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# MIGRATIONS

Photo by Sina Brod

# MIGRATIONS

## CONTEXT

Cambodia is engaged in profound societal and economic changes usually referred to as “agrarian transition”. The agrarian transition involves three main trends: that of migration within the rural areas and from rural to urban areas; that of change within the rural society from a mainly land owning population of small peasant farmers to one in which a substantial number of the population are landless workers; and the transformations of the society from primarily non-urban populations dependent upon agricultural production and organized through rural social structures to an urbanized industrialized and market-based society (De Koninck 2008). In the context of population growth, a key challenge of this transition is the creation of productive jobs that can keep pace with the annual increase of growth in the annual labor force, which in Cambodia is estimated to be between 250,000 and 300,000 (Chan 2009).

The transformations don't follow a linear path but are shaped by upheavals and contradictions. A process central to this agrarian transition, is the urbanization and industrialization of the country, manifested by the increased share of industries and services in the GDP structure and in the national labor force (Lundström and Ronnas 2006). Another important aspect is the intensification and/or the expansion of agricultural land by taking advantage of the natural endowment of forest areas that could be harnessed for colonization (De Koninck 2008; Pilgrim, et. al. 2012). Both of these evolutions suggest the increased mobility of population and its redistribution through migrations, both within and beyond national borders.

The Royal Government of Cambodia views labor migration as an avenue for promoting employment and reducing poverty among the labor force (MLVT 2010). The National Strategic Development Plan puts a strong emphasis on the promotion of domestic employment, but international labor migration (both legal and irregular) has also become a central concern for the authorities. Cambodia is a relative latecomer to the management and administration of labor emigration and the policies and institutional framework to manage the issues are at a nascent stage and lack coherence (Hing, Lun, and Phann 2011b).

## DOMESTIC MIGRATION IN CAMBODIA

We address domestic migration as the process of changing residence from one geographical location to another within the country (NIS 2009b). Migration is considered here as “period-migration”, which captures change of residence during an individual's life course from birth until the time of census enumeration (NIS 2010). According to this definition and on the basis of the 2008 demographic census dataset (NIS 2009a), the percentage of internal migrants to total population in Cambodia is 25.8% (3,457,228 people), of whom 47.25% are inter-provincial migrants.

To shed light on internal migration, we have framed the analysis on the period 1997-2008, so to have an accurate picture of recent trends. The 2008 demographic census dataset allows us to measure in and out migration movements at district level<sup>1</sup>.

$$\text{Net Migration Rate (1997-2008)} = \frac{\text{Number immigrant (1997-2008)} - \text{Number Emigrant (1997-2008)}}{\text{Total Population (2008)}} * 1000$$

The dataset allows us to measure the “net migration rate”, which is the net number of migrants per 1,000 population: A positive value of “net migration rate” signifies that more people have entered the district than people who have left it from 1997 to 2008, while a negative value denotes more people leaving than entering the district during the same period of time.

As the map shows, the districts with a positive migratory dynamic are rural districts located at the periphery of the central plain, on both east and west sides of the Tonle Sap plain and Mekong Delta. In-migration has been particularly important in the northwest, and reflects a movement of populations, mainly from the rice growing Mekong Delta and Tonle Sap basin, which is characterized by land shortages, to the forested areas of the Cambodia Thailand border where there is a possibility to acquire land.

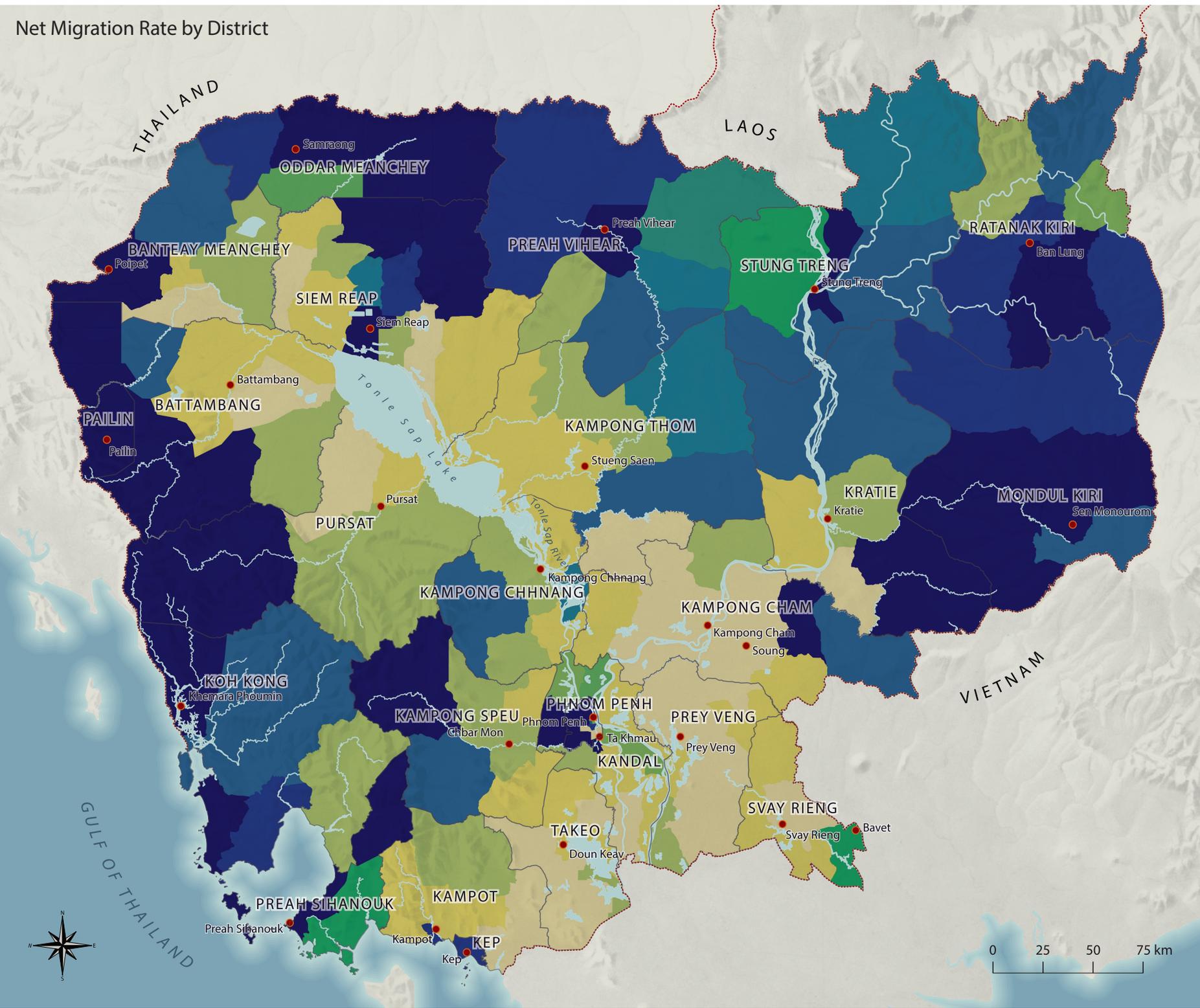
Urban centers and cross border towns (Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Kampong Cham, Sihanoukville and Poipet) also have a clear positive net migration rate. These districts are characterized by high population growth rates indicating that migration plays an important role in the overall population change in those areas. The districts with a negative migratory dynamics are mostly located in the Cambodian central plain (Tonle Sap plain and Mekong delta). Overall, these trends suggest a transfer of population from lowland rice-based regions to upland regions (rural-to-rural) on the one hand and to urban centers (rural-to-urban) on the other.



Photo by Christine Schmutzler



### Net Migration Rate by District



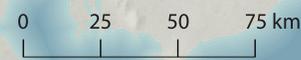
### LEGEND

- Krong (City)
- International boundary
- Province boundary
- Water body

### Net migration rate (1997-2008) Nb migrant per 1,000 population

- > 100
- ]50 - 100[
- ]10 - 50[
- ]5 - 10[
- ]1 - 5[
- ]-1 - 1[
- ]-10 - -5[
- ]-5 - -1[
- ]-50 - -10[
- ]-100 - -50[
- < -100

Data Source:  
 Cambodian Demographic Census 2008  
 (NIS, MoP)  
<http://arunatechnology.com>  
 (Aruna Technology Ltd.)  
 Department of Geography (DoG), 2005





### RURAL-TO-RURAL MIGRATIONS

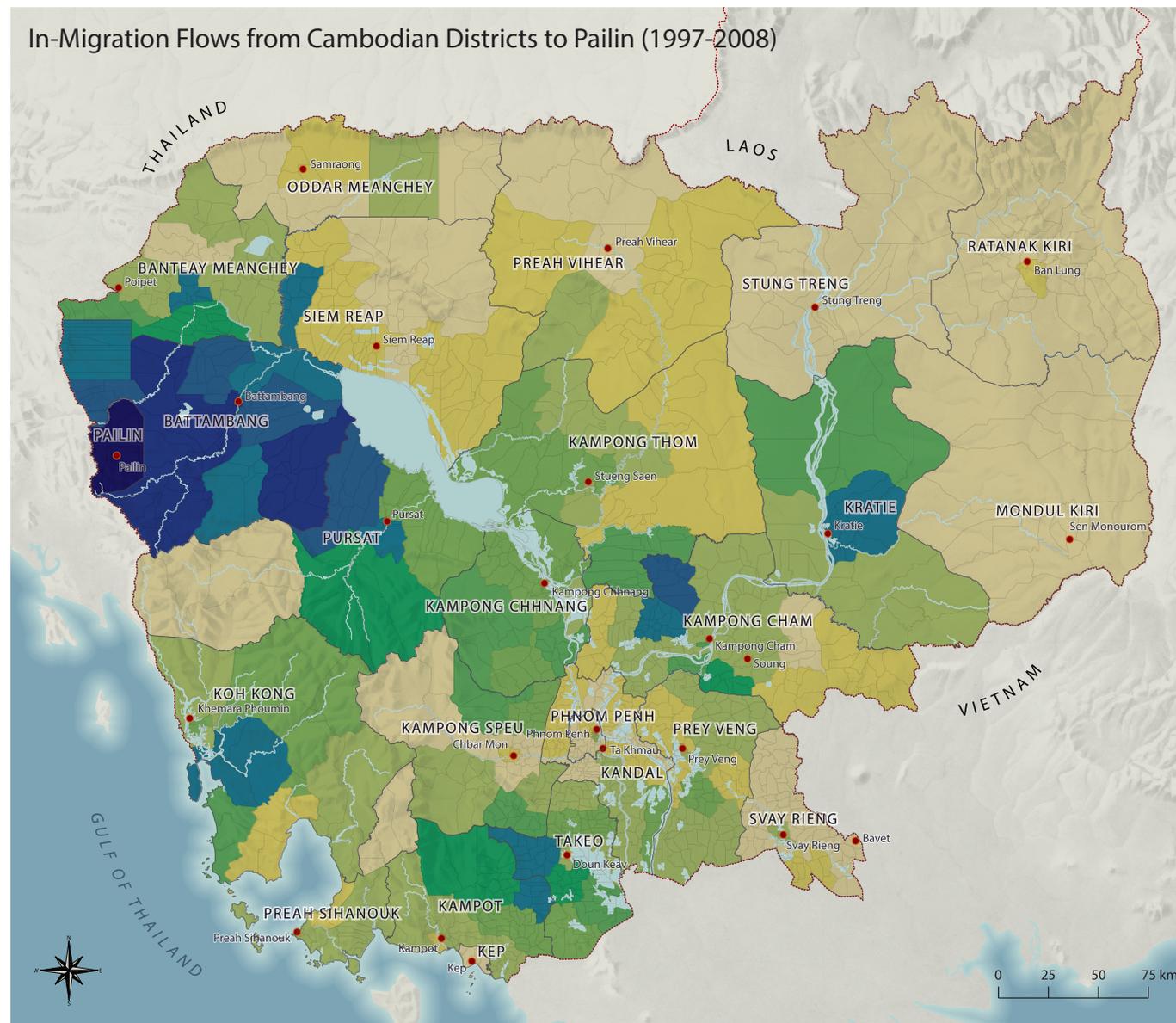
Cambodia is experiencing very significant rural-to-rural migration flows. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2009), rural-to-rural migration is nearly two times more prevalent than rural-to-urban migration (51% of the total number of migrants, versus 28%). We have taken the population movements in Pailin Province to illustrate the migratory process which has transformed the northwest in the last forty years. The migration map illustrates the origin of migrants currently living in Pailin, who represent 61.5% of the total population (NIS 2010). Migrants in Pailin come from all corners of the country but the map shows at least three major migration flows: i) internal migration movements of people within Pailin, ii) a flow of migrants originating from neighboring districts (Battambang or Banteay Meanchey) and iii) a flow of long distance migrant from southwest (Takeo, Prey Veng, Kampot) and central (Kampong Thom, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang) regions of the country. These migration streams typically represent rural-to-rural migrations, and to a large extent, they involved a movement from lowland to upland areas in search of farmland. These migrations have intensified from 1997 to 2008 following the stabilization and reintegration of militaries at the end of the Khmer Rouge conflict.

According to the 2008 demographic census dataset, 76% of migrant household heads declared that the main reason for their migration to Pailin was the search of employment (NIS, 2009). More detailed socio-economic studies have shown that high population density makes access to land more competitive and strengthens a process of land concentration and land conflicts. These constraints are further complicated by limited possibilities of

agricultural intensification and by the limited opportunities to gain non-farm employment (Chheang et. al. Dulioust 2012; Pilgrim, Ngin, and Diepart 2012). To a large extent, these migrations can be seen as an expression of peasant household's agency in responding to rural poverty. The pull factors of the migration to Pailin have to be contextualized in networks established since the seventies between ex-military, returned refugees, in-country migrants and their extended families. These processes also reflect the continuation of historical migration movements to northwest Cambodia that can be traced back to the end of the 19th century (Diepart et. al. Dupuis 2013).

In Pailin, 60% of current migrants over 18 years old are farmers working on their own land. This seems to confirm that migration is primarily driven by a search for agricultural land. The number of migrants involved in agricultural wage labor (8%) and non-farm employment (32%) became proportionally more significant towards 2007, indicating that the employment of migrants has shifted from peasant farming to wage employment and service trades as land availability for agricultural expansion has decreased.

### In-Migration Flows from Cambodian Districts to Pailin (1997-2008)



### LEGEND

- Krong (City)
- International boundary
- Province boundary
- Water body

### Migrants to Pailin (1997-2008) Nb migrant per 1,000 population

	> 30.0		3.1 - 4.0
	15.1 - 30.0		2.1 - 3.0
	10.1 - 15.0		1.1 - 2.0
	5.1 - 10.0		0.6 - 1.0
	4.1 - 5.0		0 - 0.5

Data Source:  
Cambodian Demographic Census 2008 (NIS, MoP)  
<http://arunatechnology.com>  
(Aruna Technology Ltd.)  
Department of Geography (DoG), 2005





### RURAL-TO-URBAN MIGRATIONS

Rural-to-urban migration, involving the movement of people from rural villages to the city, has largely been towards Phnom Penh. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2009), rural-to-urban migrants represent 28% of the total population.

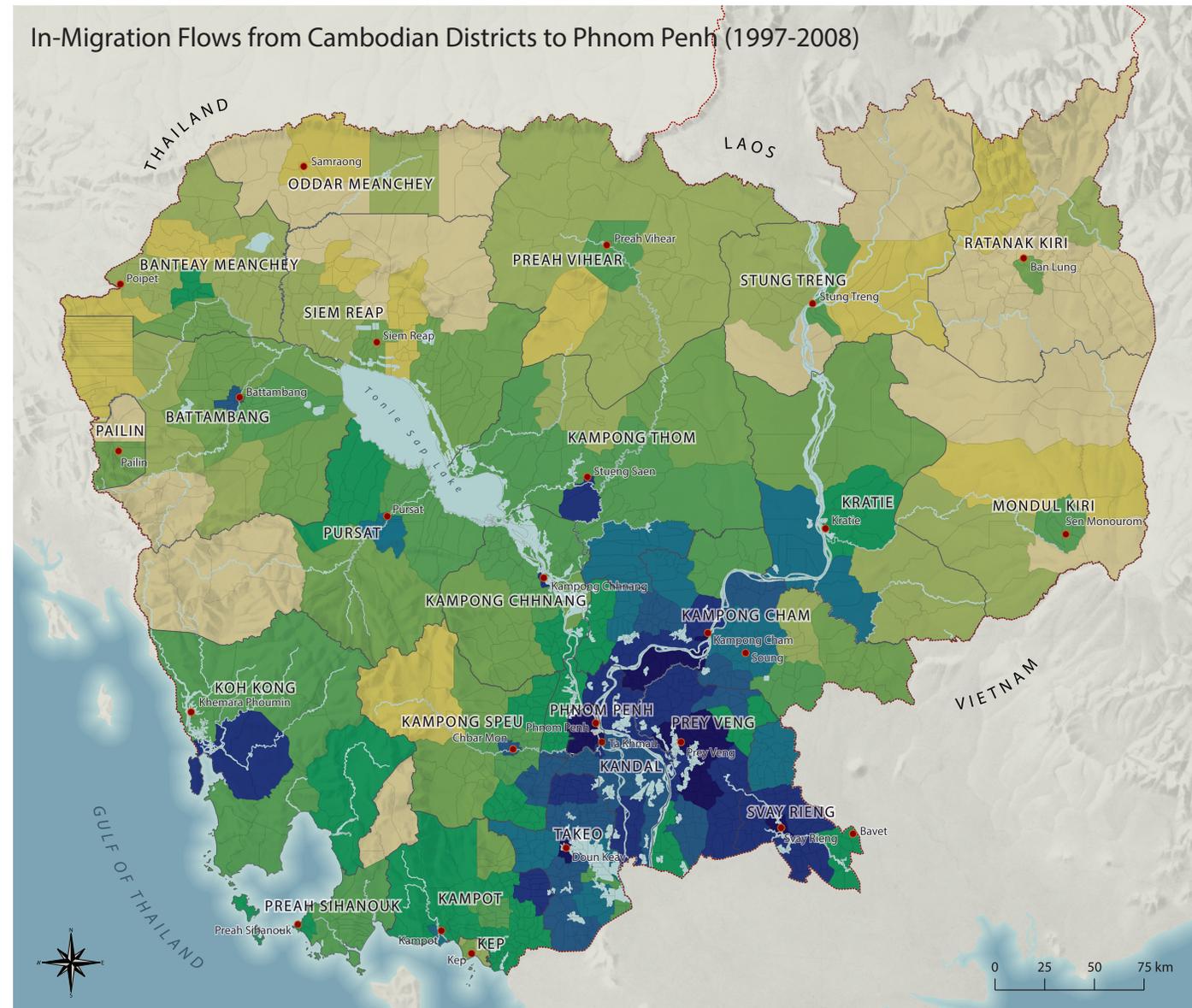
The Phnom Penh migration map illustrates the origin of migrants currently living in Phnom Penh. Migrants here represent 47.5% of the total population in the capital, but historically, following the Khmer Rouge expulsions of the seventies, nearly all Phnom Penh's population have settled or resettled there in the past forty years. Migrants to Phnom Penh come from every part of the country but migration follows a basic "gravity" model, in that there are concentrations of migrants from provinces close by with large populations, most notably Kampong Cham, Svay Rieng, Prey Veng and Takeo (MoP 2012). The map also depicts an urban-to-urban migration flow with a significant amount of migrants moving from secondary urban centers (Battambang, Kratie, Kampong Thom and Pursat). As in the case of migration to Pailin, migration flows to Phnom Penh intensified from 1997 to 2008, reflecting the growth of the economy and work opportunity in the capital.

Migrants to Phnom Penh are overwhelmingly young, with a median age of 25 years old. A greater number of young females migrate to Phnom Penh than any other age/sex group, reflecting the dominance of the garment industry in the city and national economy; 30% of migrants are females aged between 15 and 30 years old. This makes Phnom Penh a young city with slightly higher percentage of young females than males. Migrants are more likely to live alone or with siblings than non-migrants,

and the average size of a migrant household is smaller than the other households (MoP 2012).

Most migrants maintain close ties with parents living in the village of origin, and many also have siblings living either in the same household or in the same village as the parents. So while migrants usually leave their family back in their village of origin, they generally do not leave older parents behind if there is no other family to take care of them (MoP 2012). Migrant workers, and especially female garment workers, contribute to the rural household economy, and household agency rather than individual choice is at work when it comes to the decision to migrate to Phnom Penh, to share accommodation with siblings and, for many, to return to the home community to marry. There is a higher proportion of male migrants than female migrants who move to Phnom Penh for educational purposes, while more females migrate to Phnom Penh for work (MoP 2012). According to the census dataset (NIS 2009a), 25% of male migrants are students, but only 17% for female migrants. In 2008, the garment factory sector employed 41% of female migrants to the city.

### In-Migration Flows from Cambodian Districts to Phnom Penh (1997-2008)



#### LEGEND

- Krong (City)
- International boundary
- Province boundary
- Water body

#### Migrants to Phnom Penh (1997-2008) Nb migrant per 1,000 population

- |  |               |  |             |
|--|---------------|--|-------------|
|  | > 25.0 %      |  | 4.1 - 5.0 % |
|  | 20.1 - 25.0 % |  | 3.1 - 4.0 % |
|  | 15.1 - 20.0 % |  | 2.1 - 3.0 % |
|  | 10.1 - 15.0 % |  | 1.1 - 2.0 % |
|  | 5.1 - 10.0 %  |  | 0 - 1.0 %   |

Data Source:  
Cambodian Demographic Census 2008 (NIS, MoP)  
<http://arunatechnology.com>  
(Aruna Technology Ltd.)  
Department of Geography (DoG), 2005





## INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International migrations imply the movement of people to other countries, across the national borders. It is not a new phenomenon in Cambodia but it has evolved markedly in recent decades (MLVT 2010). The important drivers that push migrants overseas include a combination of chronic poverty, landlessness, lack of employment, inability to access markets and indebtedness (Maltoni 2006). There is, however, a more active pull factor involved with a substantial number of female migrants seeking relatively highly salaried work as domestic laborers in countries such as Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has recently promoted labor migration as one measure to alleviate poverty and underemployment, especially among its young labor force. It expects positive outcomes resulting from workers sending back remittances, acquiring skills and lowering unemployment (MLVT 2010).

Cambodian workers mostly migrate internationally through two different placement systems. Informal or irregular placement is by far the most widespread practice and in most cases, is facilitated by pioneer migrants or brokers who escort migrants to a workplace in the destination country. This method is widely regarded as relatively secure, convenient and cheap (Hing, Lun, and Phann 2011a). Thailand has been the major destination for migrant workers from Cambodia since 1994, mostly through these irregular channels.

In 2008, there were an estimated 180,000 Cambodian workers in Thailand. Some 110,000 were granted work permits by the Thai government in 2004 (Chan 2009; Hing, Lun, and Phann 2011a).

Legal migration is managed through a recruitment or placement system run by private and public recruitment agencies. This legal option is relatively new, costly and inconvenient for most, particularly for frequent short-term trips. According to the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT), between 1998 and 2008 about 26,000 people who travelled to other countries for work. This included 13,324 people to Malaysia, 8,231 to Thailand, 3,983 to South-Korea and smaller numbers of people to Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan, though these latter destinations are drawing increasing numbers (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training 2010).

Cambodian migrant workers are typically confined to dirty, difficult and dangerous jobs in Thailand, including fishing, construction and farming. The majority of workers sent to Malaysia are females who work as domestic workers or housemaids, while most migrants admitted in South Korea are men working in industries (Chan 2009)

Because international migration remains mostly illicit and undocumented, it is not easy to quantify the phenomenon. The commune database is the only nationwide dataset from which we can estimate the magnitude of international migration. In 2011, there were 227,764 people older than 18 years old whose primary occupation implied an international migration. This represents 2.6% of the total population in this age bracket (NIS 2013). The database does not indicate the countries of destination of the migrants, the system of placement (legal or irregular) or the duration of the migration (short versus long term). The dataset is also limited by the incompleteness of the data for certain communes.

Despite these limitations, an overall map allows illustration of the overall magnitude and distribution of international migration incidence across the country. It allows for at least 3 important observations:

1. The northwest region has the highest incidence of international migration, very likely due to the proximity to Thailand and the existing cross border migration networks in this area;
2. The incidence of international migration is also important in communes located in the Tonle Sap plain and Mekong delta, many of whom also travel through the Northwest provinces to Thailand. It should be viewed as a response to the rural poverty that affects these rice-based agricultural areas;
3. International migration is of less significance in more remote areas where communication and transport infrastructure networks are less developed and where low educational levels and subsistence life-styles may also be a factor.

International labor migration has been one of the primary coping strategies to escape poverty. However, it is not the panacea. Sachiko Yamamoto, ILO regional director for Asia and the Pacific (in Chan 2009) notes that "Migrant workers continue to report complaints and incidents of exploitive labor abroad. Among these are nonpayment and underpayment of wages, [...] substitution of contracts physical violence, sexual abuse and problems of communications due to language barrier [...]". Since labor emigration is expected to rise, the government is faced with the challenge of strengthening the policy and institutional frameworks that regulate labor export and offer better protection to migrants. Finding a solution also requires increased dialogue with governments in destination countries.

## GOVERNMENT POLICY ON MIGRATION

While the Government of Cambodia does not have a comprehensive policy on migration, it has economic and agrarian policies that support the strong movement of people engaged in internal migration, and makes the assumption that this will contribute to the rapid industrialization of the economy. This will also lead to the urbanization of a major part of the population and to land transfers, which would see the development of larger farms and fewer farmers.

Constraints on these policies are the current predominance of peasant small rice farms and their endurance as Cambodian society adapts to modernization the growth of industry, and to large scale land concessions for industrial crop

production, mainly in upland areas. A further constraint is the relatively slow demographic change which is accompanying modernization. National and urban population projections show that the proportion of the urban population – 20.08% in 2013 – will reach only 21.97% in 2030, and 27.49% in 2060 (Pardee Center 2013), representing relatively modest change. These figures may change if there is increased industrialization in urban areas, but for now they appear to reflect the continued membership and investment of urban migrants in their rural households and communities. This is perhaps the most exceptional aspect of migration in Cambodia, when compared to other Southeast Asian nations.

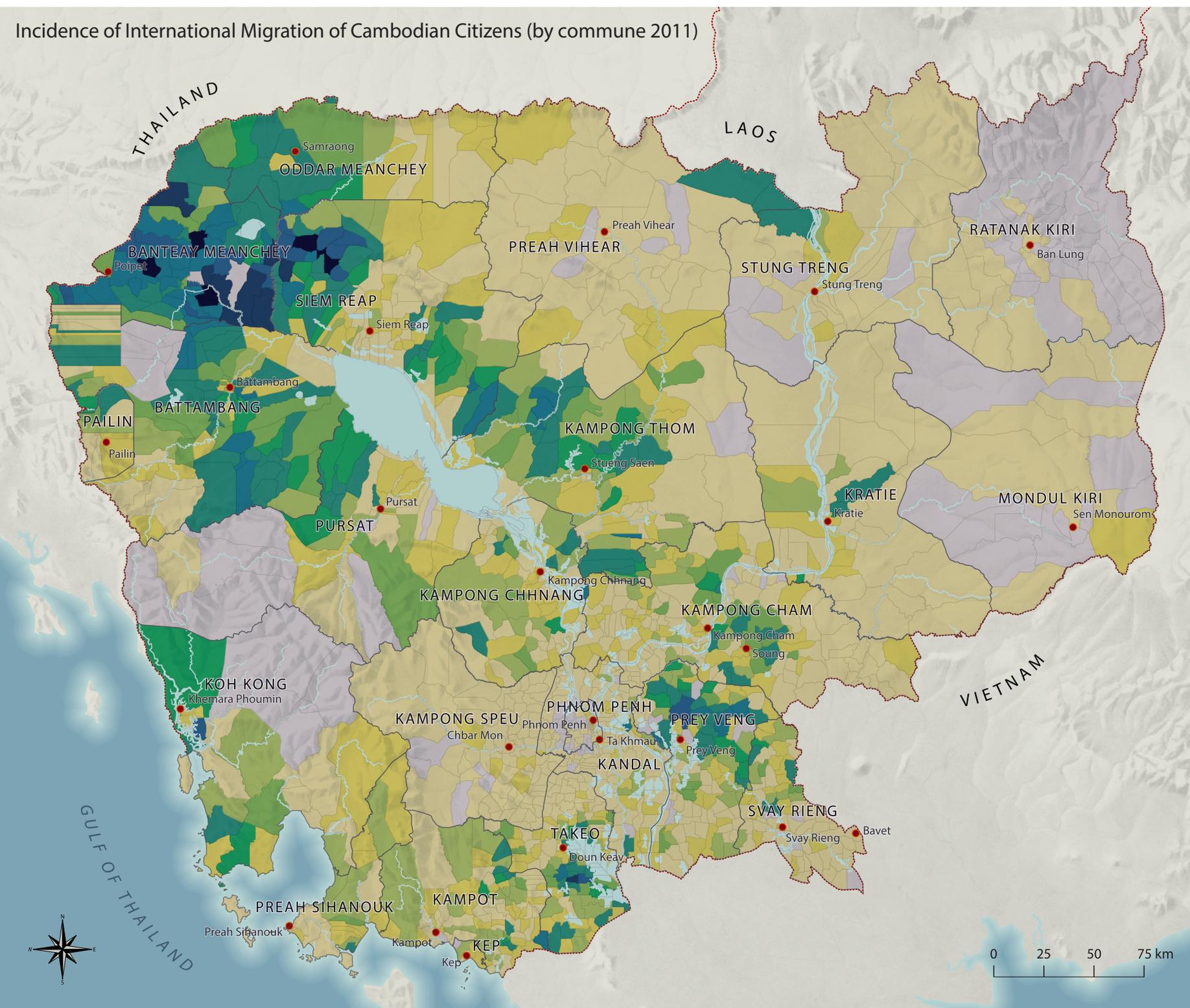


Photo by Sina Brod





### Incidence of International Migration of Cambodian Citizens (by commune 2011)



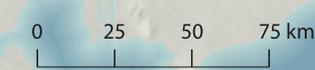
### LEGEND

- Krong (City)
- International boundary
- Province boundary
- Water body

### Percentage of migrants per total population

- > 25.0 %
- 20.1 - 25.0 %
- 15.1 - 20.0 %
- 10.1 - 15.0 %
- 5.1 - 10.0 %
- 4.1 - 5.0 %
- 3.1 - 4.0 %
- 2.1 - 3.0 %
- 1.1 - 2.0 %
- 0 - 1.0 %
- No data

Data Source:  
 Commune Database 2011 (MoP, NIS)  
<http://arunatechnology.com>  
 (Aruna Technology Ltd.)  
 Department of Geography (DoG), 2005



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> During the enumeration, people were asked if they have always been living in the current place of residence, and if not, how long they had been living in current place and what district they used to reside before current place. These questions and the relevant dataset form the basis of this permanent migration analysis.

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