Visit on Displacement and Economic Disruption at Preah Vihear Province

Brief Introduction:

From July to December 2025, the Cambodia-Thailand border dispute escalated into armed clashes and widespread insecurity, severely affecting communities in Preah Vihear Province. Villages along the border were repeatedly evacuated, schools and homes were destroyed, and families were forced into temporary shelters or refugee camps. Testimonies from children and women during this period revealed deep fear, trauma, and economic hardship, as many were compelled to abandon education or livelihoods to survive.

By early 2026, a ceasefire remained the majority of displaced families to return, yet recovery remained fragile. Infrastructure damage, unexploded ordnance, and unresolved border tensions continued to prevent thousands from resettling safely. As of August 2026, many villages in Choam Ksant District and the Triangle Area (តំបន់ត្រីកោណ) remain silent, with homes empty and schools struggling to reopen. Families who returned often face the absence of proper housing or land titles, while border closures with Laos and Thailand have cut off vital economic activities, leaving communities without stable income. This prolonged disruption highlights how the conflict has not only displaced people but also dismantled local economies and education systems. The situation underscores the urgent need for coordinated humanitarian support, reconstruction, and clear administrative measures to restore security and livelihoods in Preah Vihear Province.



Schools in Preah Vihear Province, ACT team visited!

Observation Noted:

On 5–6 August 2026, the ACT team carried out a field visit to Choam Ksant District in Preah Vihear Province, supported by local fundraising efforts that had been mobilized since the previous and early of this year. During the visit, the team observed that many families were still unable to return home due to insecurity and the presence of unexploded ordnance. Only a few people were encountered along the way, and they explained that they had come briefly to check their homes before returning to refugee camps, as the situation remained unsafe. Schools in the district had largely been closed, and although some had reopened, students were still hesitant to attend classes because they did not feel secure enough to return. These findings highlight both the continuing disruption to education and community life, and the importance of local fundraising initiatives that enable ACT to provide ongoing support to affected families in Preah Vihear Province.

Passing through the **Triangle Area** (**កំបន់ម៉ុំបី**) in Morakot Commune, Choam Ksant District, Preah Vihear Province, the ACT team observed villages that were silent and largely abandoned. This border zone, where Cambodia meets Laos and Thailand, has been heavily affected by the closure of crossings between the three countries. With borders sealed, local communities have lost their traditional economic activities such as cross-border trade, small commerce, and seasonal migration work. Families who once relied on selling goods or working across the border now face severe hardship, as there are no viable income opportunities in the area. The absence of economic flow has deepened the sense of isolation homes remain empty, schools are closed or barely functioning, and those who return briefly often leave again for refugee camps. The lack of secure livelihoods and the stalled economic process highlight how border closures have compounded insecurity, leaving the Triangle Area in a state of silence and stagnation.



House at An Ses Village in Choam Ksant Commune, Choam Ksant District

During the ACT team's travel across An Ses Village in Choam Ksant Commune, Choam Ksant District, Preah Vihear Province, the situation was marked by silence and abandonment. Homes stood empty as families remained unable to return due to insecurity, and the atmosphere reflected a community still displaced. A few families were encountered along the way, but they explained that even when they came back to visit their homes or check on their plantations, they were required to seek permission each time. Their land and property had been restricted or banned for entry, leaving them without freedom to resettle or cultivate for livelihood. This constant need for authorization underscored the fragile conditions of return, where families lacked both security and autonomy, and highlighted the broader humanitarian challenge of restoring normal life in Choam Ksant District.



As the ACT team traveled through communities in Choam Ksant District, Preah Vihear Province, the atmosphere was overwhelmingly silent, with no signs of people passing by for work or business. The villages appeared abandoned, reflecting the ongoing displacement and insecurity. Along the way, the team met a few families who explained that they had only returned briefly to visit their houses and check on their plantations. They emphasized that they could not stay permanently because the areas were restricted and considered unsafe, requiring permission each time they entered. Most families continued to live in refugee camps, where they felt more secure, even though life there remained difficult. This situation highlights the fragile conditions of return, where communities are caught between the desire to reclaim their homes and the reality of insecurity and restricted access.

At O-Da Primary School in Choam Ksant District, Preah Vihear Province, the ACT team found the site overgrown with grass and no road access. A man nearby, collecting morning glory, explained the school had been closed since July 2025. His family remained in a refugee camp, and he had only returned briefly to check his house. He noted that staying was impossible due to the lack of markets or economic activity, and expressed concern about his house and plantation, which had not produced harvests for two years, leaving his family facing worsening economic hardship.





Since the conflict began in July 2025, schools across Choam Ksant District in Preah Vihear Province have remained largely inoperative, and this disruption continues into August 2026. Many school buildings were damaged or destroyed, while others remain unsafe due to unexploded ordnance. Even where schools have reopened, insecurity and fear of renewed violence prevent full attendance. Current observations show that only about 60–80% of students have returned to class, while the rest remain absent because families do not feel secure enough to send their children back shared by teachers and school rector.

This prolonged disruption has created significant risks of dropout and long-term learning gaps, with displaced teachers and limited temporary learning arrangements unable to meet community needs. The partial return of students reflects both the resilience of families striving for education and the persistent barriers of insecurity. Without safe facilities, psychosocial support, and trust in protection measures, the education system in Choam Ksant District cannot fully recover, leaving children vulnerable to lasting educational and social setbacks.





Visit teachers and school rector at Choam Ksant Commune & District in Preah Vihear Province

During the ACT team's passage through Choeteal Kong Village in Choam Ksant Commune, Choam Ksant District, Preah Vihear Province, several families were encountered who had previously worked as migrant laborers in Thailand. Their living conditions appeared fragile, with many showing signs of poor health. The team observed that they looked pale and exhausted, reflecting both the physical strain of displacement and the lack of adequate medical care. These families weakened state underscored the broader humanitarian challenges in the area, where insecurity and limited access to essential services continue to affect the well-being of returnees and displaced communities.



Some of those encountered in Choeteal Kong Village were migrant workers who had returned during the dispute. They recounted to the ACT team their experiences of fear and uncertainty, explaining how violence and the presence of unexploded ordnance had driven them away from their homes. Their testimonies revealed a deep sense of anxiety about personal safety and highlighted the immense difficulty of rebuilding normal life under such conditions. The inability to reclaim their land or restore livelihoods has left families in a fragile state, dependent on temporary shelters and limited resources. This situation underscores the broader humanitarian challenges in Choam Ksant District, where insecurity continues to obstruct recovery, weaken community resilience, and prolong displacement.

ACT also encouraged these families to document their personal cases and experiences of migration work in Thailand. To write down their stories, ACT sought to preserve firsthand accounts of the hardships they endured, including unsafe working conditions, exploitation, and the emotional toll of separation from their communities. This process not only gave the returnees an opportunity to reflect on their journeys but also created valuable records that can inform advocacy, policy dialogue, and humanitarian programming. Collecting written testimonies ensures that the voices of migrant workers are recognized and included in broader efforts to address the vulnerabilities of border communities and to strengthen protection mechanisms for those who continue to seek employment abroad.

Refugee Stories #1:



Meas Sreyna used to work in Thailand. She explained, “I live near the border, so it is easy to return home. When the border crossing is closed, I take shortcut paths through the forest, sometimes hiding with small children to avoid being caught. I am always afraid that if we are discovered, we could be abused or tortured. The employers in Thailand cheated me, I worked for them for four months without received any pay, more than ten thousand baht. With no money to return home, I had to ask my brother in Cambodia to send me money for the journey back.”

Refugee Stories #2:

Hieb Phat migrated to Thailand. He explained, “My first hardship was that they drew blood from me every three months; if the blood was good, they took even more. The second hardship was that after working for two years, I had to renew my work permit, which cost between 6,000 and 10,000 baht. Since I earned only 300 baht per day, I had nothing left. That is why I decided to return to Cambodia. I came back legally, but if I had returned illegally, I would have had to pay between 3,000 and 5,000 baht. For women, crossing the border illegally is even more dangerous, because Thai soldiers often abuse them through beatings or sexual assault. It is better not to go at all; life there is too hard.”



Refugee Stories #3:



Touch Yav worked in Thailand. She explained, "Although working there provided some income, it was very difficult to extend my work visa permit. The process was complicated and costly, making it hard to continue legally. The work itself was exhausting, long hours of heavy labor with little rest. Even though I earned money, it was not enough to cover basic needs. Food was often insufficient, and I struggled to maintain my health and strength. Life as a migrant worker in Thailand was full of hardship, with constant pressure from both the difficult visa requirements and the demanding work conditions."

Refugee Stories #4:

Ieng Sambath shared, "I worked in Thailand for three years. During the border dispute, I wanted to return home, but my employer refused and even threatened to send me to jail or killed me. Out of desperation, everyone prayed and then ran across the barbed wire to escape. I worked for four to five months without receiving any salary. When I finally reached Cambodia, we hired a car to travel to Preah Vihear and asked the village chief for shelter because we had no home. Since the conflict with Thailand, the authorities there have treated us with hostility, always finding excuses to expel us. Whenever tensions rise, they look for ways to shoot or kill us. Because of this, I kept running from place to place in Thailand before finally returning to Cambodia."



After returning home, families in Choam Ksant District, Preah Vihear Province shared with the ACT team that they faced serious challenges in rebuilding their lives. Many no longer had proper houses to live in, and some lacked official land titles, leaving them uncertain about their rights and security. Without stable shelter or recognized ownership, families struggled to restart their livelihoods. A few attempted to cultivate small plots of land for plantation work to support their households, but insecurity and limited resources made this effort fragile[1]. Their testimonies reflected both the determination to provide for their families and the heavy burden of living without the foundation of secure housing and land, underscoring the urgent need for assistance in reconstruction and legal recognition.

[1] Migration during Conflict Aug2026

In response, ACT provided brief guidance, encouraging them to contact their village or commune chief for registration and to formally request support for housing and land allocation. While families expressed willingness to follow this advice, some noted that the process remained complicated, as village and commune leaders themselves required clearer and more practical guidelines to establish residency and ensure fair distribution with this they focus on those refugees who listed in their record. This situation reflects the broader challenge of rebuilding communities where both displaced families and local authorities struggle with limited resources and unclear procedures.



Recommendation for Solution:

Future resolution efforts must prioritize comprehensive protection and recovery measures for all affected groups. For children and schools, urgent investment is needed to rebuild damaged educational infrastructure, provide temporary learning spaces, and ensure psychosocial support so that children can regain a sense of stability and hope. Refugee and displaced communities require secure shelters, access to clean water, food, and healthcare, alongside clear resettlement plans that guarantee safety from violence and unexploded ordnance. Migrant workers, many of whom return in fragile health, should be supported through livelihood programs, vocational training, and reintegration initiatives that reduce dependency on unsafe migration. At the same time, documentation of their experiences must be strengthened to inform policy reforms that protect workers abroad.

Long-term solutions should focus on community resilience and peacebuilding. This includes promoting dialogue between authorities and local communities to reduce fear and mistrust, ensuring women's leadership in recovery planning, and creating economic opportunities that allow families to rebuild their lives without resorting to risky migration. Education recovery programs, combined with livelihood support and health services, will help restore dignity and cohesion. By integrating humanitarian relief with sustainable development and inclusive governance, future responses can move beyond short-term aid toward lasting stability and empowerment for victims of dispute, children, refugee communities, and migrant workers.

To effectively respond to these complex issues, ACT recognizes that national and international collaboration is essential. Beyond its peacebuilding role, ACT is seeking support from government institutions, UN agencies, and international NGOs to strengthen humanitarian assistance and long-term recovery. Joint efforts are needed to rebuild schools, provide psychosocial care for children, and ensure safe resettlement for refugee communities. At the same time, coordinated programs should address the health and livelihood needs of returning migrant workers, offering reintegration support and protection against future exploitation. By combining ACT's expertise in community dialogue and conflict resolution with the resources and technical capacity of external partners, a more comprehensive response can be achieved, one that not only alleviates immediate suffering but also lays the foundation for sustainable peace, resilience, and development in Choam Ksant District and beyond.



Stand with Families Displaced by the Cambodia–Thailand Border Conflict

Support families who have lost their homes, livelihoods, education, and sense of security.

1,881 families in Preah Vihear Province have been affected by displacement and severe economic disruption.

From July to December 2025, the Cambodia–Thailand border conflict escalated into armed clashes and widespread insecurity, devastating communities in Cambodia's Preah Vihear Province. Families living along the border were repeatedly forced to evacuate. Homes and schools were damaged or destroyed, livelihoods were disrupted, and thousands of people were forced to seek refuge in temporary shelters and camps.

For many families, the crisis has not ended.

Even after the fighting subsided, many people have been unable to safely return home because of continuing insecurity and the presence of unexploded ordnance. Villages remain largely empty. Families may return briefly to check their homes or farms, but access to their land is restricted and, in some cases, requires repeated permission. Without the ability to safely return, cultivate their land, or rebuild their homes, families have lost the foundations of their livelihoods and independence.

Children are paying a heavy price

The conflict has also severely disrupted education in Choam Ksant District. Since the conflict began in July 2025, many schools have remained damaged, unsafe, or only partially operational. Some school buildings have been destroyed, while others remain inaccessible because of unexploded ordnance.

Even where schools have reopened, fear and insecurity continue to keep children away. According to teachers and school administrators, only around **60–80% of students have returned to school**, while many others remain at home because their families do not yet feel safe.

After more than a year of disruption, children face growing risks of dropping out and falling behind in their education. They also need psychosocial support to recover from the fear and uncertainty they have experienced.

Livelihoods have disappeared

The closure of the border has taken away traditional sources of income. Families who once depended on cross-border trade, small businesses, seasonal work, or employment across the border have lost their livelihoods.
Migrant workers who returned home during the conflict are also struggling to rebuild their lives. Many returned with limited resources and now face the difficult reality of having no secure land, housing, or employment to return to.

These families want to rebuild their lives. They need the opportunity and support to do so safely and with dignity.

Your support can help families rebuild

We are appealing for support to help affected communities meet urgent humanitarian needs while beginning the longer process of recovery and rebuilding.

Your contribution can help support:

- **Safe shelter, food, clean water, and healthcare** for displaced families;
- **Education recovery** for children whose schooling has been interrupted;
- **Psychosocial support** for children, women, and families affected by conflict and displacement;
- **Livelihood recovery** so families can regain a stable source of income;
- **Support for returning migrant workers** through reintegration and livelihood opportunities;
- **Community recovery and peacebuilding**, including dialogue and initiatives that strengthen trust and resilience; and
- **Women's participation and leadership** in community recovery and decision-making.

Help families move from displacement to recovery

Humanitarian assistance is urgently needed, but recovery will take more than temporary relief. Families need safe places to live, access to their land, opportunities to earn a living, and the confidence that their children can return to school safely.

Every contribution can help a family take another step toward rebuilding a safe and dignified life.

"Please stand with families who have suffered the devastation of conflict and war. Their homes remain silent, their livelihoods disrupted, and their children's futures uncertain. Together, we can uphold their dignity and support their path toward peace and recovery."

Donate through:

