerging priority for TdH NL in Cambodia since 2021. Despite the abovementioned achievement, only a very limited number of companies are taking initiative. Moving forward, we're advocating for mandatory child protection policies for tech companies and partnering with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications to create an award system. This system will recognize companies taking proactive measures to protect children online, encouraging industry-wide participation while we await the enactment of new laws and regulations.

3

Navigating a shrinking civic and funding space

Cambodia grapples with a shrinking civic and funding landscape, political sensitivities, and a low prioritisation of child protection, impacting the work of child rights agencies and CSOs. Effective advocacy in this challenging environment demands a careful balance—collaborating with government partners while advocating for meaningful change. Faced with limited resources, CSOs must enhance coordination, devise innovative funding approaches, strengthen local partnerships, and forge coalitions to amplify their influence on policy development.

Updated Advocacy Milestones and Roadmap



01

November 2024

Peer engagement and child participation

Actors Involved

Girls and young women engaged with AusCam Freedom Project

Girls, young women, and diverse children and youth groups (e.g. LGBT+, rural areas, indigenous) across Cambodia co-design and implement campaigns and dialogue with government representatives about how to realise their rights

December 2024

02

Policy Influencing

Actors Involved

UNICEF and child rights CSOs, Cambodian National Council for Children

Recommendations produced by children and youth are included in the new National Action Plan to End Violence Against Children

03

March 2025

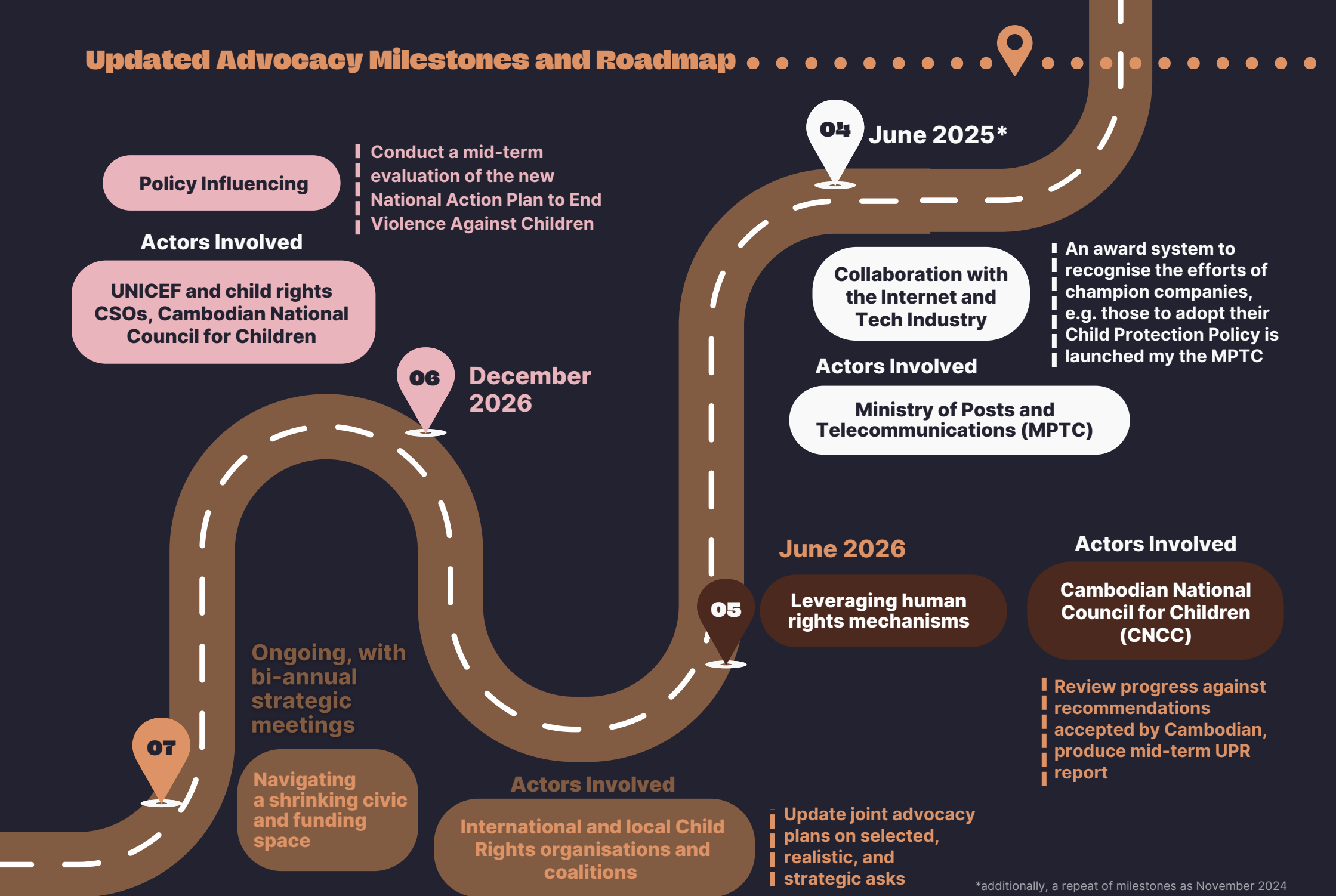
Parental Engagement

Actors Involved

CSOs implementing positive parenting initiatives and/or addressing OSEC

Research on effective strategies to engage caregivers in protecting children from OCSE is disseminated and best practices are integrated in SCROL activities

Updated Advocacy Milestones and Roadmap





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Terre des Hommes Netherlands is a global child protection organisation working in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. We protect children and prevent child exploitation, and empower children to make their voices count. We tackle issues at the roots by enabling systemic change with the support of grassroots level implementing partners. We ensure that children are at the centre of our initiatives.