



UNITED NATIONS  
VIET NAM



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**POLICY BRIEF**

# DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality in Viet Nam

# INTRODUCTION

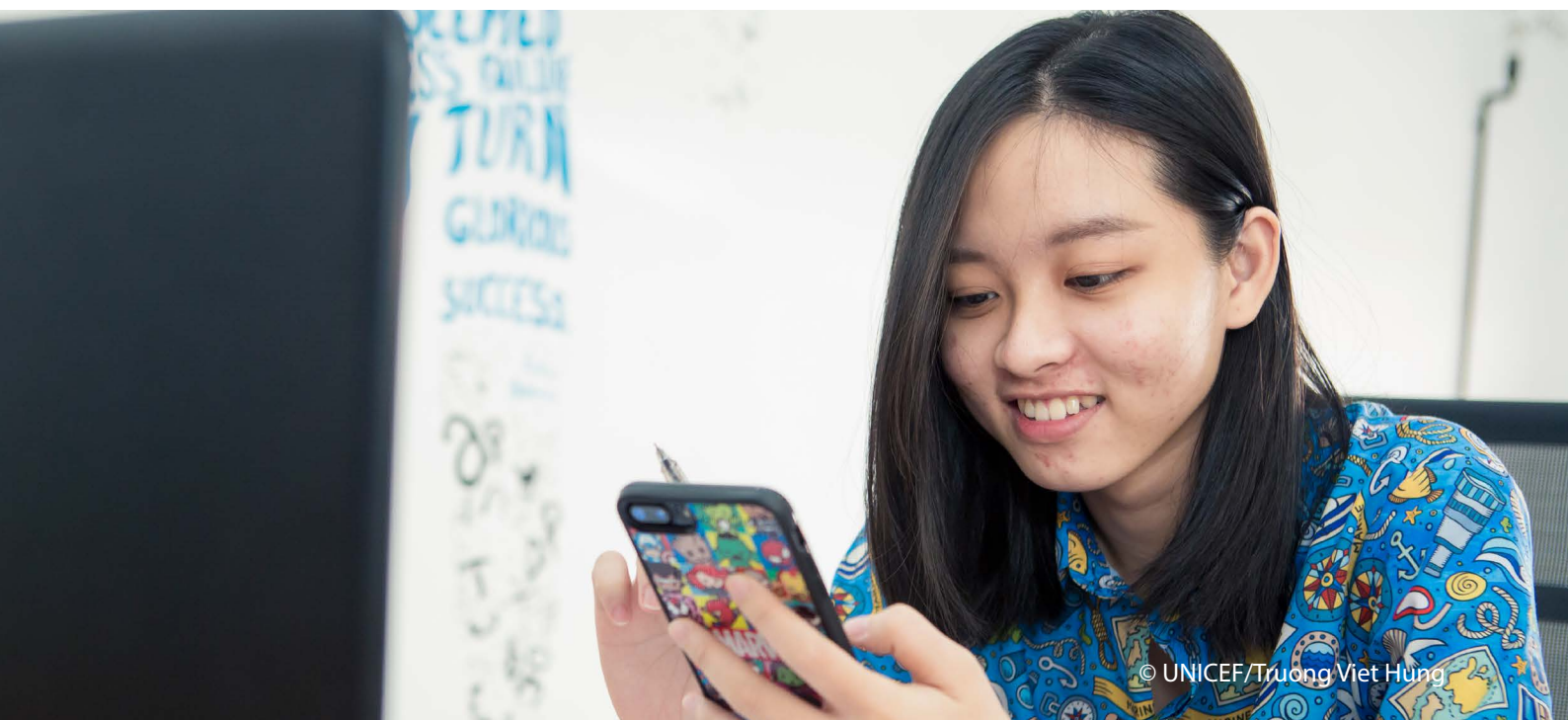
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International Women’s Day (IWD) 2023 call our attention to the digital divide between men and women and calls for an inclusive digital transformation.<sup>1</sup> Aligned with IWD, the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women has as priority theme *Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls*.<sup>2</sup> What makes this theme relevant, and what are the implications for Viet Nam? The purpose of this brief is to elaborate on this priority theme by presenting available data from Viet Nam.\*

While the digital revolution has immense potential to improve social and economic outcomes for all, including women and girls, it also risks perpetuating existing patterns of discrimination and inequalities. 37% of all women globally are not online. Women’s exclusion from the digital world has shaved \$1 trillion from the gross domestic product of low- and middle-income countries in the last decade— a loss that will grow to \$1.5 trillion by 2025 without action.<sup>3</sup>

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\*This brief was prepared by the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office and UN Women in Viet Nam with inputs from: FAO, ILO, IOM, RCO, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNESCO in February, 2023.



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# DIGITAL ACCESS AND DIGITAL SKILLS

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Viet Nam has come a long way in providing **equal access to technology**, in particular to information and communications technology (ICT). Across its 63 provinces, there is no indication of large-scale gendered differences in access to ICT, exposure to media, mobile phone use, and having basic ICT skills.<sup>4</sup> 91.1% of women and girls in Viet Nam use cell phones.<sup>5</sup> ICT provides access to information and government e-services, which is particularly impactful for women and girls living in rural, remote communities. However, having a device is critical but not necessarily sufficient for women to harness the potential of digitalization.<sup>6</sup> In Viet Nam, there is a difference in digital skills and access to advanced digital technology

*“91.1% of women and girls in Viet Nam use cell phones.”*

between men and women, boys and girls.<sup>7</sup> In the agricultural sector, for example, although digital solutions are increasingly implemented, prevailing gender norms hinders women’s access to rural advisory services, trainings, and technology transfer.

Disparities between **girls and boys pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)** are particularly pronounced. As key drivers for innovation, STEM fields are incubators to

find new, creative solutions. Research shows that **diverse teams generate innovation**.<sup>8</sup> As such, the equal participation of women is an enabling factor for innovation to take place, and, as such, can prove key for Viet Nam to continue to compete on the international arena.

Globally STEM fields lag behind in ensuring inclusive quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for girls and women. A study from 2019 found that both teachers and female students had **internalized cultural biases** of their/ their students' suitability to pursue STEM. For many, participation in STEM comes after surmounting **a series of systemic, social and cultural barriers**. In Viet Nam, for example, women are expected to take primary **responsibility for raising children and domestic duties**.<sup>9</sup> This limits women's access to a fast-growing industry and acts as a barrier for women to shape technologies and lead innovation.<sup>10</sup> By 2050, 75% of jobs globally will be related to STEM. The proportion of female graduates completing tertiary education in STEM fields in Viet Nam is 36.5%. Polytechnic University has over 78% male students compared to 22% female students.<sup>11</sup>

**“By 2050, 75% of jobs globally will be related to STEM.”**

With the gap between girls and boys pursuing STEM in Viet Nam it comes as no surprise that **innovation and tech industries has the greatest gender imbalance of all sectors**.<sup>12 13</sup> According to the International Labor Organization, in Viet Nam, women account for about 37% of the industry's workforce.<sup>14 15</sup> Studies have shown that companies with greater gender parity does better financially. Notably, IMF's calculations estimate that closing the gender gap can increase a country's GDP by an average of 35%. To sum up, diverse workforces generate revenue.<sup>16</sup> The inclusion of women therefore becomes key in unlocking Viet Nam's continuous economic growth to meet its goals of graduating to a high-income country by 2045,<sup>17</sup> while achieving greater social inclusion in line with 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) on gender equality and the empowerment of women.



## Just Energy Transition Partnership

On 14 December 2022, Viet Nam signed its political declaration on the **Just Energy Transition Partnership**. The partnership aims to accelerate Viet Nam's transition to a green, just economy. The role of digital transformation in energy transition is vital. To ensure that the energy transition of Viet Nam delivers on being 'just', the participation of women is key.



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# GENDER-RESPONSIVE DIGITAL POLICY

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In Viet Nam, with **the National Programme on Digital Transformation** until 2025 (Decision 749/QĐ-TTg), with a vision toward 2030, the Government has set out on an ambitious digitalization journey.<sup>18</sup> The need for digital transformation is identified across societal and economic sectors and is seen as a vehicle to increase productivity, stimulate innovation, and ensure that Viet Nam can continue to compete internationally.<sup>19</sup> Moving into the future, and towards Viet Nam's ambition to become a High-income country by 2045, the digital transformation journey must include all citizens as active contributors.

To achieve this, gender-responsive policies on digital transformation and innovation

are vital. In Viet Nam, the **Law on Gender Equality 2006, Article 15**, outlines equal access for men and women to science and technology, as well as to training in science and technology. Three key policy documents on digital transformation and innovation, namely the **National Strategy on Industry 4.0 to 2030 (2020)**; the **National Digital Transformation Program to 2025, with a vision to 2030 (2020)**; and **Business Support Program for Digital Transformation in 2021-2025**, are, however, gender blind. This means that the gender-related issues in innovation and technology are not addressed.<sup>20</sup> To better understand, and address, how these policies affect men and women, data disaggregated by sex, at the minimum, is needed.



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# THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

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Today, digitalization has penetrated almost all major sectors of the economy worldwide.<sup>21</sup> In Viet Nam, digital economy accounted for about 14.26% of the total GDP in 2022, with an estimated annual growth of 8.9 % in the 2022-2026 period. Yet, **women are less likely to fully partake and contribute to the digital economy.**<sup>22</sup>

Technological and digital innovation can create, eliminate, and transform jobs, all in parallel.<sup>23</sup> As the IR 4.0 is rolled out, **automation and technological advancements are forecasted to cause a rapid decline in demand for unskilled and low-skilled labor.** Nearly 80% of working-age women in Viet Nam are either low-skilled or unskilled. Up to 86% of workers in Vietnam's textile and footwear industries are at risk of losing their job within the next 15 years.<sup>24</sup> In this context, migrant female

workers are among the most affected by IR 4.0 as they account for a large proportion of the low-skilled labor force.<sup>25 26</sup> Upskilling and reskilling these workers will enable them to continue to play an active role in the economy.

**E-commerce provides new avenues for women entrepreneurs and women-led enterprises to gain access to new markets and greater profits.** According to the Viet Nam Women Entrepreneur Council, 24% of the total number of enterprises are women-led. Access to finance and credit, a crucial enabler of technology transfer, remains a challenge for women. The lack of affordable financial services is an issue for most smallholder producers, but it is particularly significant for women, who often lack collateral to access loans (e.g. land titles).<sup>27</sup>



## Key terms

### Gender Blind

The different roles, responsibilities and needs of men/boys and women/girls in specific contexts are not taken into account.

Existing inequalities in gender norms, roles and relations are not changed.

### Gender Responsive

Gender considerations are intentionally considered in the design, implementation and results of development programmes and policies.

Diverse realities and needs of all genders are reflected. Girls and women are empowered. Greater equity in gender relations is achieved.

### Gender Transformative

Gender equality is considered central to achieve positive development outcomes.

Unequal gender relations are transformed to promote shared power, control of resources, decision-making, and support for women's empowerment.

As a result, women/girls and men/boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity.

*Based on Glossary of Terms and Concepts - UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia*



## Gender-transformative agriculture

A wide range of digital solutions are emerging in the agricultural sector in Viet Nam. Whilst cutting-edge technologies are mainly adopted in large-scale farming, the government is facilitating access to digital solutions for smallholder producers too.<sup>28</sup> Men have traditionally benefitted the most from technology transfer and innovative agricultural techniques, as these have focused on tasks generally performed by men such as tillage, harvesting, post-harvest and transportation.<sup>29</sup> In parallel, female farmers are predominantly involved in traditional types of production.<sup>30</sup> These technologies – from the simplest tools to more sophisticated digital solutions – need to be designed in a gender-transformative manner, to reduce not only the burden of rural women's agricultural work, but also to be associated with their household responsibilities.<sup>31</sup>



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# VIOLENCE ONLINE

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Viet Nam has 86% of its population online.<sup>32</sup> As more people go online, more people are at risk of experiencing **cyber violence**. Cyber violence is “...any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of ICT or other digital tools and that harms or disproportionately affects a person based on gender.”<sup>33</sup> Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a rise in cyber violence was reported worldwide. The risk of cyber violence is higher for women and girls, compared to men and boys.<sup>34</sup> 38 % of all women online have experienced online violence. Overall, there is a lack of data of how these global trends are mirrored in Viet Nam and online violence, including gender-based violence online, remains a fairly new topic of discussion. Impunity of technology-facilitated violence remains colossal worldwide.<sup>35</sup> In Viet Nam, whilst relevant

strategies and programmes<sup>36</sup> refer to the importance of a safe and healthy digital environment, the issue of online gender-based violence was not addressed.<sup>37</sup>

*Cyber violence is “...any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of ICT or other digital tools and that harms or disproportionately affects a person based on gender.”*





## Cyber violence against children

In Viet Nam, up to 70% of children are exposed to harmful and objectionable content. 75% of children experience negative emotions (anger, sadness, shock or fear) when exposed to offensive content; 80% of children have experienced scenes of violence and cyberbullying; and 20% of children have been victims of cyberbullying and violence.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to threatening mental and physical well-being, discrimination against women and girls may also **limit their participation as active citizens online**. This is especially true for women with multiple identities (i.e. LGBTQI community, ethnic minority women and girls).<sup>39</sup> The risk of online violence may disincentivize women to use online services, which has particularly dire consequences when digitalizing social services.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, it risks resulting in self-censorship.<sup>41</sup>

There is indication that **online spaces are becoming increasingly used for trafficking in persons**.<sup>42</sup> Scarcity of formal

opportunities, complex recruitment processes in the formal sector, lack of access to adequate and reliable information, limited understanding of safe migration and human trafficking are key factors to why people choose brokers and middlemen to pursue irregular migration paths.<sup>43</sup> These factors, exacerbated by a **more volatile job market for low- or unskilled workforce**, push more people to take desperate measures – such as accepting job offers online without adequate background information. Women, especially young women and girls, remains a key target to international traffickers.





# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIET NAM

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- **Mainstream gender perspectives in national digital policies**, and their potential amendments, such as the National Digital Transformation Program to 2025, with a vision to 2030 (2020); the National Strategy on Industry 4.0 to 2030 (2020); and Business Support Program for Digital Transformation in 2021-2025, and include time-bound, gender-specific indicators and targets, and allocate resources to enable full implementation.
- **Strengthen and promote quality education for women and girls throughout the life course and at all levels**, including on digital literacy, to address gender disparities by ensuring that women and girls have equal access to leadership training, career development, scholarships and fellowships and vocational training, particularly in STEM fields and technical education; and address negative social norms and gender stereotypes in education systems.
- **Forecast and anticipate future job and skill needs to minimize the adverse, gendered impacts of digitalization and automation**, and adapt educational and vocational curricula, reskilling and upskilling programmes to facilitate women's transition to new occupations and jobs, in particular for those at risk of being replaced by automation, in particular for migrant workers.

- **Strengthening data collection to better understand the full dimensions of gender and innovation and technology, and to address gender-based violence online**, through disaggregated by sex, age, disability, ethnicity and geographic location. Use this data to inform public budgets through gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) to enhance the effectiveness of public resources in this area.

- **Integrate the prevention and response of gender-based violence online** into the Programme on gender-based violence prevention and response 2021-2025 (Decision no. 2232/QĐ-TTg) and in National Digital Transformation Program to 2025, with a vision to 2030 (2020); the National Strategy on Industry 4.0 to 2030 (2020); and Business Support Program for Digital Transformation in 2021-2025.



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