

5TH ANNUAL GENDER PLATFORM 2026

From Dialogue to Action:

Advancing Gender Equality and Safe Workplaces
to Support Cambodia's LDC Graduation



INTRODUCTION

The 5th Annual Gender Platform, held on 22 September 2026 in Phnom Penh, convened 170+ with around 100 organisation representatives from government ministries, employers and brands, trade unions, civil society and development partners. After four editions that built a shared understanding of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in Cambodia's garment, footwear, and travel goods (GFT) sector, this year's platform set a clear expectation: move from dialogue to action.

Underpinning the platform this year was the upcoming deadline of Cambodia's scheduled graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status on 19 December 2029. This deadline brings a sense of urgency to ensure that the GFT sector makes significant efforts to advance gender equality ahead of time. The GFT sector exported approximately USD 15.5

billion in 2025, and women make up more than 75% of its workforce. How the sector manages the transition from LDC status will therefore shape the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of women workers.

The platform examined that transition through three lenses raised by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA): the skills women workers need to stay employable, the safety they are entitled to at work, and the support systems, such as childcare and social protection, that make work possible. The day also marked the launch of the RISE Respect programme in Cambodia, the introduction of ILO Better Work's GBVH Referral Pathways project, and a first-year report on the Women Empowerment (WE) Network launched at the 2025 platform.



KEY OUTCOMES

Gender equality framed as a condition for smooth LDC graduation. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) and the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) linked women’s skills, care responsibilities, and safe workplaces directly to Cambodia’s Smooth Transition Strategy.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to expand to the GFT sector. MLVT announced that RPL, previously applied mainly in construction, will be extended so women can certify skills they already hold.

Stronger legal and compliance foundations for safe workplaces. MLVT highlighted the draft Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Law, including measures on GBVH, inter-ministerial labour inspections and the “One Enterprise, One Harmonious Community” initiative.

Launch of RISE Respect in Cambodia. A whole-system programme to prevent GBVH, working with around 40 brands, and expanding to suppliers and factories.

A systems approach to GBVH shared. ILO Better Work introduced the GBVH Referral Pathways project to map, understand and strengthen the links between factory grievance mechanisms, labour systems, and community services.

WE Network scaling up. In its first year, the network delivered 13 community-based events with 13 partners across 9 provinces, reaching 2,100 participants.

A call for shared evidence. MLVT invited partners to jointly develop case studies on skills development and women’s preparedness for LDC graduation.

WHY IT MATTERS

LDC Graduation and Women Workers

Cambodia now meets all three graduation criteria set by the UN Committee for Development Policy: income per capita, the Human Assets Index and the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index. Graduation is a major achievement, but it also changes the trade terms the GFT sector has relied on. Continued

preferential access to key markets, such as the EU’s GSP+ scheme, depends on ratifying and effectively implementing international conventions, including core labour rights. Gender equality, social dialogue and effective labour inspection are therefore becoming market-access issues, not only social ones.

THE ROAD TO 2029

▸ **2026**

Smooth Transition Strategy (STS) finalised

▸ **2027**

Approval and early action

▸ **December 2029**

Graduation

▸ **2027-2029**

Implementation and reporting

▸ **2030-2036 and beyond**

Monitored transition

The draft STS sets out five pillars: macroeconomic stability; trade and competitiveness; structural transformation and human capital; climate resilience; and institutional capacity and partnership. An inclusive transition is important to a

smooth and sustainable graduation that leaves no one behind, including women workers, youth and other vulnerable groups.

WHERE WOMEN WORKERS COULD MOVE, AND THE SKILLS IT TAKES

Destination	Skills Required
Upgraded GFT jobs	Multi-skilling on the line; quality, supervisory and compliance roles
Light manufacturing (footwear, travel goods)	Rapid line-skills transfer, machine multi-skilling, literacy and numeracy
Agro-processing, food and beverage	Food safety and hygiene, quality control, packaging, cold-chain handling
Tourism, hospitality and care	Recognised service certification, food handling, basic English, care qualifications
Digital services, e-commerce and logistics	Digital literacy, data entry, inventory and customer service

Five conditions were identified to make this work: know which workers are exposed; train them where they already are; remove the barriers that stop women taking new jobs; steer investment towards

job-absorbing sectors; and protect incomes during the move.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

From the Platform

MoWA opened the day with a clear message: gender equality is a shared responsibility, not the task of a single institution. The Minister set three priorities for the discussion, which frame the highlights below: upgrading women workers' skills, reducing and sharing the burden of care, and creating safe workplaces that enable productivity.

Gender equality is not the responsibility of any single institution. It is a shared responsibility for all of us.

H.E. Dr. Kantha Phavi
ING, Minister of Women's
Affairs



SKILLS:

Preparing women for the jobs of 2030

National skills drive. MLVT is expanding technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for women and youth, including through the TVET 1.5 Million programme targeting poor and vulnerable families. Its Strategic Plan 2024–2028 places TVET and gender mainstreaming at the centre.

.....

Certifying what women already know.

RPL will expand to the GFT sector, allowing experienced workers to have existing skills formally recognised and to progress into better jobs.

.....

Skills the industry will need. The Cambodian Garment Training Institute (CGTI) identified digitalisation, automation, ESG and sustainability, and leadership as priority areas. With TAFTAC and the Skills

Development Fund, CGTI is developing the Cambodia Skills Framework 2026, which links job roles, tasks, and proficiency levels to clear career pathways.

.....

Proof that leadership training pays.

One factory sent 11 women to the GEAR programme (ILO Better Factories Cambodia, funded by DFAT); all 11 were subsequently promoted.

.....

Looking ahead. MLVT's closing remarks named reskilling, upskilling and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, as essential for women to benefit from the changing world of work.



SAFETY:

Preventing GBVH and securing remedy

RISE Respect launched. RISE's Cambodia needs assessment found that GBVH remains a critical issue, harmful behaviour has become normalised, reporting and response mechanisms need strengthening, and workers' daily experience is not reflected in formal workplace systems. The programme works across three levels: people and social norms, factory systems, and the business and enabling environment.

Aligning buyers. Where a factory supplies several brands, RISE engages all of them so that the factory receives consistent expectations and support rather than fragmented requirements.

Referral pathways, not isolated cases. ILO Better Work stressed that GBVH needs systemic solutions. Workers need multiple safe entry points to remedy, and the most trusted channel is often a peer rather than the highest authority. The project

analyses four dimensions: mechanisms, norms, capacities, and relationships and influence.

An ecosystem already in place.

Participants described their roles in the response system: the LABS Initiative working with brands and factories on safer workplaces; the Solidarity Center building GBVH capacity among workers and union leaders; and the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC) providing counselling, legal aid, shelter, and reintegration support to survivors.

Law and policy. Government efforts include the first OSH Law (in draft), measures under NDC 3.0 on thermal comfort and heat stress, the 4th National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women (2025–2030), and continued collective preparation toward ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 (C190).



SUPPORT:

Care, social protection, and financial health

Childcare as an enabler of work. Planète Enfants & Développement presented community-based and enterprise-based childcare models, with structured monitoring of attendance, nutrition, child growth and parent satisfaction. A trade union representative praised the model's certified teachers and gender-responsive approach but noted it currently operates only in Kampong Speu and called for expansion.

Policy backing for care. MLVT's OSH Strategic Plan includes childcare and baby centres in factories, and MoWA highlighted the care economy as both a burden to share and an opportunity for women's employment.

Social protection and financial literacy.

MoWA pointed to expanding National Social Security Fund coverage, while MLVT called for stronger financial knowledge among women workers.

From commitment to practice.

UN Women presented the Women's Empowerment Principles as a practical framework for companies. Good Return shared its work training financial service providers on unconscious bias. The World Food Programme (WFP) presented food fortification and inclusive food systems as a route to women's health and productivity.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID

Asked what gender equality means to them, participants associated it with fairness, empowerment, human rights, respect, and equal treatment. Building on these shared core values, the survey results reveal a strong consensus among participants on prioritising actions that increase women's access to education, skills training, and leadership opportunities to advance gender equality in Cambodia.

At the same time, the results highlight notable knowledge gaps in technical policy areas. For instance, only **38%** of participants correctly identified the current Neary Rattanak VI strategic plan, and just **34%** accurately noted Cambodia's CEDAW ratification year. This indicates that while public enthusiasm and foundational awareness are high, targeted awareness campaigns remain essential.

PANEL

Is the GFT sector on track?

The panel, moderated by CARE Cambodia, asked whether the sector is ready to support a smooth graduation while advancing gender equality and decent work. The shared answer: policy foundations are in place, but skills without

opportunity remain a gap. Training only pays off when it leads to real career pathways inside factories.



Government (MLVT). Despite global economic pressures and regional conflict, Cambodia is pressing ahead with graduation preparation. MLVT pointed to its Strategic Plan 2024–2028, labour compliance measures, Article 83 of the Labour Law and childcare provisions under its OSH plan. It called for stronger joint action so that more women and girls can access training and move into leadership.

Employers (EuroCham Garment & Manufacturing Committee). Reskilling must be tied to clear career pathways and real vacancies. LDC graduation is not only a trade transition but a transition of Cambodia's human capital, above all its women workers. Women were encouraged to invest in their skills, speak up about their needs and advocate for advancement.

Training (CGTI). Training should follow industry trends and assessed worker needs. CGTI urged HR departments to give women and men equal access to training and encouraged women to adopt a leadership mindset.

Factory floor (Seeds Garment). The GEAR results show what targeted leadership training can achieve. The factory recommended continuing and expanding GEAR because it combines technical and soft skills.

Barriers named: persistent social norms and the low number of women among union representatives.

WE NETWORK

One year on

Launched at the 2025 platform, the Women Empowerment (WE) Network has taken the WE House model of safe learning spaces into communities and factories.

Call for collaboration: Organisations committed to gender equality in the GFT sector are invited to join the WE Network as partners.

The network is now linked to the **WE Academy** at CGTI, which offers technical, soft skills and supervisory, sustainability and compliance courses, connecting awareness-raising with pathways to better jobs.



បណ្តាញស្ត្រីអង់អាច
Women Empowerment Network

2,100	13	13	9
PARTICIPANTS	PARTNERS	EVENTS	PROVINCES

TOPICS

 Financial Literacy	 Social Protection	 Stress Management	 AI Bootcamp
 GBVH	 Heat Stress	 RISE Packages	 "Our Rights" App








MARKETPLACE

Digital tools for women workers

The day closed with a marketplace showcasing digital tools that give workers direct access to information, support and reporting channels.



TOOL	PROVIDED BY
 GBV Safe App	Ministry of Women's Affairs/CARE
 Our Rights App	GIZ Cambodia
 BFC Chatbot	ILO-Better Factories Cambodia
 MLVT Services App	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
 LABS QR Code	LABS Initiative
 Youth Health App	Child Helpline Cambodia
 Migration App	Child Helpline Cambodia
 Art as a tool for connection	Meta House

OPPORTUNITIES

For action

This year's platform brought together more stakeholders than ever, all of whom have a critical role to play in advancing gender equality and safe workplaces in the GFT sector. Both individually as well as collaboratively, action is required. The key recommendations emerging from the forum are as follows:

Government

- Finalise and adopt the OSH Law with clear provisions on GBVH, heat stress, and workplace safety.
- Roll out RPL in the GFT sector and link certification to recognised career pathways under the Cambodia Skills Framework.
- Strengthen inter-ministerial labour inspection and embed women workers explicitly in the Smooth Transition Strategy's implementation and monitoring.
- Continue collective preparation toward ratification and implementation of ILO C190.

Brands and buyers

- Align expectations and support across buyers sourcing from the same factory, rather than imposing fragmented requirements.
- Nominate supplier factories for RISE Respect and co-invest in skills and leadership programmes.

Employers and factories

- Give women and men equal access to training, and connect training to promotion, as GEAR has shown.

- Appoint a senior sponsor for GBVH prevention, strengthen grievance mechanisms, and protect time for worker and manager learning.
- Invest in enterprise-based childcare and baby centres.

Trade unions and civil society

- Increase women's representation among union leaders and worker representatives.
- Strengthen trusted, peer-level entry points, and referral links to survivor services.

Development partners and all stakeholders

- Scale proven models, including community childcare beyond Kampong Speu and the WE Network.
- Build a shared evidence base through joint case studies on skills and women's readiness for LDC graduation.
- Promote the digital tools showcased at the platform so that workers know where to turn for information and help.

CONCLUSION

The 5th Gender Platform confirmed that Cambodia's LDC graduation and gender equality are one interlinked agenda. The sector's future competitiveness depends on a workforce that is skilled, safe and supported, and in the GFT sector that workforce is overwhelmingly women. Safe and healthy workplaces are both a human rights imperative and a driver of productivity and market access.

The dialogue built over five editions is now well established. The test for the coming years ahead is delivery: RPL in the GFT

sector, an OSH Law that addresses GBVH, referral pathways that workers trust, and training that leads to promotion. The co-organisers will use the next platform to report back on progress against these commitments and to celebrate achievements to date.

”

The challenges of this transition must be turned into opportunities to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of enterprises and to create decent jobs.

H.E. Sovann Vannaroth,
Permanent Secretary of
State, Ministry of Labour
and Vocational Training



About the organisers

LABS Initiative - Life and Building Safety (LABS)

Initiative is an industry-driven programme where multiple brands and retailers join forces with the public and CSOs to mitigate preventable fire, electrical, and structural buildings' safety risks in key apparel and footwear-producing countries. For more details, visit: <https://labsinitiative.com/>

The **Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale**

Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH is a global service provider in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development and international education work. Commissioned by German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the FABRIC Cambodia project works with partners to strengthen Cambodian textile and garment industry's ability to meet international environmental and social sustainability requirements. The project focuses on three areas: textile recycling, policy advisory, and women's empowerment. For more details, visit: <https://www.giz.de/en/projects/sustainable-textile-industry-cambodia-ii>

CARE Cambodia has been working with Cambodians since 1973, providing relief and development assistance within Cambodia and subsequently to Cambodian refugees on the Thai border. Since 1991, the re-opened office in Phnom Penh has worked in many areas including emergency relief, preparedness, health, education, livelihoods and gender-based violence. Today, CARE focuses on empowering particularly marginalised and vulnerable women in Cambodia. CARE works with women who have migrated to urban areas, women and girls from ethnic minorities and rural women who are denied multiple rights. For more details, visit: <https://www.care-cambodia.org>

ILO-Better Factories Cambodia (BFC): Established in 2001, Better Factories Cambodia is a foundational programme of Better Work, a unique partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Bringing together the Royal Government of Cambodia, employer associations, and local trade unions, BFC works across the garment, footwear, and travel goods industries to improve working conditions, protect labour rights, and boost factory competitiveness in the global market.

RISE – Reimagining Industry to Support Equality: A global initiative advancing opportunity and equality across garment supply chains. In Cambodia, RISE works with local organisations on financial-health literacy, respectful workplaces and digital skills, and launched RISE Respect in 2026.

Cambodian Garment Training Institute (CGTI): Provides market-aligned vocational education and recognised certification that narrows skills gaps and improves employability across the sector, including through the WE Academy.

Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC): is a leading membership-based organization for NGOs in Cambodia with nearly 200 members working on various development sector. CCC has been playing roles as the Coordinator, Monitor and Advocate to realize enabling environment for CSO and sustained CSO Resource Hub at the national and sub-national levels.

Published by	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany FABRIC Cambodia Sayon Phnom Penh, 1st Floor, #42, Samdach Pan Street (214), Sangkat Boeung Raing, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
As at	October 2026
Design	Monileak Ean

Photo credits	© LABS Initiative © CGTI
Text	Samantha Diouf Meyching Chea Sinal Hean Somana Moeurnthavy
On behalf of	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
In cooperation with	LABS Initiative CARE Cambodia ILO-BFC RISE CGTI CCC