



Briefing Note: World Habitat Day & Adequate Housing in Cambodia

Despite hundreds of thousands of people returning to their homes after the mass displacement caused by the Cambodia-Thailand border conflict in late 2025, many families remain unable to safely return to their homes due to damaged housing, disrupted services and risks from unexploded ordnance. Beyond border areas, longstanding land disputes, insecure tenure, forced and threatened evictions, predatory microfinance lending and development-related displacement continue to place homes, land and livelihoods at risk. Indigenous communities face particular vulnerabilities, with development pressures increasingly affecting traditional lands on which housing, livelihoods and cultural practices depend.

Against this backdrop, World Habitat Day 2026, under the theme “Adequate Housing for All”, provides an important opportunity to highlight what adequate housing requires in practice. Among other elements, as identified by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), it requires security of tenure, access to services and infrastructure, habitability, accessibility, appropriate location and cultural adequacy. In this briefing note, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights examines the current challenges to the right to adequate housing in Cambodia and outlines the applicable international human rights standards governing tenure security, forced eviction, displacement and return. Conclusively, the CCHR calls on the Royal Government of Cambodia to ensure that every person in Cambodia is protected from forced eviction and displacement, is adequately consulted, compensated and relocated where displacement cannot be avoided, and is enabled to return safely and sustainably to their home if displaced.

Situation in Cambodia

Insecure land tenure continues to expose communities across Cambodia to the loss of land, homes and livelihoods. Long-standing disputes connected to Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) remain unresolved, while communities continue to face forced evictions or threats of evictions. CCHR’s [monitoring](#) identified 40 cases of forced or threatened eviction affecting 22,108 families between October 2023 and September 2024, including cases involving intimidation, property destruction, inadequate compensation and insufficient consultation. These patterns continued into 2026. In July 2026, around 300 families affected by an ELC granted to Great Wonder Agriculture Development in Kratie province were [ordered to leave](#) their settlements, crops and construction sites by 14 August 2026.

Predatory microfinance lending and coercive debt-collection practices have also been a key driver of land loss in Cambodia, particularly among [poor and Indigenous borrowers](#). Microfinance institutions have aggressively marketed loans to Indigenous communities, often issuing loans based primarily on the value of borrowers’ land rather than their capacity to repay. Many Indigenous borrowers faced language and financial-literacy barriers, while some continued to be offered loans despite already struggling with debt. Consequently, borrowers have been pressured to sell land and other productive

assets, resulting in land loss which has [undermined livelihoods](#) and, for Indigenous communities, collective land rights, cultural identity and traditional ways of life.

At the same time, despite documented inadequate consultation and compensation for communities affected by major development projects, investment approvals have accelerated, increasing the potential scale of land and housing impacts where adequate safeguards are not applied. Cambodia approved [630 fixed-asset investment projects](#) in 2025 – 52% more than in 2024 – including major agricultural, infrastructure and energy projects, followed by another [146 projects](#) in the first quarter of 2026. The 180-kilometre Funan Techo Canal is expected to affect at least 2,305 households, of which around [400](#)

[households](#) are expected to lose their homes. By August 2026, families had already lost access to farmland while compensation for affected farmland and residential property remained [outstanding](#).

In April 2026, residents facing demolition of their homes for the widening of the Boeung Trabek canal rejected proposed relocation housing that was considered [inadequate](#), citing its small size, distance from the city and vulnerability to flooding. Authorities nevertheless ordered residents to dismantle their homes and warned that remaining structures would be demolished.

These pressures are particularly acute for Indigenous communities, many of which remain without completed collective land title (CLT) registration. Despite progress from 43 CLTs in June 2025 to 59 in June 2026, [only 12%](#) of Cambodia's estimated 488 Indigenous communities have obtained CLTs, while the registration process remains complex, costly and lengthy. In September 2026, around 150 Bunong

In connection with the revised Funan Techo Canal route, one family in Angkor Borei district has been unable to cultivate 1.5 hectares of rice fields since November 2025, despite having received [no compensation](#), while its residential land was also affected. In January 2026, a farmer in Kandal province [reported](#) having no information on where he would relocate or how much compensation he would receive after his home was expected to be demolished.

families in Monduliri [reported](#) that clearing for a private development had affected rotational farmland, burial grounds and sacred forest, while threatening water sources, fishing areas and access to forest resources essential to community life. Communities attempting to resist displacement or seek resolution often face restrictions and intimidation. In July 2026, authorities [blocked](#) Kratie villagers from marching to the National Assembly over their ELC dispute, while in May a Preah Vihear land-community representative was summoned by district police and reported being [pressured to stop protesting](#) and filing petitions.

Despite a ceasefire, displacement related to the Cambodia-Thailand conflict continues to undermine many Cambodians' enjoyment of adequate housing. At its peak in December 2025, the border conflict displaced [644,589 people](#) within Cambodia. Although most have returned, UN Special Rapporteur Thomas Andrews noted at the end of July 2026 that 20,000 Cambodian civilians were [still displaced](#) and unable to return home. As of September 2026, 13,259 people at a displaced civilian camp in Rong Cham village remain [unable to return](#) to their homes. While thousands of displaced families have moved from makeshift shelters into temporary housing, scarce livelihood opportunities, unreliable water supplies, limited teaching materials and inadequate school facilities, and flood-prone access roads continue to [undermine living conditions](#). Damage to homes and infrastructure, unexploded ordnance and unresolved conditions along parts of the border also continue to prevent safe and sustainable return.

International human rights law and standards

The right to adequate housing is guaranteed under [Article 11](#) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by Cambodia in 1992. As clarified by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in [General Comment No. 4](#), adequate housing should not be understood merely as physical shelter, but as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity. *Adequacy* encompasses seven interrelated elements, including legal security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy.

Security of tenure therefore forms an integral part of the right to adequate housing. [General Comment No. 26](#) on land and economic, social and cultural rights further recognizes that secure and equitable access to, use of and control over land can be essential to the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing, and that loss of such access can result in displacement and forced eviction. For Indigenous Peoples, the connection between land and adequate housing is particularly significant, as their homes, livelihoods, cultural practices and identity are often closely tied to their traditional lands and territories. The general protections afforded by the right to adequate housing are therefore complemented by specific protections under the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP), which recognizes their rights to lands, territories and resources traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired, and requires States to provide legal recognition and protection with due respect for Indigenous customs, traditions and land-tenure systems. UNDRIP further provides that Indigenous Peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories without their free, prior and informed consent and agreement on just and fair compensation, with the option of return where possible.

Loss of housing, land and property can consequently undermine not only adequate housing, but also access to food, water and sanitation, health and livelihoods, while interfering with individuals' ability to live securely in their homes and communities.

[General Comment No. 7](#) provides specific protection against forced evictions, which constitute a gross violation of the right to adequate housing. Complementing this, [Article 17](#) of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) prohibits arbitrary or unlawful interference with a person's home. Regardless of tenure status, everyone should enjoy a degree of security of tenure protecting them against forced eviction, harassment and other threats. Before any eviction, States must explore all feasible alternatives in genuine consultation with affected persons and ensure appropriate procedural protections and access to remedies. Evictions must not leave individuals homeless or vulnerable to further human rights violations. These protections are further elaborated in the [UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement](#), which provide that development-related evictions may occur only in exceptional circumstances and require, among other safeguards, meaningful participation, fair compensation and adequate resettlement. Where displacement or eviction occurs unlawfully, affected persons must have access to effective remedies, including restitution and appropriate compensation. [Article 2\(3\)](#) of the ICCPR further requires States to ensure an effective remedy where rights protected by the Covenant have been violated. The obligation to provide remedies therefore extends beyond preventing the initial loss of housing or land to addressing its consequences and, where possible, restoring affected persons to their previous situation.

The protections afforded by the ICESCR and ICCPR, including the rights to adequate housing, protection against arbitrary or unlawful interference with the home, and an effective remedy, continue to apply during armed conflict alongside applicable international humanitarian law. For

persons internally displaced by conflict, these protections extend to preventing arbitrary displacement, ensuring adequate living conditions while displaced, and facilitating voluntary, safe and dignified return or resettlement. The [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#) provide an authoritative international framework bringing together applicable international human rights and humanitarian law standards for protecting persons internally displaced by conflict and other causes, including during return and resettlement.

The following Principles are particularly relevant to Cambodia's current context:

Principle 7: Prior to any decision requiring the displacement of persons, authorities must ensure that all feasible alternatives are explored in order to avoid displacement altogether. Where no alternatives exist, all measures must be taken to minimize displacement and its adverse effects.

Principle 9: States are under a particular obligation to protect against the displacement of indigenous peoples, minorities, peasants, pastoralists and other groups with a special dependency on and attachment to their lands.

Principle 28: Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country.

Principle 29: Competent authorities have the duty and responsibility to assist returned and/or resettled internally displaced persons to recover, to the extent possible, their property and possessions which they left behind or were dispossessed of upon their displacement. When recovery of such property and possessions is not possible, competent authorities shall provide or assist these persons in obtaining appropriate compensation or another form of just reparation.

Recommendations

The CCHR calls on the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to take the following measures to ensure the effective realization of the right to adequate housing:

1. *Prevent forced evictions and strengthen security of tenure* by halting evictions that do not comply with international human rights standards, exploring all feasible alternatives to displacement, and ensuring that no eviction results in homelessness or increased vulnerability.
2. *Guarantee timely and meaningful consultation* with communities affected by development projects, provide clear information on potential displacement, compensation and relocation, and ensure fair compensation before displacement occurs.
3. *Ensure that any relocation provides adequate alternative housing*, including security of tenure, essential services, habitability, appropriate location and access to livelihoods.
4. *Strengthen and enforce regulation* of microfinance lending and debt-collection practices through the National Bank of Cambodia and relevant authorities, including requirements to assess borrowers' repayment capacity, ensure accessible and understandable loan terms, prevent coercive collection practices, and protect Indigenous collective land from debt-related loss.
5. *Accelerate and simplify CLT registration* for Indigenous communities and protect traditional lands pending registration, including against encroachment, concessions and development projects, while ensuring meaningful participation and respect for free, prior and informed consent in accordance with international standards.
6. *Ensure communities can defend their land and housing rights* without intimidation, obstruction or retaliation, and establish or strengthen accessible complaint and dispute-resolution mechanisms providing effective remedies for eviction, land loss and inadequate compensation.
7. *Facilitate the safe, voluntary and sustainable return* of persons remaining displaced by the Cambodia-Thailand conflict by removing barriers to return, including unexploded ordnance and damaged housing and infrastructure, maintaining adequate temporary housing and essential services until return is possible, and providing restitution or appropriate compensation where property cannot be restored.

For more information, please contact **Mr. Vann Sophath**, CCHR's Project Coordinator, by phone at (+855) (0)12 941 206 or email at vann.sophath@cchrcambodia.org.