

— RESEARCH BRIEF · EDUCATION

The Skills Gap

Are Cambodia's young people learning the skills employers need?

— THE SHORT ANSWER

Progress, and a gap that is still wide.

Are Cambodia's young people learning the skills employers need? The data show **progress**, and a **gap that is still wide**.

More children finish school and test scores are rising. But **most 15-year-olds tested are still below basic reading level**.

— KEY NUMBERS

Four numbers that tell the story



61.6%

lower secondary
completion rate, 2024
(World Bank WDI)



86.6%

of 15-year-olds tested
below basic reading level
(PISA 2025, OECD)



6.6%

unemployment with
higher education, 2025,
preliminary (NIS)



~2043

year working-age share is
projected to peak (World
Bank projection)

01

WHAT HAPPENED

More children finish school.

In 2024, the primary completion rate was **91%** (World Bank WDI, 2024).

For lower secondary school, it was **61.6%**, up from 47.5% in 2015 (World Bank WDI).

— WHAT HAPPENED

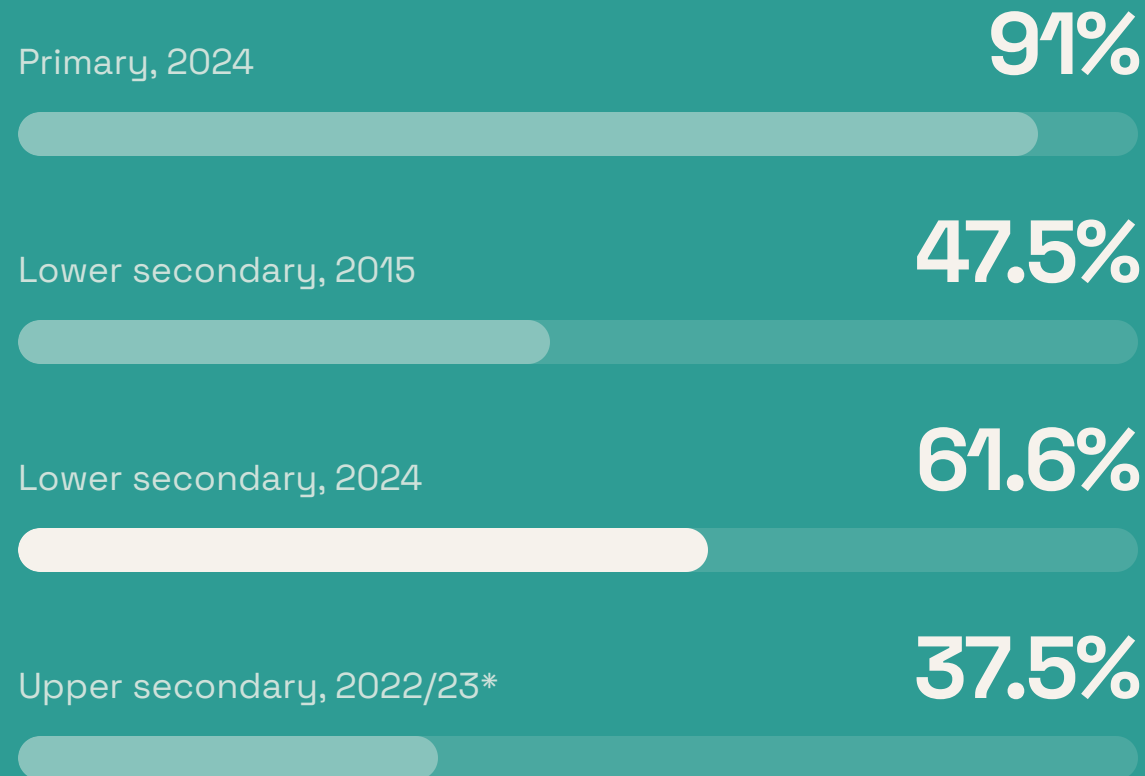
The road narrows at every step

In the 2022/23 school year, **37.5%** completed upper secondary. For girls, it was 42.7% (Ministry of Education data, cited by the Asian Development Bank, 2024).

By 2024, about 15 in every 100 lower secondary students were dropping out (**15.5%**, MoEYS Education Congress Report 2025, via UNICEF Cambodia).

University enrolment rose from 17.4% in 2023 to **21.4%** in 2024, comparing students with everyone of university age (World Bank WDI).

COMPLETION RATE



*Ministry of Education data, which counts differently from the World Bank series above.

— WHAT HAPPENED

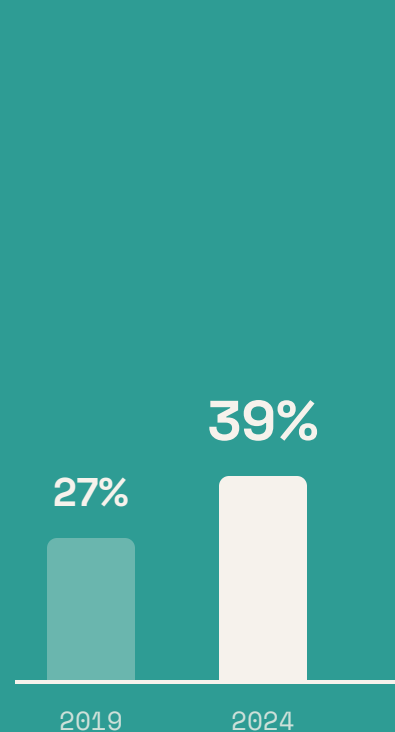
Learning is improving, from a low base

SEA-PLM is a regional test for Grade 5 pupils. In 2024, **39%** reached high reading levels, up from 27% in 2019.

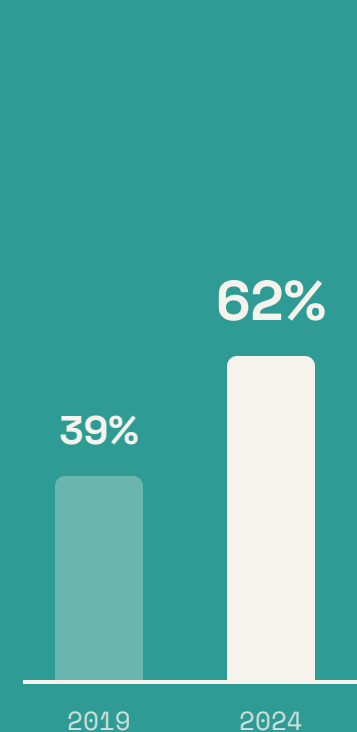
In maths, high levels rose from 39% to **62%**.

Still, **37%** stayed at the lowest reading levels (UNICEF Cambodia, SEA-PLM 2024).

READING · HIGH LEVELS



MATHS · HIGH LEVELS



Share of Grade 5 pupils at high levels, SEA-PLM

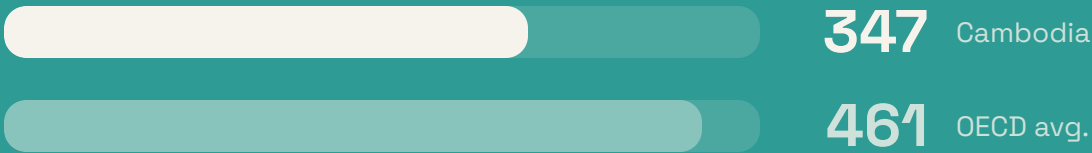
— WHAT HAPPENED

PISA: rising, but far behind

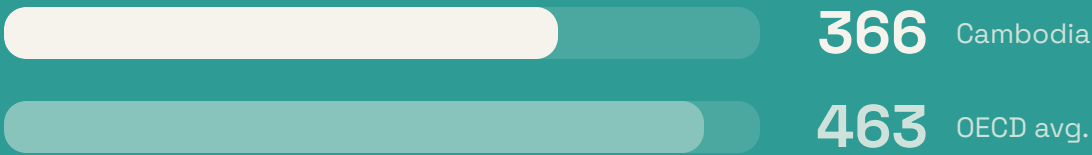
PISA, run by the OECD (a group of mostly richer countries), tests 15-year-olds still in school. In PISA 2025, Cambodia’s scores rose since 2022 by 18 points in reading, 29 in maths and 35 in science, while the OECD average fell.

But the gap is still large. Cambodia scored 347, 366 and 382, against OECD averages of 461, 463 and 482. About 87 in every 100 Cambodian students tested (**86.6%**) were below basic reading level (OECD, PISA 2025).

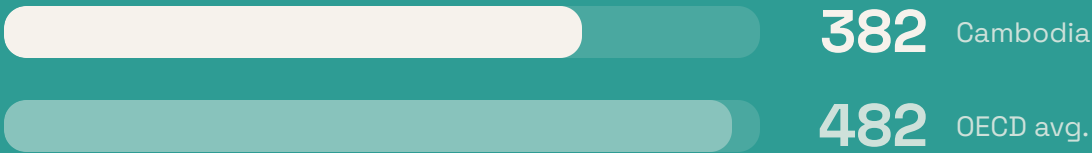
READING · Cambodia +18 since 2022



MATHS · Cambodia +29 since 2022



SCIENCE · Cambodia +35 since 2022



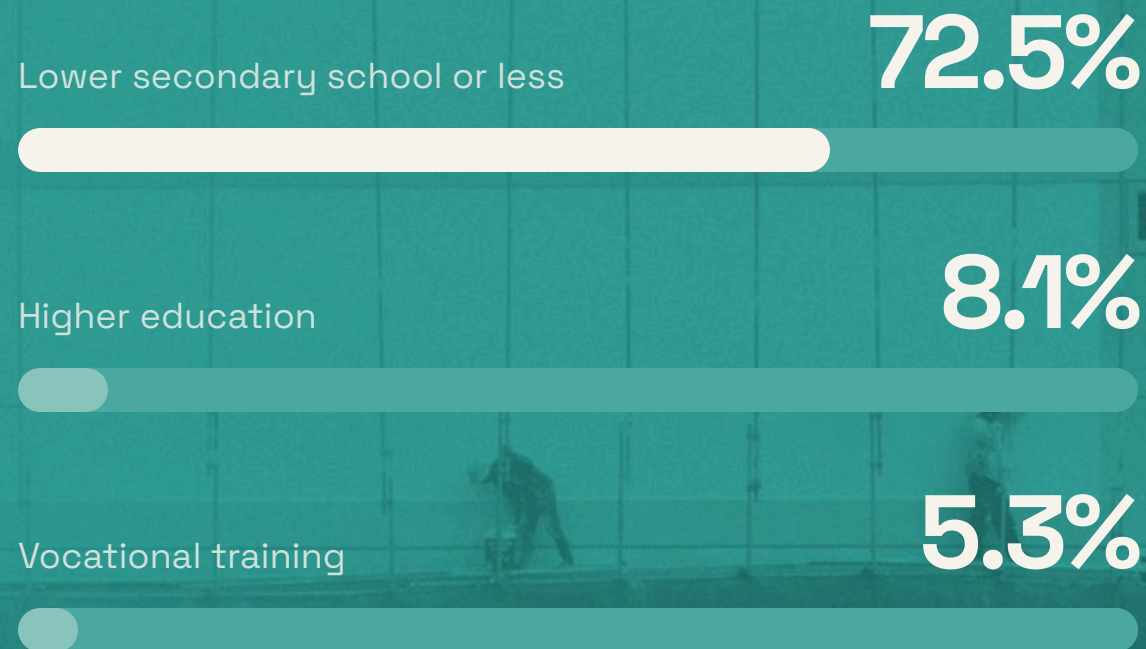
— 02 · WHY IT MATTERS

Most workers have lower secondary school or less

The 2025 Labour Force Survey counted about **9.41 million** people in the labour force (National Institute of Statistics, preliminary).

By our own calculation, **72.5%** have lower secondary school or less. About 8.1% have higher education, and 5.3% have vocational training.

LABOUR FORCE BY EDUCATION, 2025



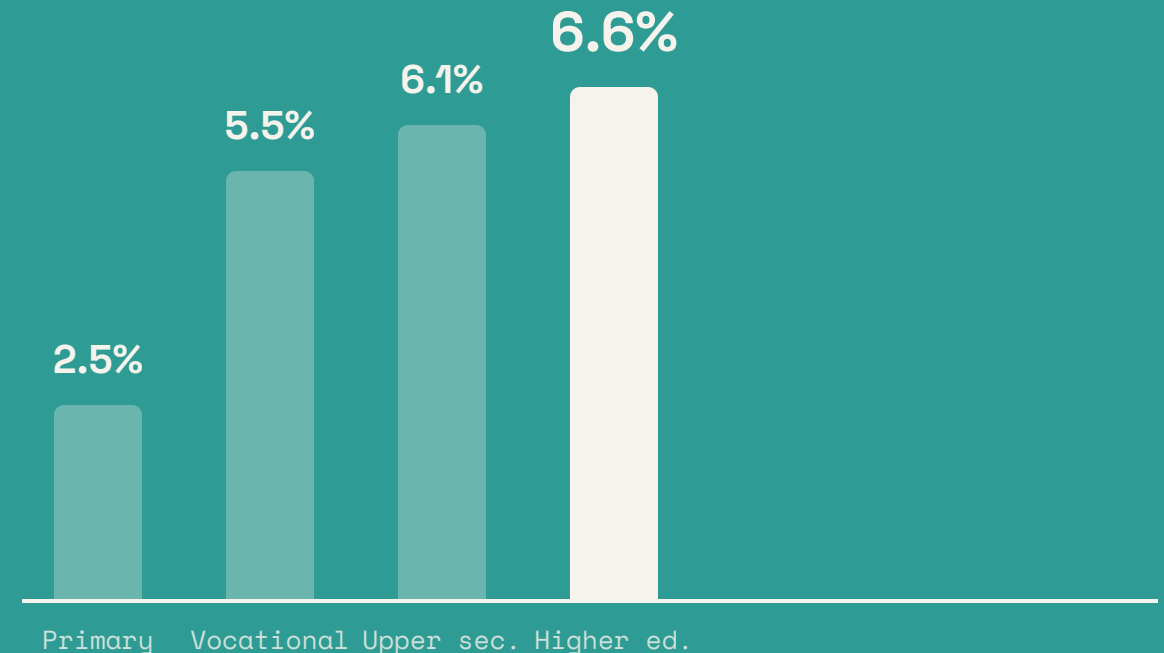
Our calculation from NIS data (preliminary)

— WHY IT MATTERS

More schooling, more unemployment?

People who went beyond lower secondary school are more likely to be unemployed. "Unemployed" means looking for work, but without a job.

The unemployment rate is **6.6%** for people with higher education, 6.1% with upper secondary and 5.5% with vocational training. For people with only primary school, it is **2.5%** (NIS, 2025, preliminary).



Unemployment rate by education, 2025 (preliminary)

— WHY IT MATTERS

Young people, informal jobs and digital skills



Young people

For young people aged 15 to 24, unemployment is **9.8%**, and **13.1%** are not working, studying or training.



Informal jobs

About **76.7%** of jobs are informal, with no formal contract or social protection (NIS, 2025, preliminary).



Digital skills

About **68.5%** of Cambodians used the internet in 2024 (ITU estimate, via World Bank). But using a phone is not the same as job-ready digital skills. In 2021, only about **17%** of upper secondary students had computer classes (ADB, 2021).

— 03 · WHO IS INVOLVED

Two ministries, one big training push

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) runs schools and universities. The Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) runs TVET (technical and vocational education and training).

Since it was announced in late 2023, MLVT has run a TVET programme for poor and vulnerable youth. The target is **1.5 million** young people. By June 2026, the ministry reported more than **270,000** enrolments. By December 2025, it reported 79,285 graduates, of whom 51,591 were in work. No independent evaluation has been published yet.

TVET PROGRAMME FOR POOR AND VULNERABLE YOUTH

Target **1.5 million**



Enrolments, by June 2026 **270,000+**



Graduates, by Dec 2025 **79,285**



Graduates in work, by Dec 2025 **51,591**



Ministry-reported. Dates differ: enrolments to June 2026, graduates to December 2025.

04

RISKS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

The biggest risk is time.

The World Bank projects that Cambodia's share of working-age people will peak around **2043**.

That leaves about **17 years** to turn a young population into a productive one (World Bank, Cambodia Economic Update, June 2026).

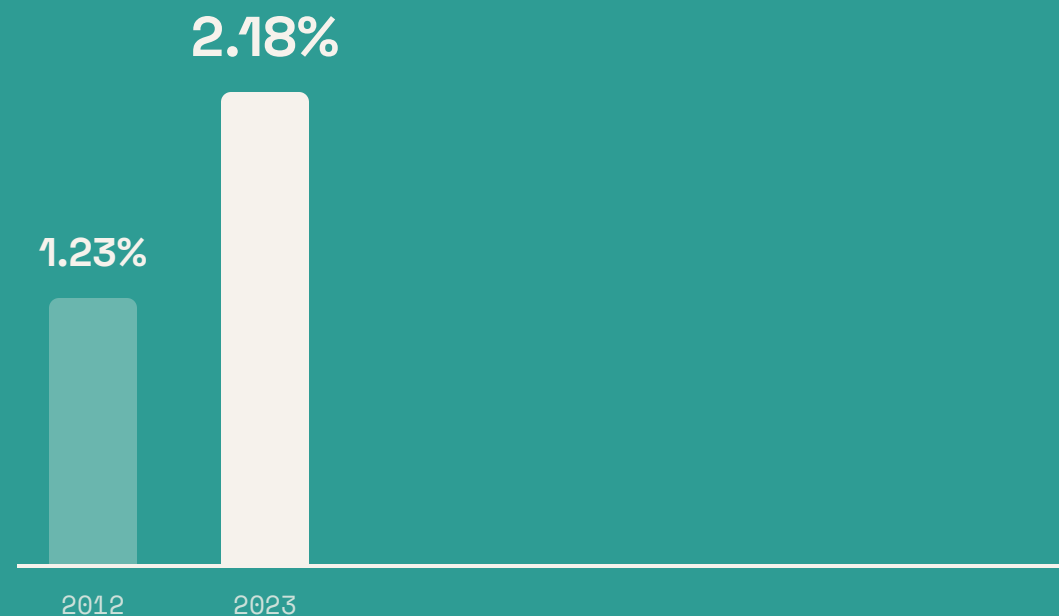
— RISKS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

Spending is rising. Open questions remain.

In 2023, public spending on education was **2.18% of GDP**, up from 1.23% in 2012 (World Bank WDI). GDP is the total value of everything a country produces. In 2025, education was an estimated 11.6% of government spending, a figure that may be revised.

The World Bank estimates that closing gaps in human capital (people's skills, knowledge and health) could lift future earnings potential by **68%**.

It is also unclear why graduates are unemployed more often. The labour survey does not test this, and we found no Cambodian study that measures which possible reason is bigger.



Public spending on education, % of GDP (World Bank WDI)

05

WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

A diploma still helps.

A diploma still helps. But employers also ask what you can do. Reading, maths, teamwork, a foreign language and digital tools all matter, alongside the certificate.

Short TVET courses, apprenticeships and on-the-job training are other paths. **University is one road, not the only one.**

— 06 · DIFFERENT VIEWS

Is learning improving? How big is the gap?

Is learning improving fast enough?

- **Progress view:** OECD data show Cambodia improved in all three PISA subjects since 2022. UNICEF Cambodia describes the SEA-PLM 2024 gains as strong improvements.
- **Gap view:** the same OECD data show 86.6% of tested students below basic reading level, and a large gap with the OECD average.

How big is the skills gap?

- **Larger-gap view:** in the 2024 study by EuroCham, the European business chamber, 74% of 106 companies said it was hard to find qualified staff. Nine of the top ten skill gaps included soft skills, like leadership and communication (via B2B Asia News).
- **Narrower view:** in the government's larger survey of 577 workplaces, 27.3% of those planning to hire in the next 6 months expected recruitment to be difficult. About 28% said some staff lacked skills, and the top reason was being new to the role (MLVT, 2024).
- The two surveys use different samples and questions, so their numbers cannot be compared directly.

DIFFERENT VIEWS

Why are graduates unemployed? Is TVET working?

Why are graduates unemployed more often?

- **Mismatch reading:** some qualifications may not fit what employers need.
- **Job-search reading:** people with little schooling may not be able to wait, so they take any work. Graduates may wait longer for a better job.

Is TVET working?

- **Ministry view:** the MLVT spokesperson says the employment results show the training matches job market demand.
- **Caution:** no independent evaluation has been published yet. The same spokesperson also says the ministry must make sure private employers accept these skills.

ABOUT THE DATA

Read these numbers carefully

- Labour figures come from the Labour Force Survey 2025, collected in late 2025. They are preliminary, may change and should not be compared with the 2019 survey.
- Primary and lower secondary completion come from the World Bank (2024). Upper secondary uses Ministry of Education data (2022/23), which counts differently.
- SEA-PLM (Grade 5, 2024) and PISA (15-year-olds still in school, 2025) are different tests and cannot be combined.
- Labour-force shares by education are our calculation. Internet use, education's share of spending and the 68% figure are estimates. The 2043 peak is a projection. TVET numbers are ministry-reported.
- EuroCham figures come from a trade-media summary; the original report could not be retrieved. The computer-class figure is from 2021, the latest available.

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Every number, and where it comes from

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