

NEWS

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17-20 February 2026 - Representatives of Universidad Politécnica de Madrid have taken part in the four Online Kick-Off sessions of the **START Cambodia** project. **Strategic Transformations for Wider Access, Stronger Retention and Improved Conditions for More Diverse Students to Thrive** is an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Capacity Building in Higher Education Strand 3 project that officially started on 1 February 2026 and will run till 31 January 2030.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), National Institute of Education (NIE), Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC), Svay Rieng University (SRU) and University of Heng Samrin Thbongkhmum (UHST) - from Cambodian side - will work together with four European partners: University of Groningen, the Netherlands (project coordinator), Asociación de Educadores y Expertos Tuning, Spain; Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain; and Middle East Technical University, Turkey, in order to: foster structural reform of the Cambodian higher education sector necessary for ensuring inclusive transition, more equitable access, stronger retention and higher academic success rates for vulnerable groups.

During the next four years the ten partners will focus on

- 1- Equipping key actors who support future students - especially students from vulnerable groups - in preparing for successful transition to higher education during the upper secondary education stage with tailor-made information, didactic and continuous professional development resources;
- 2- Introducing curriculum innovations aimed at strengthening retention and academic success into first-year courses of STEAM undergraduate programmes;
- 3- Setting up institutional- and programme-level support schemes and structures required to make transition to higher education inclusive, in particular for students from vulnerable groups; as well as
- 4- Creating mechanisms for Cambodian HE authorities, institutional policy makers, students from vulnerable groups, and faculty members to engage in a national dialogue and joint actions focused on sustaining and extending the structural reform

As a structural project, START Cambodia supports the EU Global Gateway strategy of “investing in quality education, paying attention to the inclusion of vulnerable groups”, so as to enhance the competitiveness of Cambodia with a more diverse population getting access to decent jobs.



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START Cambodia brings together Higher Education and Upper Secondary School Sectors actors, with students – including those from vulnerable groups – working side by side with academics, institutional & national higher education authorities.

The project aims to benefit (1) all future Cambodian students & learners, especially those from vulnerable groups, (2) Cambodian Higher Education Sector, (3) Cambodian Upper Secondary School sector, and (4) Cambodian society at large, while offering resources (Higher) Education systems beyond Cambodia can use to promote sustainable growth and more equitable access to Higher Education &, thus, decent work.

The first face-to-face project meeting will take place in Phnom Penh on 22-25 June 2026, with MoEYS as host.