

## **Unlocking Gender Equality for Inclusive Growth in Viet Nam**

Ha Noi, Viet Nam December 2024

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This Common Country Analysis (CCA) 2023 Update was prepared under the leadership of the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Viet Nam. With financial and technical support from UN Women in Viet Nam, the report was drafted by Sriani Kring (UN Women Consultant), Kongchheng Poch (UNRCO Economist), and Tran Thi Thuy Anh (UN Women Programme Management Specialist). The drafting team expresses their gratitude to the professional staff of the Institute of Labor Science and Social Affairs (ILSSA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Viet Nam for their technical input and substantive feedback. This report also benefited greatly from substantial input and peer reviews by the staff of UN agencies in Viet Nam.



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# **Executive** Summary .....

The Case for Investing in Gender Equality

Leveraging a 'gender dividend' in the labor market will help Viet Nam address numerous economic and social challenges. These include the impact of megatrends such as demographic shifts toward a rapidly aging society, climate fragility, and the need to transition to a net-zero carbon economy. A technological revolution-including digital transformation and artificial intelligence-is both jeopardizing low-skilled jobs and creating new highly skilled jobs in emerging sectors while driving the productivity gains needed to escape the 'middle-income trap' of a low-skilled, labor-intensive economy and transition to a modern, knowledgebased economy.

To turn existing inequalities into drivers of inclusive and productive growth, Viet Nam can leverage national and global evidence. Investments in gender equality are a valuable resource for development and a key prerequisite for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Numerous projections and analyses demonstrate that investing in gender equality leads to significant increases in gross domestic product (GDP), higher productivity, better food security, reduced poverty, enhanced child welfare-resulting in improved future human capital—and strengthened climate change mitigation efforts. For businesses, gender equality fosters innovation and profitability, improves dialogue and working conditions, enhances industrial relations, and increases competitiveness.



### **Persistent Gender Gaps** in Viet Nam's Labor **Market and Untapped Gender Dividends**

Viet Nam has made significant progress in strengthening the regulatory framework for gender equality in the labor market since the adoption of the 2006 Gender Equality Law, with numerous amendments, new laws, and decrees. Nevertheless, gender gaps in the labor market must be further addressed for Viet Nam to sustain inclusive economic growth and achieve high-income status by 2045. While Viet Nam enjoys a higher labor force participation rate for women (67.9 percent in 2023) than many Asian countries, it remains lower than the rate for men (76.7 percent) and often results in an intense double burden of paid and unpaid work due to prevailing gender norms. Women's participation declines during peak childbearing and child-rearing years, as many disengage from the labor market-potentially due to the lack of paid care options in an underdeveloped care economy.

In 2023, over 44 percent of the employed population in Viet Nam was engaged in vulnerable employment (defined statistically as a combination of own-account work and contributing family work). The proportion of women in vulnerable employment is higher, at **48 percent**, compared to over **40 percent** for men.



Sectoral and occupational segregation remains apparent, with women concentrated in eight major sectors and underrepresented in twelve others.



While women constitute a higher share of manufacturing employment (over 55 percent), they tend to be concentrated in food production, textiles, clothing, leather and related products, electrical equipment, and other manufacturing sectors, often in lowerstatus tiers of employment. Approximately 84 percent of women in manufacturing lack technical qualifications, a pattern confirmed across all sectors, with 76.3 percent of all employed women having no technical qualifications.

A gender wage gap persists in nearly every sector except administrative and support service activities, with women earning an average of 87.8 percent of men's wages, based on the 2023 Labor Force Survey data.

In terms of social insurance coverage (both compulsory and voluntary), rates remain low for both women and men, though women have a higher rate of coverage (35.5 percent of employed women versus 27.7 percent of employed men). However, a deeper analysis reveals numerous gender-based disadvantages for women. Social insurance coverage is weakest in the agricultural sector, among those in vulnerable employment (ownaccount and contributing family workers), and in the age groups above 55 years. Women are also more likely to disengage from social insurance protection due to inadequate socio-economic support to remain in the labor market after becoming parents. Consequently, women's pension coverage is lower than men's for several gender-related reasons.

Universal maternity coverage remains out of reach. As of 2019, only about 30 percent of employed women were covered by maternity protection. However, recent reforms-including amendments to the Social Insurance Law in 2024-are expected

to boost coverage by allowing women enrolled in the voluntary social insurance scheme to receive maternity protection funded by the State Budget. Nonetheless, the impact of this reform is expected to be minimal, given the low percentage of women covered under voluntary insurance and the fact that many women in informal employment cannot afford voluntary insurance.

While various gender-specific barriers contribute to these labor market gaps, one of the most intractable is the extent of unpaid care work undertaken in the home. Data from the 2022 Time Use Survey reveals a consistent pattern: women dedicate significantly more time to unpaid domestic tasks than men, irrespective of age, educational attainment, geographical location, or other variables.

Major economic sectors have been analyzed to identify potential gender dividends from investing in women's capacities in areas such as trade, global supply chains, agriculture, electronics, and the care economy. Women can play a pivotal role in Viet Nam's strategy to transition from low-productivity, low-skilled production to higher-value economic activities.



**Policy Pathways for** Reaping Gender in the Labor Market **Reaping Gender Dividends** 

To maximize the benefits of gender dividends, Viet Nam must advance gender equality in the labor market. Three main policy pathways - interlinked and mutually reinforcing - are recommended:



**Implementing Gender Responsive** Social Protection

Strengthening and expanding gender-responsive social protection, including social insurance and social assistance, plays a crucial role in supporting women to stay in the labor market and remain economically active. A study of 71 countries has shown that spending on social protection is associated with reduced gender gaps in labor market participation. While Viet Nam has a relatively high rate of women's labor force participation, significant gaps are evident during childbearing and childrearing years, peaking in older age groups. This suggests that workers with family responsibilities, primarily women, lack adequate support to remain in the labor market.

### Key gender-responsive social protection policy

measures include: adequate paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave; implementation of flexible work arrangements to enable women and men to manage caregiving responsibilities while staying employed; expansion of affordable childcare and early education facilities to help reconcile family and work responsibilities; investment in care facilities and services for older persons; enhanced access to social insurance, such as unemployment benefits and pensions, including the full equalization of retirement ages between women and men; as well as equal opportunity and family-friendly workplace policies. Additionally, social protection measures such as cash transfer programs for pregnant women will help empower them economically, increase their autonomy and decision-making within families, and reduce financial pressures. These measures will incentivize women to participate more actively in the labor market.



Developing a Care Economy

With the burden of unpaid care work acting as one of the most significant barriers to equality across multiple dimensions of work, the objectives of recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work must be integrated into the design and implementation of all policy interventions. These include labor market policies, sectoral policies, employment creation strategies, and regulations, as well as macroeconomic policies such as public expenditure and taxation. This approach must also be integrated into action plans for achieving the SDGs, in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's report *Our Common Agenda*, which calls for 'large-scale investments in the care economy' to accelerate progress across all SDGs, not just SDG 5.

Notably, Viet Nam's National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030 includes a target to reduce the average number of hours spent by women on unpaid family care work at home, compared to men, to



Investing in the paid care economy will generate multiple benefits, including direct and indirect increases in quality female employment in Viet Nam. In developing a paid care economy, Viet Nam has made significant progress in early childhood education. However, progress is more limited in the ecosystem of support for persons with disabilities. With the country's rapid pace of aging, there is a pressing need to develop innovative models of care for older persons, including through attracting private sector investment and fostering publicprivate partnerships.

### Developing gender-responsive care infrastructure, particularly in underserved, rural, and remote areas, is also vital to alleviating women's unpaid

**care work**, as they are often among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. This investment would not only create more jobs in the care sector but also enable women to participate more actively in paid employment across other sectors. Several countries have established gender budget lines for infrastructure development and incorporated assessments of the gender impact of development plans.

As Viet Nam advances in developing a thriving care economy, it will need to conduct a systematic review of the value of unpaid care work performed by women and men and its implications for economic growth, employment, and skills demand. It will also be necessary to map the public and private sector potential for expanding the care economy, including the development of fiscal and other incentives. This will involve establishing institutions to oversee governance and standards in the sector while reviewing relevant legislation to ensure policy coordination and coherence. Enhancing the capacity of national and subnational government institutions, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders in formulating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies that integrate care dimensions is also critical.



Closing Gender Gaps in Digital Skills and Transforming Occupational Segregation

Making greater investments in women and girls to close gender gaps in digital skills is of paramount importance, not only for advancing gender equality and transforming occupational segregation but also for reaping the benefits of the growing digital economy. With science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation identified as a new engine of growth in Party Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW (2024), women and girls have a vital role to play in enabling Viet Nam to make progress in these priority sectors and develop a more competitive and highly productive economy.

### Executive Summary

### Key policy measures are suggested as follows:

- Provide targeted scholarships and financial aid specifically for women and girls pursuing education and training in high-demand fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing.
- Establish digital learning centres and provide subsidized access to learning platforms for women and girls in emerging technologies such as AI, robotics, data science, green technologies, and renewable energy.
- Introduce mentorship and career guidance programs to encourage women to participate in high-value economic sectors, including the digital economy.
- Collaborate with private companies and industry leaders to create internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities for women and girls in emerging and growing sectors.
- Transform social norms and perceptions regarding the roles of women and girls in digital and STEM fields through career awareness-raising initiatives targeted at young girls and their families.

Proactive policy measures such as reskilling and upskilling, especially in digital and Industry 4.0 skills, are needed to ensure women remain employable and active in the labor market. It is worth noting that labor demand is likely to shift away from low-value sectors, where women currently predominate, toward new high-value, digital, and green sectors. Furthermore, gendersensitive labor forecasting should be developed in parallel with strategies to increase young women's access to STEM and high-demand vocational training, as well as labor market support to facilitate their entry into highly skilled jobs.

## Transforming occupational segregation also requires a holistic policy approach, including:

- Transforming the channels that transmit gender norms within households and society at large.
- Implementing affirmative action, targets, quotas, and other special measures in skills training, specific jobs, and enterprise support.
- Strengthening women's access to productive resources, particularly for farmers and entrepreneurs.

- Continuously monitoring the labor market using sex-disaggregated and intersectional data.
- Enhancing the gender responsiveness of all policies and building the capacity of national and sub-national governments to develop and implement gender-mainstreamed and targeted policies.

Along with these pathways, **it is crucial to strengthen the enforcement of businesses' compliance with labor laws and regulations,** including non-discrimination policies and sexual harassment prevention and protection. Additionally, fostering workplace dialogue mechanisms and facilitating skills training and women's leadership development are proven strategies for helping businesses of all sizes retain women workers by investing in their careers. Raising awareness at all levels of society is also essential for mainstreaming gender equality knowledge and eliminating stereotypes in educational curricula and media.



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The Common Country Analysis (CCA) is a diagnostic tool and a strategic pivot of the United Nations (UN) development system, providing independent, reliable analysis to inform policy and support the country's sustainable development. The UN in Viet Nam prepared a comprehensive CCA in 2021 to guide the formulation of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022-2026. The 2021 CCA examines a wide range of thematic issues shaping Viet Nam's sustainable development, with a focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and vulnerable populations at risk of being left behind. It is accessible here on the UN in Viet Nam's website.

According to the UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) guidance, the CCA should be updated annually to reflect the latest changes in development contexts and to inform the policy and programming work of the UN development system in the country. In this regard, the UN in Viet Nam conducted the 2023 CCA update, with a focus on 'the investment in gender equality and women's economic empowerment to advance economic prosperity and SDGs in Viet Nam.'

This CCA update is centered on the theme of investing in gender equality for three major reasons. First, the global pace of achieving gender equality is slow. In Viet Nam, the second Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2023 observed that, despite some improvements in various gender indicators,

# Introduction

progress in SDG 5 (gender equality) remains difficult to fully assess due to inadequate updated and disaggregated data. This issue is also underlined in the National Review of the 30-Year Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Viet Nam, submitted by the Government of Viet Nam to the Beijing+30 Review in 2024. The VNR highlights major challenges, including the persistence of violence against women and children, high rates of child marriage and early childbearing among ethnic minority women, and constraints on women's ability to participate in the labor market.

Second, Viet Nam's Gender Equality Profile emphasizes that, at an aggregate level, closing the gender gap will require shifting the focus from providing basic human rights to addressing the impediments and biases affecting women's economic empowerment, participation, and security. Moreover, there is a need for analytical evidence to inform advocacy, policy orientation, and programming to support Viet Nam in making robust investments in gender equality-not only to advance the SDG 5 agenda but also to realize economic prosperity and achieve other SDGs by 2030. Finally, the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAP) Scorecard report of the UN in Viet Nam requires an in-depth analysis of the 2021 CCA on gender equality to further improve UN investments in this area.

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The Case for Investing in Gender Equality



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# The Case for Investing in **Gender Equality**

### 2.1. Investing in Gender Equality for Viet Nam's Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

Investing in gender equality for women and girls in Viet Nam is essential for achieving inclusive and durable economic growth, sustainable development, poverty eradication, and cohesive communities and institutions. Leveraging a 'gender dividend' will enable Viet Nam to meet its ambitious development goals of achieving upper middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2045, as outlined in the National Master Plan for 2021-2030 with a Vision Toward 2050. This trajectory will be highly dependent on the more efficient use of Viet Nam's existing resources, including female human capital, to drive the productivity gains needed to escape the middle-income trap, which is characterized by low skills, low productivity, and labor-intensive employment. Beyond economic growth, a diverse, agile, and highly skilled workforce, inclusive of both men and women, can enable Viet Nam to become a modern, advanced society.

Investing in gender equality will also enhance labor market resilience and 'shock-proof' the economy. While Viet Nam's pandemic recovery may be admired across the Asia-Pacific region, the country is not immune to socio-economic shocks, which are expected to increase due to global economic uncertainty, the climate emergency, and complex geopolitical contexts. These factors will likely exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Just as women bore the brunt of labor market disruptions during the pandemic due to their concentration in vulnerable economic sectors, the current period of global instability heightens their vulnerability. Like many nations, Viet Nam must grapple with multiple, reinforcing uncertainties, including the reverberating impacts of the war in Ukraine, which have contributed to energy volatility, global supply chain disruptions, and the cost-of-living crisis. These are compounded by climate fragility, which puts Viet Nam at risk of extreme weather events, alongside the residual effects of the pandemic. Given these challenges, closing the gender inequality gap is more urgent than ever.

In the medium term, Viet Nam must also navigate megatrends that are already reshaping the labor market and economic landscape. A critical megatrend is the rapid aging of the population, leading to a shrinking working-age population and rising dependency ratio. Viet Nam is undergoing

demographic transition at an earlier stage of economic development and with a lower per capita income than other countries that have experienced similar shifts. The risk of 'getting old before getting rich' will require decisive policy choices, including enhancing women's employment outcomes, to prevent serious long-term economic consequences. Women, who make up a large proportion of the elderly population, are at an increased risk of poverty due to accumulated disadvantages throughout their working lives. Additionally, workingage women may face pressure to care for elderly relatives, forcing them out of the labor market in the absence of other care solutions. As Viet Nam's labor force shrinks, the country cannot afford to overlook the immense potential of women as key drivers of growth, productivity, and prosperity.

Another megatrend disrupting Viet Nam's labor market is the rapid advancement of technology under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and artificial intelligence (AI). This shift threatens jobs in female-dominated sectors, such as labor-intensive manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, healthcare, and services. While job displacement is a concern, job growth is also expected in higher-skilled roles, underscoring the need for active labor market policies and expanded social protection to re-skill and redeploy women into emerging sectors. This is particularly relevant for green jobs, as Viet Nam has committed to achieving a net-zero carbon economy by 2050.





### 2.2. The Economic Gains of Investing in Gender Equality

Gender equality is a powerful economic source that drives innovation, competitiveness, leadership, and economic advancement. Global estimates suggest that closing the gender gap in employment and entrepreneurship could raise global GDP by more than 20 percent-essentially doubling global economic growth over the next decade. Other analyses indicate that numerous benefits arise from the significant inclusion of women in the labor force and that closing the gender gap could increase GDP by an average of 35 percent. Four-fifths of these gains will come from adding workers to the labor force, while one-fifth will result from the impact of gender diversity on productivity. Further benefits include increased wages for men as a result of improved productivity gains through the inclusion of women.

In agriculture, closing the gender gap in farm productivity and wages within agri-food systems could boost GDP by one percent, representing nearly **US\$1 trillion**, while also reducing global food insecurity levels, leading to **45 million more people becoming foodsecure**. Moreover, projections show that closing the gender gap in access to productive resources in several countries could increase farming yields by 20–30 percent.



Investing in women and girls through education, skills development, and leadership training—while addressing discriminatory social norms that limit their opportunities—not only empowers them but also nurtures families, strengthens entire communities, and drives development. Multiple studies provide evidence that increasing resources in the hands of women leads to higher children's survival rates, improved nutritional status, and greater school attendance. In households where women are the key decision-makers, the proportion of resources devoted to children is significantly greater than in those where women have a less decisive role.

Similar effects can be observed regarding climate change, one of the most significant challenges



of our time. For instance, recruiting women into green sectors can broaden the talent pipeline and address skill shortages, while also strengthening product and service design and delivery to female consumers, who are the key decision-makers for household energy choices. Moreover, investing in the upskilling and reskilling of women in green sectors and supporting the engagement of girls and women in STEM has been shown to empower disadvantaged groups, reduce emissions, strengthen energy adaptive capacity, and enable businesses to achieve financial and competitive gains while effectively managing climate risks. Companies with greater gender diversity have been shown to reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by five percent compared to those with a higher proportion of men in management. Additionally, firms with an increasing share of women on their boards are more likely to reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and water use. These effects are not limited to the green sector alone-companies with a more gender-diverse workforce and leadership tend to perform better in risk management, innovation, and problem-solving.

The immense potential of investing in women and girls becomes even more persuasive when examined at the country level, and Viet Nam is fortunate to have developed a rigorous evidence base specific to its socio-economic context. For instance, the business case for investing in women workers has been well documented. A survey of 300 Vietnamese enterprises found that improving gender diversity in the workplace leads to higher productivity and profitability, an increased ability to retain talent, and greater creativity. An analysis of a Better Work Viet Nam factories with a high share of female workers shows that gender-responsive improvements in working conditions and dialogue had a direct impact on business performance and industrial relations. Notably, staff turnover was reduced by one-third, and no strikes were recorded over a nine-year period. These findings have been further reinforced in the Gender Equality and Returns project, which provides evidence that skills training for women workers and training female line leaders resulted in higher productivity on production lines supervised by women in 80 percent of participating factories. This evidence underscores that empowering women workers drives and sustains compliance, increases productivity and profitability, and improves both dialogue and working conditions.

Investing in childcare has also been shown to be a game-changer for women's empowerment in Viet Nam. Evidence indicates that it increases the probability of

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wage-earning employment by 41 percent

- formal employment by 26 percent
- long-term (two-year) labor market G participation by
  - **38 percent**

These shifts result in a movement of labor



most likely into higherproductivity jobs

Furthermore, the probability of living in poverty is reduced by 22 percentage points.

The evidence base, particularly concerning Viet Nam's more vulnerable communities, is equally compelling. Innovative and practical interventions that empower women from ethnic minority communities-such as the 4M (Meet-Match-Mentor-Move) program-have led to significant income increases. By partnering with local authorities and communities, training programs primarily targeting women-operated enterprises in management, information and communications technology (ICT), and electronic devices for production and trade have contributed to the sustainability of enterprises and revenue growth exceeding 20 percent per year.







Enhanced Policy and Regulatory Framework for Gender Equality in Viet Nam



# Enhanced **Policy and** Regulatory Framework for **Gender Equality** in Viet Nam

Viet Nam has made commendable progress in establishing a legal and institutional framework for gender equality in recent years. The National Committee for the Advancement of Women was established to assist the Prime Minister in coordinating activities across ministries and sectors. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) plays a crucial role in identifying gender equality priorities and is responsible for implementing and monitoring state agency efforts to achieve gender equality.

The foundation of the regulatory framework for gender equality is the 2006 Law on Gender Equality, which takes a holistic approach to promoting gender equality across all areas of life while ensuring the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in all branches of government. This has led to significant improvements in the legal framework, which are detailed in Annex 1. Provisions within the Law on Gender Equality related to the world of work include prohibitions against all forms of discrimination and stipulations that men and women should be treated equally in the workplace regarding employment, wages, bonuses, social insurance, working conditions, and other labor rights (Article 8). Similarly, the Labor Code, amended in 2019, introduced stronger provisions to safeguard equal rights for both male and female workers. It explicitly prohibits discrimination in employment, recruitment, labor contracts, salaries, working hours, and occupational safety. Equally important, the revised Labor Code removed discriminatory

provisions that previously prevented women from entering certain occupations, established stringent measures against sexual harassment, and reduced the gender gap in retirement age between men and women.

Viet Nam has also formulated a National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2030, which defines specific goals for the country to promote equality in the current period. These goals include reductions in unpaid care work for women, reductions in domestic and gender-based violence, a more balanced sex ratio at birth, the elimination of stereotypes in school and university curricula, and leadership targets for women directors or business owners. The specific targets to be achieved are detailed in Annex 2.

With regard to the SDGs, Viet Nam has made progress in some areas under SDG 5, but certain weaknesses persist, such as the remarkably high and rising imbalance in the sex ratio at birth, with 111.8 boys per 100 girls in 2023, the relatively high rate of child marriage and early childbearing among ethnic minority women, and the persistence of violence against women and children. Women continue to be the primary providers of unpaid care work in the home, while paid care work remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, the data to monitor and evaluate the implementation of SDG 5 is still limited. While these gaps remain specific to SDG 5, it is worth reiterating that the principle of gender equality cuts across all 17 SDGs, and empowering

women and girls will be a major accelerator in achieving all SDGs.

With regard to progress in achieving SDG 8, the data in the targets were, for the most part, not disaggregated by sex, preventing sufficient granularity or precision in assessing the situation of women in the labor market. In general, the VNR revealed that indicators on GDP growth, the rate of child labor, the rate of workers in informal employment, the unemployment rate, and the contribution of tourism to GDP are being implemented well, despite fluctuations caused by the pandemic, and have exceeded the 2022 milestone.

The indicators of GDP per capita growth, GDP size, labor productivity, and the number of people with bank accounts all witnessed improvements, though the results did not meet the expected level for 2022. Several indicators regressed compared to 2015. such as the contribution of Total Factor Productivity (TFP), the number of persons aged 15-30 years not in employment, education, or training, the mortality and morbidity rate in occupational accidents, and the number of ATMs.

Of specific relevance to this report, with respect to investing in equality to leverage gender dividends and boost the economy, the VNR observed that despite improvements, the growth of labor productivity in Viet Nam has not accelerated sufficiently to catch up with some countries in the

Asia-Pacific region. Presently, Viet Nam's labor productivity remains 26 times lower than that of Singapore, 7 times lower than Malaysia, 4 times lower than China, 3 times lower than Thailand, and 2 times lower than the Philippines. The current difficulty in improving labor productivity in Viet Nam is due to low labor quality, particularly in areas such as skills levels, working conditions, and levels of informal employment. The proportion of workers who have received training from elementary vocational training level or higher in 2022 reached 26.2 percent, only 0.1 percentage points higher than in 2021. In addition, the substantial number of workers engaged in the informal sector placed further downward pressure on labor productivity. Notably, the share of informal employment, including agriculture, stands at 68.5 percent, reflecting a decline of only 1.8 percentage points compared to the previous year. The VNR emphasizes that these issues present significant challenges for Viet Nam in implementing SDG 8 and must be addressed in the future.





Women in the Labor Market in Viet Nam: Persistent Gaps





The labor market and economy are gendered structures that reflect and reinforce existing inequalities, as demonstrated in the following review of selected labor market indicators and the discussion of drivers of inequalities in this section. Notably, while inequalities do not singularly affect women, it is women who tend to be among the most marginalized within already vulnerable groups. Where gender disadvantage intersects with rural location, geographical province, ethnicity, age, low income, or disability, disparities become even more pronounced.



4.1. Gender Analysis on Viet Nam's Labor Market





While Viet Nam has a relatively high labor force participation rate for women (67.9 percent for women and 76.7 percent for men in 2023) compared to many countries in the Asia-Pacific region, a more nuanced understanding is required.

First, a gender gap still exists in participation rates between women and men (see Figure 1). Second, persistent gender norms regarding the division of labor in the household result in an intense double burden of paid and unpaid work for women.







An analysis of global trends in female labor force participation highlights the concepts of the 'motherhood penalty' and the 'fatherhood premium,' where men are more likely to be in paid work after becoming fathers. These terms describe the gender gap that arises when women are compelled to disengage from the labor market to care for children, often due to inadequate workplace and policy support for balancing work and family responsibilities. Leaving the labor market has long-term consequences for women's career progression. It deprives the economy of their talents and skills and often results in stagnant careers. Additionally, the 'motherhood wage penalty' affects women's accumulated work experience, skills, wages, pensions, and social security coverage due to interrupted employment.

These trends appear to be confirmed in the case of Viet Nam, as indicated by the data in Figure 2.



While the gender gap in labor force participation is relatively small in the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups, it becomes more significant in the 25-59 age range,



which corresponds to the peak childbearing and child-rearing S years.

Data from the 2022 National Time-Use Survey also supports this trend. When women have children under the age of seven in the household, they engage in less paid work, whereas the opposite is true for men.

Furthermore, the presence of additional family members, especially older adults, increases the care responsibilities of women in Viet Nam, further lowering their labor force participation rates.

Moreover, the data in Figure 2 reveals that the high gender gap in participation rates among older age groups, peaking at ages 55-59, may be due to women's caregiving responsibilities for elderly relatives.

The 'motherhood penalty' in terms of labor force participation is further exemplified by a qualitative study conducted in three provinces in Viet Nam. The study confirms that women responsible for unpaid care work must give up or reduce their income-generating employment. This, at the same time, reduces the time they can dedicate to their own health, leisure, and social and community activities. The study found that young women in these provinces often trade off income-generating job opportunities to care for newborns, children with disabilities, older parents, or relatives with illnesses or disabilities. For middle-aged women, the opportunity to return to the labor market becomes even more difficult, particularly for those without technical gualifications or capital to create their own jobs.

Tracking participation gaps disaggregated by key characteristics, including household composition and the presence of children and elderly family members, will contribute to a better understanding of the role that unpaid care work plays in restricting or preventing women's participation in the labor force. Policies need to be developed to ensure that marriage, motherhood, and the care of older family members do not undermine women's full participation in society or become sources of discrimination in the labor market.



An examination of employment status reveals significant differences in the guality of work that women and men engage in. Figure 3 below shows pronounced gender segregation in the category of contributing family workers (one of the lowest quality types of employment status), with more than twice as many women in this category compared to men (15.4 percent and 6.9 percent, respectively). In higher-guality work, the share of men as employers is more than twice that of women (2.8 percent for men and 1.1 percent for women). Additionally, for employees, there is a clear gender gap of 6.1 percentage points (56.6 percent for men and 50.5 percent for women).

### Figure 3. Share of employment by status and sex. 2022.



Source: Calculations by Evangelia Bourmpoula based on ILO harmonized microdata from the Viet Nam Labor Force Survey.

	Percenta	ıge distribu	ition (%)	Vulnerable Employment (Proportion of own-accoun workers and unpaid family workers to total employed population) (%)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	44.0	40.4	48.0
Urban	28.1	27.1	29.1	33.3	30.1	36.7
Rural	71.9	72.9	70.9	50.3	46.3	55.0
Socio-economic region						
Northern Mountainous Areas	15.3	15.3	15.3	56.0	52.4	60.0
Red River Delta	12.1	11.5	12.6	36.0	32.9	39.2
North Central and Central Coastal area	20.6	18.5	22.7	44.4	36.8	52.9
Central Highlands	11.2	11.3	11.1	70.1	66.6	73.7
South East	7.0	7.2	6.7	28.5	27.1	30.2
Mekong River Delta	21.5	23.7	19.3	52.0	49.3	55.6
Ha Noi	6.1	5.9	6.3	34.2	31.5	37.1
Ho Chi Minh	6.3	6.6	6.0	30.3	29.0	31.9
<b>Age group</b>						
15-24	7.0	7.7	6.4	30.0	30.1	29.9
25-54	65.0	63.4	66.5	39.3	35.7	43.3
55-59	11.3	11.9	10.7	64.0	55.4	76.4
60 and over	16.7	17.0	16.4	79.5	74.0	85.7

Table 1 below provides a more detailed picture of the vulnerable employment indicator (which covers own-account workers and contributing family workers), disaggregated by sex, age, and region. Workers in these categories are more likely to be in informal jobs, lack decent working conditions, have insufficient social security, and are often excluded from social dialogue. The table highlights the alarming levels of vulnerable employment in Viet Nam, which constitutes more than 40 percent of total employment and exceeds 70 percent in rural areas.

In three regions-Northern Mountainous Areas, Central Highlands, and Mekong River Deltavulnerable employment accounts for more than 50 percent of total employment. While the gender gap in the younger age group (15 to 24 years) is negligible, sharp increases in the share of women are more apparent in the 25-54 age groups, particularly striking in the 55–59 age group (with a gender gap of 21 percentage points), and especially for those aged 60 and over. Of particular concern is the very high percentage of vulnerable employment among both women and men in the older age groups.

### Table 1. Vulnerable employment by sex, region, age. 2023.

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey data



Occupational and sectoral segregation

Gender segregation in the labor market is evidenced by the fact that women and men are often concentrated in different sectors and job types. Such sectoral and occupational segregation limits both women's and men's opportunities to access a full range of jobs. It also results in the concentration of women in lower-paid, lower-status, and less productive work. For instance, data shows that rural women are over-represented in the occupational category of unskilled labor (elementary workers), where they constitute 52 percent of this occupational group.

Women are significantly underrepresented in senior and decision-making positions. In 2022, only 16.8 percent of middle or senior management positions in Viet Nam were held by women, and 47 percent of listed companies in the country had no women on their boards at all. Table 9 in Annex 3 documents that only 0.5 percent of employed women were in top leadership positions (leadership at all levels), and 8.5 percent of employed women held higherlevel technical professions in 2023.

Using the most recent data, Table 2 further illustrates the level of sectoral segregation by gender. Women tend to be clustered in eight major sectors (where they hold more than 50 percent of positions), including manufacturing, wholesale and retail, accommodation, and food services. They constitute less than 50 percent of employees in twelve other sectors. While women have a higher share of employment in the manufacturing sector (over 55 percent), they tend to be concentrated in food products, textiles, wearing apparel, leather and related products, electrical equipment, and other manufacturing (Table 3 below). Delving deeper into the manufacturing sector, Table 4 reveals the degree of vertical segregation. It highlights that approximately 84 percent of women in manufacturing have no technical gualifications at all, suggesting that they are concentrated in the lower-skilled segments of the industry.

### Table 2. Female employment by economic sector. 2023.

	Female employment to sectoral employed population (%)	Male employment (% of total male employment)	Female employment (% of total female employment)
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery	45.6	27.5	26.2
Mining and quarrying	20.0	0.5	0.1
Manufacturing	55.1	19.7	27.4
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	19.9	0.4	0.1
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	41.6	0.3	0.3
Construction	10.3	15.6	2.0
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	54.9	12.8	17.8

	Transportation and storage	
	Accommodation and food service activities	
	Information and communication	
	Financial and insurance activities	
	Real estate activities	
j j	Professional, scientific and technical activities	
ß	Administrative and support service activities	
	Activities of the Communist Party, political-social organizations, Public Administration and Defence; compulsory social security	
	Education and Training	
2000 T	Human health and social work activities	
	Arts, entertainment and recreation	
S.	Other service activities	
	Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use	
	Activities of international organizations and bodies	
Total		

Female employment to sectoral employed opulation (%)	Male employment (% of total male employment)	Female employment (% of total female employment)
10.1	6.7	0.9
67.0	3.5	8.2
33.9	0.8	0.5
54.3	0.8	1.1
41.7	0.8	0.6
34.4	1.0	0.6
40.1	0.9	0.7
30.8	3.3	1.7
74.2	1.9	6.1
65.1	0.8	1.7
48.6	0.6	0.6
53.6	2.0	2.6
95.5	0.0	0.8
61.1	0.0	0.0
46.8	100.0	100.0

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey Data

### Table 3. Female employment by manufacturing sector. 2023.

		Female employment to sectoral employed population (%)	Male employment (% of total male employment)	Female employment (% of total female employment)
A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A	Food products	54.0	2.0	2.7
	Beverages	47.4	0.3	0.3
	Tobacco products	46.7	0.0	0.0
	Textiles	56.1	0.5	0.8
	Wearing apparel	76.7	2.6	9.8
	Leather and related products	67.6	2.2	5.3
0 <u></u> -} 0 <u></u> }	Wood and of products of wood and cork (except for furniture)	49.9	1.0	1.2
	Paper and paper products	48.6	0.4	0.4
	Printing and reproduction of recorded media	46.6	0.1	0.1
Ē	Coke and refined petroleum products	27.1	0.0	0.0
	Chemicals and chemical products	39.6	0.3	0.2
	Pharmaceutical, medicinal chemical, and botanical product	48.8	0.1	0.1
j eu	Rubber and plastic products	44.0	0.6	0.5

		Female employme sectoral emp population
	Other non-metallic mineral products	
*	Basic metal	
	Fabricated metal products (except for machinery and equipment)	
	Computer, electronic, and optical products	
	Electrical equipment	
	Machinery and equipment	
	Motor vehicles, trailers, and semi-trailers	
	Other transport equipment	
	Furniture	
(G)	Other manufacturing	
	Repair and installation of machinery and equipment	
Total manu	facturing	

e ent to ployed ı (%)	Male employment (% of total male employment)	Female employment (% of total female employment)
30.3	1.0	0.5
20.0	0.3	0.1
11.2	2.6	0.4
57.3	1.5	2.2
50.2	0.4	0.5
25.2	0.2	0.1
39.5	0.4	0.3
28.6	0.3	0.1
30.1	2.1	1.0
66.3	0.4	0.9
9.5	0.4	0.0
55.1	19.7	27.4

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey data

Table 4 below confirms the pattern of employment where the vast majority of women (76.3 percent) have no technical qualifications in the sectors in which they work. Only 13.8 percent of women have the highest technical qualifications in their sectors (graduate and above).

### Table 4. Female employment by technical qualification. 2023.

	Female employment (% of total female employment)	No techni- cal qualifi- cation	Vocational training	Interme- diate	College	Graduate and above	Total
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery	26.2	97.6	0.4	1.1	0.5	0.5	100.0
Mining and quarrying	0.1	42.8	10.1	19.3	7.2	20.6	100.0
Manufacturing	27.4	84.3	2.8	3.8	3.5	5.6	100.0
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	0.1	21.2	2.9	14.3	9.6	52.0	100.0
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	0.3	71.7	1.7	5.3	4.4	16.9	100.0
Construction	2.0	82.5	0.4	1.7	2.0	13.5	100.0
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	17.8	74.2	2.2	5.6	6.1	11.8	100.0
Transportation and storage	0.9	38.1	5.0	7.7	9.6	39.6	100.0
Accommodation and food service activities	8.2	85.5	1.9	3.9	3.6	5.2	100.0
Information and communication	0.5	11.3	0.2	4.1	10.5	73.9	100.0
Financial and insurance activities	1.1	10.2	0.7	2.9	6.8	79.3	100.0
Real estate activities	0.6	53.2	6.4	5.6	9.2	25.6	100.0
Professional, scientific and technical activities	0.6	8.8	1.0	6.0	7.7	76.5	100.0

	Female employment (% of total female employment)	No techni- cal qualifi- cation	Vocational training	Interme- diate	College	Graduate and above	Total
Administrative and support service activities	0.7	50.0	2.1	4.1	9.4	34.4	100.0
Activities of the Communist Party, Political-Social Organizations, Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	1.7	9.5	1.5	6.6	5.2	77.3	100.0
Education and Training	6.1	7.3	0.5	5.5	13.4	73.2	100.0
Human health and social work activities	1.7	8.6	1.0	17.6	26.8	46.0	100.0
Arts, entertainment and recreation	0.6	81.7	1.9	2.8	2.7	11.0	100.0
Other service activities	2.6	82.8	3.3	3.7	5.0	5.2	100.0
Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use	0.8	97.7	0.4	0.7	0.3	0.9	100.0
Activities of International Organizations and Bodies	0.0	13.8	-	3.1	6.8	76.2	100.0
Total	100.0	76.3	1.7	3.8	4.4	13.8	100.0



Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey data

Sectoral segregation is even more conspicuous for ethnic minority communities. Figure 4 below, shows that ethnic minorities are much more likely to be engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishery occupations, with 81.9 percent compared to 35.3 percent of the total population in 2019. For women from ethnic minorities, the difference is somewhat less at 73.3 percent, but still more than twice as high compared to the total population.

### Figure 4. Proportion of ethnic minority employed persons by sector in 2015 and 2019 compared to total population.







The types of gender segregation in the labor market, differences in educational attainment, and differential access to resources and jobs (including discrimination challenges) are among the factors that underlie the gender wage gap. Recent data provided in Table 5 in Annex 3 shows that there are gender wage gaps in every sector except for administrative and support service activities.

### It suggests that the average wage of women is 87.8 percent of the average wage of men, while Table 6 in Annex 3 reveals that average wage gaps are Femal further demarcated along urban and rural lines.

While average wages in urban areas are higher than those in rural areas, men's average wages are higher than women's in both dimensions.

The gender gap in earnings is even more striking than in wages. A recent report notes that for the self-employed in certain categories, such as elementary occupations, the gender gap is as high as 54.3 percent, and for craft and related trades, the gap is 53.8 percent.



**o** Male

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## Limited Social Insurance Coverage

Social insurance coverage-both compulsory and voluntary-remains low for men and women in Viet Nam, encompassing around 31.4 percent of the employed population in 2023 (Table 7, Annex 3), though it has seen more growth in 2024. Adding to the complexity of the situation is that, despite gender-specific barriers such as women's higher rates of engagement in part-time and temporary work, gender pay gaps, inactivity due to family responsibilities, a higher share of unpaid care work, and women's predominant presence in sectors such as domestic work, agricultural work, and unpaid contributing work, women's coverage by social insurance is somewhat higher than that of men by around 8 percentage points. Around 35.5 percent of employed women and 27.7 percent of employed men are covered by social insurance. Coverage is weakest in the agricultural sector, among those in vulnerable employment, and in the age groups above 55 years.

This higher rate of coverage for women needs to be further contextualized to avoid the misleading impression that women are doing well in terms of social insurance coverage. Firstly, coverage rates for both women and men are low, and it is notable that women's access to social insurance benefits and the value of the benefits they receive are lower than those of men, as a consequence of the gender gap in participation and earnings in the labor market. Workers in agriculture, own-account workers, and workers in small family businesses-a high proportion of whom are women-are not included in the compulsory scheme, and they have very low levels of affiliation to the voluntary scheme. Contributions to the voluntary scheme are out of reach for women with low incomes, and the fact that voluntary insurance does not include sickness and, until recently, maternity, makes the scheme much less appealing for women.

The high take-up of lump sums in the Vietnamese system is also significant because it affects the accumulation of contribution records. It is particularly concerning that most lump sums are withdrawn by young women. In 2019, about 69 percent of lump sums were taken by women younger than 35. This elevated rate among women of reproductive age suggests a link between women's broken careers and childbirth and indicates that a particular need is not sufficiently covered by other short-term benefits, such as maternity and unemployment insurance.

The higher rates of coverage for women demonstrate that women are aware of the value of joining social insurance, but even so, they are often forced to leave it earlier in their careers due to parenting responsibilities, the lack of supportive policies such as child benefits and flexible workplaces, or limited access to childcare.

Nevertheless, recent policy reforms have expanded opportunities for disadvantaged groups of female workers to be covered by social insurance. For instance, eligibility for the compulsory scheme has been expanded to incorporate those workers with a minimum contract of one month. It includes benefits for retirement, survivors, sickness, maternity, employment injuries, and unemployment. However, it does not include disability or family benefits.

Regarding pensions, women are in a particularly unfavourable position due to disadvantages accrued across their working lives. Women's contributory histories are, on average, four years shorter than those of men in Viet Nam. Low contribution records affect both coverage and benefit amounts because benefits are based on the years effectively contributed. Only 16 percent of women aged 65 and over in Viet Nam receive a social insurance pension, compared to 27.3 percent of men in 2019. In the older age groups, the gap is even wider. Notably, while the revised Labor Code narrowed the threshold age gap between women

and men for retirement, it continues to have a significant impact on women's pension earnings.

The system of maternity benefits is, for the most part, in line with international standards and good practices compared to other countries in ASEAN, in terms of duration and allowances. Nevertheless, it is estimated that only 30 percent of all women in the labor force participated in the compulsory scheme and were covered by maternity benefits in 2019. Research demonstrates that ensuring universal maternity benefits comes at a minimal cost to a country. In Viet Nam, the cost of providing maternity benefits for uninsured women was estimated at less than 0.04 percent of GDP in 2020, declining to 0.02 percent of GDP in 2030.

Viet Nam is responding to the challenge of extending social insurance coverage. The amendments to the Social Insurance Law, adopted in June 2024 and set to take effect in July 2025. are expected to have significant positive impacts on both men and women. These amendments include: (i) promoting a multi-tiered pension system by integrating non-contributory pensions into the law and creating a 'mixed' pension for workers with shorter contributory careers; (ii) significantly increasing pension coverage by reducing the minimum period required for pension eligibility from 20 years to 15 years and lowering the age limit for the non-contributory pension from 80 years to 75 years; (iii) addressing the issue of lump-sum withdrawals by encouraging employees to reserve their contributions rather than opt for a lump-sum payment, with incentives such as improved pension conditions, health insurance coverage, and monthly allowances; and (iv) extending the legal coverage of the compulsory social insurance system to new groups of workers, including household business owners, part-time workers, and non-salaried managers of enterprises and cooperatives, with an estimated 3 million workers now covered under this change.

In a boost to maternity protection coverage, under the amended law, women who meet certain conditions and participate in voluntary social insurance will receive a maternity allowance of VND 2 million per new-born child, funded by the State Budget, without requiring participants to pay more than the current rate set by the regulations.

### 4.2. Major Demand- and Supply-Sided Barriers to Gender Equality in the Labor Market

A complex interplay of gender-specific barriers underlies these labor market inequalities. Among these barriers, deeply embedded cultural norms that define the roles of women and men remain pervasive in Viet Nam, despite the relatively high labor force participation of women. This not only results in a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work in the home, shouldered by women and girls, but also significantly contributes to occupational and sectoral segregation, as well as engagement in low-quality employment, which leads to an income gap. The gender division of labor is reflected and reinforced through differences in access to and choices regarding technical skills and jobs, which channel girls and boys into different educational and career paths. While girls continue to perform well in education, and gender parity has been achieved in most areas of schooling, the lack of girls and young women entering STEM fields limits their capacity and opportunities to access higher value-added and better-paid employment. For older women, and those in rural, remote, and mountainous regions who may have missed out on educational opportunities, inadequate lifelong learning structures prevent them from attaining better-quality jobs.

Other supply-side barriers to gender equality include significant information deficits among women regarding employment opportunities and rights, as well as limited awareness and capacity within a broad range of labor market institutions to address gender gaps. For women entrepreneurs, inadequate access to productive resources such as land, technology, credit, market information, and skills imposes clear constraints on business growth. Meanwhile, women farmers are held back by insufficient access to land, farm inputs, extension services, skills training, technology, and information, confining them to low-productivity agriculture.

On the demand side, factors include direct discrimination. While Viet Nam has made considerable progress in establishing regulatory foundations for non-discrimination, enforcement and compliance remain challenges. More pervasive is indirect discrimination and entrenched perceptions that women are secondary income earners or costly to hire due to maternity responsibilities. Additionally, the societal undervaluation of jobs predominantly occupied by women, workplaces that fail to accommodate workers with family responsibilities, and a lack of incentives to transform gender norms hinder women's opportunities for promotion, upskilling, and career progression.

Another crucial demand-side barrier to decent employment for women is the weak gender responsiveness within sectoral, trade, and industrial policies (see Section 5).

While this list of gender barriers is not exhaustive, it clearly highlights that women face distinct constraints compared to men, both before entering the labor market and throughout their entire working lives. 1月日日 4.3. Unpaid Care Work

One major driver of inequitable outcomes will be expanded upon here: the disproportionate share of unpaid care work in the home that women shoulder, with the highest burdens among the already disadvantaged and vulnerable. Unpaid care work is a major obstacle that hinders women's access to decent work and training opportunities; it can also hamper career progression and may compel women to temporarily disengage from the labor force to care for families or forego paid work altogether. This, in turn, contributes to women's weak pension coverage in old age. Additionally, unpaid care work has a multiplier effect on women's enjoyment of a range of other rights-it impedes their opportunities to engage in public life, curbs their leisure time, and can be detrimental to their overall health and well-being. Unpaid care work in the home, also known as reproductive work, is vital to the economy. It ensures the daily and long-term reproduction of the labor force, yet it is often overlooked in policymaking. Feminist economists have made a long-standing and compelling case that, despite unpaid care work's vital contribution to labor force reproduction, it is rarely given economic value or considered an investment in the same way as other investments, such as infrastructure development. They note that growth models are based on a profound feminization of care responsibilities, leading to underinvestment in human capacities and constituting one of the most serious barriers to gender equality and long-term prosperity.

An analysis of the 2022 National Time-Use Survey reveals the heavily skewed distribution of household responsibilities.







The duration of time spent on housework is also higher per participant, with **women spending an average of three hours per day**, compared to 1.7 hours for men.



Women are also more likely to be engaged in care work: **45 percent of women engage in daily care work** compared to 24 percent of men.

Again, the duration is longer for women-3.15 hours per day compared to two hours for men. The data shows a consistent pattern where women dedicate more time to domestic tasks than men, irrespective of variables such as age, educational attainment, geographical location, or economic stratum.

Older women also play a role in caregiving for grandchildren when young couples migrate internally or externally for work. Further investigation of the data highlights that unpaid care work in the home hinders women's labor mobility, as well as their ability to transition from the informal to the formal economy, and contributes to the gender wage gap for both migrant and native-born women.

While quantitative data on unpaid care work among ethnic minorities is difficult to obtain, women in these communities are likely to be among the most heavily burdened due to the weak capacity of public services to reach remote areas, as well as inadequate infrastructure. A qualitative study that interviewed 800 people from 14 ethnic minorities in 2022 found that women spent an average of five hours a day on unpaid care work, compared to 2.1 hours for men. The most time-consuming tasks involved taking care of children, the elderly, and persons with illness or disabilities (30.3 percent of the total time spent on unpaid care work), cooking and cleaning (19.1 percent), and collecting firewood (13.2 percent). Based on these estimates, an ethnic minority woman contributes an average of VND 2.7 million to the monthly income of an ethnic minority household through unpaid care work.



Gender Sectors

# Untapped **Dividends in Key Economic**



Viet Nam's economy has structurally shifted from agriculture to industry and service sectors. The latter sectors have increasingly played an important role in generating better quality jobs. With aspirations to graduate to upper-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2045, Viet Nam is seeking to modernize its growth model transitioning from low-productivity, low-skilled jobs toward more highly productive, higher value-added jobs.

There is no doubt that women can play a vital role in these structural transformations, benefiting not only themselves and their families but also enabling the economy to harness their innovation, skills, and dynamism to drive growth trajectories. Women have already played an immense role in Viet Nam's industrialization and have benefited from the reallocation of employment from agriculture to export-oriented industries. For example, the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) reports that between 2011 and 2019, women accounted for at least 47.3 percent of the new jobs created across many sectors and that an estimated 45 percent of labor income was accrued by them. Yet, a more nuanced analysis reveals that, even in manufacturing employment, women-who tend to be in the lower tiers-are at risk of technological displacement while simultaneously missing opportunities in high-growth, male-dominated industrial sectors. Entry into 'new' economic activities is not automatic; it requires supportive gender-responsive measures for inclusion and 'just transitions.' The latter refers to maximizing the opportunities arising from labor market, sectoral, and economy-wide shifts while minimizing their negative effects through social protection, social

dialogue, and respect for fundamental principles and rights at work.

Demand-side barriers in industrial employment in Viet Nam are well-documented. For instance, a report on labor law compliance during the pandemic in selected industrial sectors revealed perceived discrimination by workers in some enterprises in the hiring of female workers. Discrimination against older workers, women (including pregnant women), and workers not favoured by management was also identified. Age was cited as a reason for being selected for labor cost-cutting measures among 6.9 percent of employers. Additionally, 9.9 percent of workers in the study believed that older workers were among the first to be affected by cost-cutting measures. A small proportion (2.4 percent) of surveyed workers in the garment, electronics, and furniture sectors claimed that pregnant women and women raising small children were targeted for furlough or termination due to their perceived family responsibilities and perceived low productivity rather than the COVID-19 crisis.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is also a key barrier, though some female workers who face sexual harassment across all sectors in Viet Nam may not be aware they are victims, according to one study. This was attributed to a lack of workplace training on sexual harassment or to women choosing not to report such incidents out of fear of losing their jobs or facing retaliation. Hence, genderspecific reporting mechanisms that are sensitive to this context and conform to local social and cultural norms are important to effectively address such issues.







Expanded trade can either enhance genderequalizing trends or exacerbate existing gender gaps, depending on how it is designed and implemented. The situation in Viet Nam reveals a mixed and complex picture. On the one hand, gender-based barriers in access to and control over resources mean that women face greater challenges than men in taking advantage of expanded trade. These barriers include differential access to productive resources such as land, credit, technology, and market information, as well as differential access to training. Intersectional disadvantages and discrimination-including rural-urban location, ethno-linguistic differences, poverty levels, age, and disability-compound gender disadvantage and play an important role in determining the distributional impacts of expanded trade.

An analysis of the gendered impact of the development of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) reveals that, despite the potential for job creation, such development would contribute little to changing the gender pattern of employment and wages.

This confirms a large body of research showing that women's location and role in the economy, as well as existing sectoral segregation, will play a critical role in how trade affects their work and livelihoods. For instance, imported agricultural goods may

displace the production of women farmers, and global supply chains may be heavily reliant on cheap female labor with poor working conditions and inadequate pay. Similarly, the lower end of value chains may be found in informal housework, with all its attendant serious decent work deficits. Additionally, while female employment often increases as a result of export-oriented production, it tends to be less stable than male employment, as multinationals, especially those in labor-intensive industries, respond to changes in labor costs. Furthermore, aside from rapid labor turnover and potential job losses due to technological advances, women in industrial production linked to trade are often in temporary, casual, or part-time work. For women entrepreneurs, a lack of access to assetsincluding technology, credit, market information, business networks, and other resources-may hamper their capacity to compete with larger firms involved in export-oriented production.

On the other hand, expanded trade, such as that experienced by Viet Nam, can drive industrialization, higher incomes, and the growth of formal female employment. The growth of export-oriented manufacturing in Viet Nam has been able to absorb parts of the surplus agricultural labor force, very often female workers, and this has been driving economic transformation. A part of the reason there are more men than women in informal employment in Viet Nam is the expansion of the manufacturing sector in areas such as textiles and garments, where women workers predominate.

This evidence underscores the need to ensure that gender analysis is embedded in the development of trade agreements. Significantly, all commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) should be emphasized in the content of agreements, alongside a respect for core labor standards. Existing analysis reveals that while gender provisions increasingly appear in trade agreements, they do not adequately address the distributional issues central to more inclusive trade, nor how gender-related commitments could be tailored, implemented, enforced, or applied. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these provisions can encourage positive changes at the national level and open up more economic opportunities for women. However, this will require gender-responsive content and language, as well as ensuring the contextual specificity of gender provisions to facilitate women's economic empowerment through expanded economic opportunities, enhanced skills and entrepreneurship, access to finance, and bridging the digital divide, among other measures.

Viet Nam has forged several bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. It is also a member of two large-scale free trade agreements negotiated by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which will significantly magnify trade volumes. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which came into force in 2018, has robust provisions for labor and environmental standards. As of 2023, its members are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Viet Nam, and the United Kingdom. The preamble to the agreement stresses "the importance of promoting ... gender equality," alongside environmental protection, labor rights, sustainable development, and Indigenous rights. Furthermore, the Development Chapter of the CPTPP (Chapter 23) includes aspirational provisions on women and economic growth, which "recognize that enhancing opportunities in their territories for women, including workers and business owners, to participate in the domestic and global economy contributes to economic development."

More recently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) came into force in 2022, covering all ten ASEAN Member States, as well as the Republic of Korea, Japan, China, New Zealand, and Australia. The members account for about 30 percent of the world's population and 30 percent of global GDP, making it the biggest trading bloc in history. The RCEP is still in its initial stages, and there is room for negotiating new provisions, but there is already concern about the absence of provisions regarding human rights, environmental sustainability, and labor standards. A major concern is that it could deepen gender inequalities, drive down wages, and threaten access to decent working conditions for women and other vulnerable groups. Among the potential negative impacts are cuts in public services, which can intensify the burden of women's unpaid work. Similarly, provisions in the agreement may obstruct the expansion of measures supporting environmental sustainability, human rights, and labor rights, while generating downward pressure on wages, working conditions, and union rights. The RCEP may also limit the capacity of governments to meet their obligations to use temporary special measures (established in CEDAW) to promote substantive gender equality.



## 5.2. Global Supply Chains

A recent study covering Southeast Asia (ASEAN and Timor-Leste) reveals the profound impact that engagement in global supply chains (GSCs) has had on the region, including an estimate of GSCrelated jobs, accounting for 75 million workers in 2021-or more than one in four workers. Significant improvements in job quality, a decline in working poverty, and gains in labor productivity have been attributed to this integration. In some cases, this has also led to increases in wage employment, high-skilled employment, and female employment. The analysis suggests that further improvements can be achieved through social protection and labor market policies, as well as investments in skills development-particularly for women-to enable a shift to higher value-added segments of value chains, in addition to including labor standards in trade agreements.

Women have benefited significantly from employment opportunities arising from GSC engagement. For example, the number of female garment workers more than doubled between 2007 and 2020. Total employment in the sector rose from 1.6 million to 3.4 million, with women accounting for almost 75 percent of all workers. A recent report notes that the textiles and garment sector has provided important employment opportunities for women in Viet Nam. Although the share of female workers in the industry has decreased in recent years—from 80 percent in 2012 to 75 percent in 2022—it remains well above the manufacturing sector average. Women represent the lion's share of employment in the industry across most occupational groups, and the gender wage gap has also declined in the sector, from 17.2 percent in 2013 to 9.3 percent in 2023, as male and female salaries converged across all occupational groups.

Through technology transfer, the adoption of new production practices, opportunities to engage in high-value economic activities, and the absorption of surplus rural labor, GSC engagement has been a stimulus for industrialization and enhanced competitiveness. Nevertheless, GSCs are plaqued by decent work deficits that impact women, including poor working conditions, inadequate occupational health and safety, lack of organization and representation, and low pay. Global competitive pressures can drive down wage growth and weaken fundamental rights such as freedom of association and collective bargaining. In addition, informal and non-standard forms of employment remain a concern in the lower tiers of supply chains. Women, who represent a large share of global supply chain workers in Viet Nam, are often in low-wage jobs with poor social protection and may be subject to discrimination and sexual harassment.





### 5.3. Agriculture

Despite the decades-long structural transition away from agriculture, it remains a major source of employment in Viet Nam and continues to play an essential role in the country's development trajectory. Agricultural employment stands at the nexus of several interlinked objectives: modernizing agriculture, increasing labor productivity, removing gender-based barriers in livelihoods, transforming gender norms, addressing deeply entrenched rural inequalities-including those between men and women, urban and rural areas, majority and minority communities, and provinces-all of which are intricately entwined with poverty reduction and inclusion goals. Additionally, agriculture plays a crucial role in consolidating food security, expanding into higher value-added agricultural exports, ensuring climate change mitigation and resilience, and achieving sustainable development.

In all these areas, investing in women will be pivotal in enabling Viet Nam to achieve its multifaceted goals for rural transformation while enhancing women's empowerment. Analysis emphasizes that, with appropriate support, women are key change agents catalysing progress toward a more sustainable future. A study investigating the effect of women's empowerment on rice production in the Mekong River Delta used the Abbreviated Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (A-WEAI) and found that empowering women increased household rice productivity by 0.457 tons per hectare and 4.035 tons per farmer. Furthermore, women's empowerment increased rice income by VND 24.168 million per farmer and VND 2.805 million per hectare. Similarly, a World Bank Smart Agriculture project in Viet Nam targeted women farmers and trained them in climate-friendly rice production. In the seven years since the project started in 2015, farmers working across 185,000 hectares of land reduced their use of inputs by 50 percent and increased their earnings by 30 percent on average. Of considerable importance is that women's sustainable farming practices helped cut approximately 1.5 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions each vear.

Recent studies have revealed the positive benefits that arise when women have greater access to resources in Viet Nam, especially land. Land reform, in which land use certificates are now given to both spouses—affirming women's rights to land and property—has not only supported their collateral for loans but has also strengthened women's role in household decision-making. The World Bank notes that the 2003 Land Law resulted in an increase in joint land ownership certificates from 11.6 percent in 2004 to 38.3 percent in 2014. An analysis of land-use rights held exclusively by women or jointly by couples in Viet Nam has resulted in several beneficial effects, including increased household expenditures, women's selfemployment, and reduced household vulnerability to poverty. The most recent Land Law (2024) includes specific provisions to support the inclusion of ethnic minority communities, especially in the allocation of productive and residential land, as well as communal ownership in accordance with the cultural practices of minority communities.

A review of the National Target Program on New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) found that benefits to women stemmed from time savings arising from improvements to roads and irrigation systems. The program introduced new knowledge and technology, which improved efficiency and increased income from agricultural sub-sectors such as horticulture and small animal husbandry, where women predominate. Investments in clean water supply, electricity, schools, communications, and sanitation have improved living conditions and addressed priorities for women, thereby enhancing their well-being and that of their families. However, the review found that these benefits could have been expanded and enhanced through a concerted gender-responsive approach within the NTP-NRD, including an analysis of gender-differentiated roles, disparities in access to resources, and participation in decision-making in the agricultural sector.

## Continuing Gender-Based Challenges in the Agriculture Sector

Despite the compelling and growing evidence of the catalytic impact of investing in women in agriculture to accelerate poverty reduction and mitigate climate change in Viet Nam, challenges remain immense. For example, women's predominance as workers in low-yielding subsistence agriculture means they are relatively more exposed to the effects of climate change, such as extreme weather events. This can severely affect women's livelihoods and intensify their unpaid care responsibilities in the home, as well as their duty of care responsibilities within the household-often in the context of limited coverage by social and labor protections. Additionally, women still have limited access to land and capital, constraining their capacity to invest in more climate-resilient livelihood options, such as diversifying their production to higher-value crops or supplementing their income with small-scale processing or off-farm enterprises.

Rural women are also less likely than men to access training and extension services, which is a critical barrier as agriculture shifts toward being less labor-intensive and more knowledge-based. Although digital solutions are increasingly being implemented, prevailing gender norms hinder women's access to rural advisory services, training, and technology transfer. Men tend to be the main beneficiaries of agricultural extension services in Viet Nam, and local-level agricultural extension staff are predominantly male. Moreover, the method of imparting knowledge remains highly technical and lacks gender sensitivity. Women are engaged in less lucrative production and crops, have greater difficulty accessing credit and technology, receive fewer benefits from mechanization than men, and have limited access to market and other economic information. Consequently, a significant earnings gap persists, with women in agriculture earning only 70 percent of what men earn.

Rural gender norms remain rigid, and inadequate infrastructure intensifies unpaid care work in the home. Rural women in the labor force are less likely to be paid workers than urban women (32 percent compared to 54 percent) and are more likely to be engaged in unpaid labor (32 percent compared to 12 percent). Rural women are also nearly three times more likely than rural men to be engaged in unpaid labor (32 percent compared to 11 percent), with much of this unpaid labor involving contributions to small farm enterprises.

Furthermore, rural women face intersectional disadvantages based on age and ethnicity, compounded by lower levels of education and skills, which make adaptability to modern farming techniques and climate change particularly challenging. These factors exacerbate women's weak decision-making power in rural households. Despite their substantial labor contribution, women in rural Vietnamese households are less involved in major production decisions or equipment purchases on family farms, particularly in ethnic minority communities.



Ethnic minority groups predominantly reside in remote mountainous regions and are among the country's poorest populations. As of 2020, ethnic minorities comprised 79 percent of the remaining poor, despite making up only about 15 percent of the total population. A 2015 survey of 33 out of 53 ethnic minority groups revealed that between 90 and 100 percent of individuals were employed in agriculture. Inadequate infrastructure imposes heavy time burdens on women, as evidenced by the fact that at least 20 percent of ethnic minority households travel more than 30 minutes to collect clean water, compared to just 4 percent for the majority Kinh population.

In the longer term, Viet Nam's agricultural sector is undergoing deeper structural transitions away from low-value agriculture toward higher-value, modern agriculture. In parallel, job creation in the industry and service sectors is expected to continue absorbing the workforce leaving the agricultural sector as it becomes less labor-intensive and more productive. However, these shifts affect women and men differently, leading to disparate patterns of employment. Although the feminization of agriculture due to male out-migration from rural areas in Viet Nam is less pronounced than in some countries, women's position in agriculture remains far more marginalized than men's. This is evident from the fact that women are primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture. A 2021 report estimated that 85.9 percent of women in agricultural employment were primarily involved in subsistence farming, compared to 59.2 percent of men. Patterns



of sectoral segregation are also apparent, with men more likely to

engage in value-added processing and lucrative export crops.

## Existing Policy Frameworks for the Agriculture Sector

Numerous policy documents support agricultural transformation; however, explicit gender analysis or gender-responsive provisions remain limited. This is despite Viet Nam's National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030), which aims to reduce the proportion of female workers in the agricultural sector to below 30 percent by 2025 and below 25 percent by 2030.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) objectives for 2021–2025 include continuing the transformation toward sustainable development, environmental protection, increased incomes for rural households, ensuring food security, and promoting modern, value-added agriculture. MARD has set targets for increased productivity, improved technological access, increased exports, higher-value production, expanded agricultural training, and a reduction in the total agricultural labor force by 2025.

MARD also developed a Gender Action Plan for 2016-2020, specifying targets for women that included training, healthcare, managerial and leadership development, addressing gender-based violence, and capacity building for mainstreaming gender equality. However, previous National Target Programs aimed at raising rural incomes lacked specific interventions to address gender equality issues, which constrain women's voice in decentralized decision-making and their specific livelihood development needs. At the local level, women's participation in rural policy development remains low. Only 23 percent of agricultural cooperatives are led by women, and female representation at the district and commune levels is limited. As a result, women are underrepresented in planning and decision-making processes regarding agricultural production, with ethnic minority women being particularly marginalized.

The Agricultural Restructuring Program (ARP) for 2021–2025 outlines various objectives and targets that could significantly benefit women. However, the document is couched in genderneutral terms and fails to address key disparities, such as income gaps, the gender division of labor leading to female time poverty, the male targeting of new technologies, and women's lower position in agricultural value chains. This represents a missed opportunity to invest in women's empowerment, both in productive and reproductive work, which could accelerate rural transformation and agricultural restructuring.

In contrast, strong gender analysis is apparent in the National Plan on Climate Change Adaptation for 2021–2030, which aims to minimize vulnerability to climate change by strengthening resilience, the adaptation capacity of communities, economic sectors, and ecosystems, and by promoting the integration of climate change adaptation into strategies and planning. It highlights the increased risks that climate change poses for women and emphasizes the importance of enabling women to participate in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Thus, it represents an important example of gender mainstreaming in the policy process.



The electronics industry is one of the most dynamic sectors in the country and has seen significant export growth, increasing sixfold from five percent in 2010 to 32.22 percent in 2021. Favorable legal frameworks, foreign investment promotion policies, extensive global and regional supply chain integration, regional production shifts, and broader geopolitical tensions have all contributed to the rapid growth of Viet Nam's electronics sector within a short time span. Generally, the shift of manufacturing production to Viet Nam has also been facilitated by several recently signed free trade agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the EU-Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA).

Employment growth in the electronics sector has been particularly impressive from 2010 to 2020, when the number of workers in the industry grew by 400 percent. However, during the same period, the proportion of women workers in the sector declined from approximately 70 percent to 60 percent. It is noteworthy that the average income of workers in this sector is high compared to wages across the entire manufacturing sector and nationally. While the gains in female employment have been considerable, a deeper analysis of employment composition reveals significant occupational segregation.



Women constitute the majority of the workforce in this sector (approximately 550,000 women compared to 360,000 men in 2020), yet male workers dominate highly skilled categories, while **women predominate in middle-skilled and elementary occupations** that require minimal secondary education qualifications. A gender wage gap persists, although it is declining. In 2010, **the average wage for women was 51 percent of that of men, but by 2021, it had risen to 89.6 percent**.



## 5.5. The Care Economy

The care economy comprises both paid and unpaid work, as well as direct and indirect care work. It includes care provision within and outside the household, the people who provide and receive care, and the employers and institutions that offer care services. Investing in the care economy both by expanding paid care work and alleviating unpaid care work in the home—is likely to yield considerable dividends for Viet Nam. It would leverage both gender equality and economic growth, help drive innovation, and increase productivity. Critically, it can also provide a pathway for women out of their predominance in poorly paid, insecure, part-time, and informal work.

The business case for investing in childcare support for industrial workers, for instance, has been amply demonstrated by the analysis of a

Moreover, recent years have witnessed a shifting gender composition in the sector, with male employment growing and female employment declining, particularly in elementary occupations. This trend became especially pronounced after the pandemic. While recent studies have not examined the reasons behind these changing employment patterns, possible explanations include the broader difficulties women face in returning to work after the pandemic due to family responsibilities, as well as the general trend of unpaid care work in the home hindering the re-employment of women of a certain age. Additionally, this may confirm global patterns indicating a negative relationship between women's share in manufacturing employment and increases in labor productivity. In other words, as the value of a sector increases, women's employment in that sector tends to decline.

Although the electronics sector has experienced substantial growth, it remains primarily in low-value assembly production, dominated by low-skilled occupations. The majority of local enterprises are small and medium-sized businesses that produce low value-added parts for foreign companies. This reflects Viet Nam's current level of participation in global electronics supply chains and suggests that the country remains mired in the middleincome trap. Harnessing the potential of female employment can help Viet Nam advance into higher-value segments of global supply chains in electronics by implementing appropriate policies.

survey of selected companies in Viet Nam. Among the benefits accrued by businesses were improved recruitment and retention outcomes (which reduced costs), reduced absenteeism, better employee performance and productivity, enhanced corporate reputation, improved worker-management relations, and strengthened relationships with external buyers and consumers. Enabling widespread access to safe and quality childcare empowers parents-both men and women-to secure better jobs and fully contribute in the workplace. It allows employers to harness the full potential of their workforce, and it builds the social and intellectual capacity of the next generation. Such investments are cost-effective, not only by increasing women's labor force participation, particularly during their critical childbearing years, but also by enabling them to access full-time, higherpaid employment, which boosts household incomes.

Investing in the care economy will drive employment growth both directly and indirectly, especially for women.



Global estimates suggest that investing in universal childcare and long-term care services could generate up to **280 million jobs by 2030** and a further **19 million by 2035**, for a total of 299 million jobs. This job creation potential by 2035 would be driven by 96 million direct jobs in childcare, 136 million direct jobs in long-term care, and 67 million indirect jobs in non-care sectors.

Progressive and sustainable investments of US\$4.4 trillion (or 4 percent of total annual GDP) by 2030, or an annual investment of US\$5.4 trillion (4.2 percent of GDP before taxes) by 2035, are likely to be offset by tax revenues from increased earnings and employment. This would reduce the funding requirement for all policies to a net 3.2 percent of GDP (after taxes) in 2035 (or US\$4.2 trillion after taxes). Of the total net employment creation in 2035, 78 percent of these new jobs will be held by women, and 84 percent will be in formal employment—both of critical importance in overcoming inequalities and fostering social inclusion, especially for the most marginalized groups.

As Viet Nam faces a growing dependency ratio, the demand for care services for the young, elderly, ill, and disabled is likely to escalate rapidly. In its efforts to invest in affordable, high-quality care services, Viet Nam will be able to source knowledge from a significant body of international guidance and best practices. For example, the UN Women has established the '5R' framework, which entails:

- Recognizing: Assigning economic value to unpaid care work.
- Reducing unpaid care work: Achieved through infrastructure development and labor-saving applications.
- Redistributing unpaid care work: Involves transforming gender norms and the division of labor while facilitating and incentivizing a more equitable share of care work between men and women. This also includes expanding public services and promoting private sector provision.
- Rewarding paid care workers: Ensuring decent working conditions, social protection, and higher wages.
- Representation of paid care workers: Establishing rights, voices, and participation in collective bargaining and social dialogue.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) has also established similar policy frameworks consisting of four interlinked dimensions to develop a comprehensive care economy. These elements include: care infrastructure, such as water, sanitation, energy, transportation, and healthcare; care-related social protection, including cash transfers, fiscal benefits, and non-contributory pension schemes; care services, such as public and private provision of childcare, eldercare, and care for persons with disabilities and illnesses; and employment-related care policies, such as sick leave, family-friendly workplaces, and employerfunded or contributory maternity, paternity, and parental leave.

Considering these guidelines, Viet Nam's care policy frameworks should include a combination of time (leave), benefits (income security), rights, and services to ensure the right to care and be cared for while promoting gender equality and decent work. To maximize their transformative impact, care policy packages need to be rightsbased and gender-responsive, integrated and universal, and based on solidarity, representation, and social dialogue. They should also embrace a life-cycle approach and comprise policies and services ranging from care leave and breastfeeding entitlements to childcare and long-term care services for all workers with family responsibilities. Crucially, the government alone cannot fund all the care services that Viet Nam will need. It is important to tap into the market and leverage private sector engagement.

Social protection is a critical pillar of the care economy, encompassing multiple instruments. These include non-contributory transfers, which are particularly important for women from poor communities; contributory social insurance schemes with the flexibility to accommodate women's disrupted working lives; and labor market policies that support women's access to social protection, such as minimum wage systems, the right to paid leave, reasonable working hours, the right to social insurance, and active labor market policies to support women's (re)entry into the workforce. Social services such as affordable



childcare and elder care, as well as pensions, are part of the social protection framework, ensuring the affordability of care services in the future. This will be particularly important for Viet Nam in the

context of rising dependency ratios.

A forthcoming report on the care economy in Viet Nam provides a comprehensive review of progress and challenges. The government has begun laying the foundation for the care economy by establishing a system of legal documents that include investments in care facilities, healthcare, and social care. It has also defined the responsibilities of relevant agencies in managing care facilities and started to establish standards and conditions. The governance structure for the care economy includes several laws and decrees, such as Decision No. 966/QD-TTg (2023), which sets the framework for elderly care facilities, the care of children in special circumstances, and support for individuals with physical or mental disabilities or addictions. Other key laws include the 2009 Law on the Elderly, the 2010 Law on Persons with Disabilities, Decision No. 1677/QD-TTg (2018) on Early Childhood Education, and the 2019 Labor Code, which outlines employers' responsibilities in supporting workers with family obligations. Together, these contribute to an evolving ecosystem for care provision and rights.

Early childhood education (ECE) measures and facilities have expanded successfully across the country, generally providing affordable and quality care, which has reduced the burden of household childcare. However, notable gaps remain, including insufficient care options for children under 18 months and variability in both the quantity and quality of ECE options available to ethnic minority communities.

Care options for older persons are far less developed than those for children. Long-term elder care is primarily community-based and relies heavily on family structures. Few long-term care institutions currently exist. Additional challenges include an insufficient number of specialized medical and healthcare personnel to meet demand. Furthermore, private sector investment in elder care remains limited due to a lack of specific guidelines, policies, preferential loan programs, and other incentives to encourage private sector participation.

Regarding persons with disabilities, Viet Nam follows family- and community-based care models. While several community-based centers support persons with disabilities, they are often understaffed and under-resourced, making it difficult to meet the diverse needs of this population.



Policy Pathways for Reaping Gender Dividends in the Labor Market





# **Policy Pathways** for Reaping **Dividends in the** Labor Market

To reap substantial gender dividends, Viet Nam needs to make greater investments to address gender gaps in the labor market. These gaps include labor force participation rates, social protection disparities, gender wage gaps, limited access to productive resources, and restricted opportunities to gain higher-value skills and jobs. Addressing these issues requires immediate and medium-term policy solutions and, over the long term, deep systemic change.

Three main policy pathways, which are practically interlinked and mutually reinforcing, are recommended to maximize gender dividends. For instance, measures to transform unsustainable and deeply inequitable care systems—currently reliant primarily on women's unpaid work in households, enterprises, farms, and communities—are crucial across all dimensions of the labor market in Viet Nam.



Implementing Gender-Responsive Social Protection

Strengthening and expanding gender-responsive social protection, including social insurance and social assistance, plays a crucial role in supporting women to stay in the labor market and remain economically active. A study of 71 countries found that spending on social protection is associated with reduced gender gaps in labor market participation. While Viet Nam has a relatively high rate of women's labor force participation, significant gaps appear during childbearing and childrearing years, peaking in older age groups. This suggests that workers with family responsibilities-mainly women-lack adequate support to remain in the labor market.

Key gender-responsive social protection policy measures include adequate paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave; the implementation of flexible work arrangements to allow women and men to manage caregiving responsibilities while remaining employed; the expansion of affordable child care and early education facilities to help women and men balance family and work responsibilities: investments in care facilities and services for older persons; enhanced access to social insurance, such as unemployment benefits and pensions, including the full equalization of retirement ages between women and men; as well as equal opportunity and family-friendly workplace policies. Additionally, social protection measures, such as cash transfer programs for pregnant women, will help empower them economically,

increase their autonomy and decision-making within families, and reduce financial pressures. This will encourage women to participate more actively in the labor market.



With the burden of unpaid care work acting as one of the most significant barriers to equality across multiple dimensions of work, the objectives of recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work must be integrated into all policy interventions. These include labor market policies, sectoral policies, employment creation strategies, and macroeconomic policies, such as public expenditure and taxation. This must also be integrated into action plans for achieving the SDGs. in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's report Our Common Agenda, which calls for "large-scale investments in the care economy" to accelerate progress across all SDGs, not just SDG 5. Notably, Viet Nam's National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030) includes a target to reduce the average number of hours women spend on unpaid family care work, as compared to men, to 1.7 times by 2025 and 1.4 times by 2030.

Investing in the paid care economy will generate multiple dividends, including direct and indirect increases in quality female employment. Viet Nam has made significant progress in early childhood education but has been slower in developing an ecosystem of support for persons with disabilities. With the country's rapidly aging population, there is an urgent need to develop innovative elder care models, including private sector investments and public-private partnerships.

Developing gender-responsive care infrastructure, particularly in underserved rural and remote areas, is vital to alleviate the unpaid care work burden on women, who are often among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. This development would not only create more jobs in the care sector but also allow women to participate more actively in paid employment. Several countries have established gender-responsive budget lines for infrastructure development and integrated assessments of the gender impact of development plans.

As Viet Nam progresses in developing a thriving care economy, it will need to conduct a systematic review of the value of unpaid care work performed by women and men and its implications for economic growth, employment, and skills demands. It will also need to map public and private sector potential for expanding the care economy, including the development of fiscal and other incentives, to develop the institutions that will oversee governance and standards in the sector, while reviewing relevant legislation to ensure policy coordination and coherence. Enhancing the capacity of national and sub-national government institutions, policymakers, and pertinent stakeholders in formulating, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating policies that integrate care dimensions is also critical.



Closing Gender Gaps in Digital Skills and Transforming Occupational Segregation

Making greater investments in women and girls to close gender gaps in digital skills is paramount not only for advancing gender equality and transforming occupational segregation but also for reaping the benefits of the growing digital economy. With science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation identified as a new engine of growth, as stated in Party Resolution No. 57-NQ/ TW in 2024, women and girls have a vital role to play in enabling Viet Nam to make progress in these priority sectors and to develop a more competitive and highly productive economy.



### Key policy measures are suggested as follows:

- Provide targeted scholarships and financial aid specifically for women and girls pursuing education and training in high-demand fields such as STEM, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing.
- Establish digital learning centers and provide subsidized access to learning platforms for women and girls in emerging technologies such as AI, robotics, data science, green technologies, and renewable energy.
- Introduce mentorship and career guidance programs to encourage women to participate in high-value economic sectors such as the digital economy.
- Collaborate with private companies and industry leaders to create internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities for women and girls in emerging and growing sectors.
- Transform social norms and perceptions regarding the roles of women and girls in digital and STEM fields through digital and STEM career awareness-raising and guidance for young girls and their families.

Proactive policy measures such as reskilling and upskilling, especially in digital and Industry 4.0 skills, are needed to ensure women remain employable and stay in the labor market. It is worth noting that labor demand is likely to shift away from low-value sectors, where women currently predominate and contribute, to new high-value, digital, and green sectors. Furthermore, gendersensitive labor forecasting should be developed in parallel with strategies to ensure more young women have access to STEM and high-demand vocational training, as well as labor market supports for their entry into highly skilled jobs.

## Transforming occupational segregation also requires a holistic policy approach, including:

- Transforming the channels that transmit gender norms in the household and the wider society.
- Implementing affirmative action, targets, quotas, and other special measures in skills training, specific jobs, and enterprise support.
- Strengthening access to productive resources for women farmers and entrepreneurs.
- Continually monitoring the labor market with sex-disaggregated and intersectional data.
- Strengthening the gender responsiveness of all policies and enhancing the capacity of government at national and sub-national levels to develop and implement gendermainstreamed and targeted policies.

Along with these pathways, it is vitally important to strengthen the enforcement of businesses' compliance with labor laws and regulations, such as non-discrimination policies and sexual harassment prevention and protection. Moreover, ensuring dialogue mechanisms in the workplace and facilitating workplace skills training and women's leadership are proven ways of enabling economic units of all sizes to retain women workers through investing in their working lives. Concerted awareness-raising at all levels of society is also crucial for mainstreaming gender equality knowledge and eliminating stereotypes in educational curricula and media.





Investing in women and girls is imperative for unlocking the economic growth benefits needed to realize Viet Nam's vision to reach high-income status by 2045. Empirical evidence shows that closing the gender gap in employment and entrepreneurship could raise global GDP by more than 20 percent. In Viet Nam, analytical evidence underlines the economic benefits of investments in gender equality in the labor market, such as higher labor force participation, improved productivity, better quality jobs, higher incomes, reduced poverty, and better household well-being. Women are key drivers of major economic sectors such as manufacturing, textiles and garments, as well as wholesale and retail trade and services.

# Conclusions

Viet Nam has achieved significant progress in strengthening regulatory frameworks for equality in the labor market. However, persistent gender gaps remain. If they are successfully addressed, it can unleash invaluable economic benefits in driving inclusive and sustainable economic growth and strengthening economic resilience. This can not only catalyze economic structural transformation to help Viet Nam escape the middle-income trap and reach high-income country status but will also enable women and girls to enjoy full rights and opportunities in a dynamic labor market. Unlocking Gender Equality for Inclusive Growth in Viet Nam

## Annexes

### Annex 1: Amended Laws and New Regulations Supporting Gender Equality

- The 2006 Law on Gender Equality adopts a comprehensive approach to promoting equality across all areas of life, ensuring gender mainstreaming throughout government branches and legislation.
- The Law on Promulgation of Legal Documents was amended and supplemented in 2020 to mandate gender mainstreaming in all legal documents (Article 5).
- The Law on the Election of Deputies to the National Assembly and People's Councils (2015) stipulates that women should constitute at least 35 percent of the total number of candidates on the official lists for both the National Assembly and the People's Councils.

- The Law on the Organization of the Government (2015) identifies gender equality as a fundamental organizational principle and specifies state obligations in this regard.
- The Penal Code was amended and supplemented in 2017 to include provisions protecting women's rights, addressing offenses such as sexual abuse, human trafficking, sex work, and measures to protect mothers and children.
- The Civil Code includes provisions recognizing the right to gender reassignment or transitioning (Article 28).
- The Law on Legal Aid (2017) contains specific provisions enabling girls and women to access free state legal aid.
- The Law on Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) (2017) defines a woman-owned SME as one in which women hold at least 51 percent of its charter capital

and have at least one female executive officer. Priority is given to supporting these enterprises, as well as those employing a significant number of women.

- The Law on Statistics (amended in 2015) introduces several indicators included in the National Gender Development Indicators, as set forth in the law.
- The Ministry of Planning and Investment's Circular No. 10/2019/TT-BKHDT stipulates the National Gender Development Statistical Indicators Set, comprising 78 indicators.
- The amended Law on the State Budget (2015) establishes the principle of prioritizing budget allocations to achieve gender equality goals and requires gender-responsive budgeting in the formulation of annual state budget estimates.
- The Labor Code (amended in 2019) includes provisions ensuring equal rights for female and male workers, combating discrimination in employment, recruitment, labor contracts, salaries, wages, working hours, and occupational safety and health. It removed discriminatory provisions that prevented women from entering certain occupations, established measures against sexual harassment, and reduced the gender gap in retirement age between women and men.
- The Education Law (revised in 2019) stipulates that educational programs must meet scientific and practical criteria to achieve gender equality goals, including the elimination of stereotypes in curricula and textbooks.

- The Law on Vocational Education and Training (2014) promotes gender equality in vocational education and training. It ensures learners are respected and treated equally, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or origin, and are provided with comprehensive information about learning and training opportunities.
- The law supports female learners and rural workers participating in elementary training programs and training programs of less than three months by covering training costs as per the Prime Minister's regulations.
- The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (amended in 2022) includes a definition of gender-based domestic violence and provides additional support to survivors of domestic violence.
- The 2017 Law on Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises prioritizes support for women-owned SMEs in start-up, production, and business activities. SMEs that employ a significant number of female workers are also given priority when accessing loans from the State budget and other credit institutions.
- The Law on Vietnamese Workers Working Abroad Under Contract (2020) contains provisions to ensure gender equality and antidiscrimination, and to combat actions that contribute to human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse of workers going overseas.
- The Social Insurance Law (amended in 2024) expands coverage within both compulsory and voluntary social insurance schemes. Women are likely to benefit from expanded access, including the establishment of maternity protection in the voluntary social insurance scheme for the first time.
- The Employment Law is currently under revision, offering an opportunity for Viet Nam to strengthen non-discrimination measures and promote equality between women and men in the workforce as a matter of labor rights and justice.

In addition, a number of programs have been established to deepen gender equality, including the Enhancement of Women's Equal Participation in Leading and Management Positions at Policy-Making Levels 2011–2030; the Program on the Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence 2016–2020 with a Vision to 2030; the Program to Reduce Child Marriage in Ethnic Minority Areas 2015–2025; the Program on Controlling Sex Imbalance at Birth 2016–2025; and the Program to Support Women's Start-Ups 2017–2025.

### Annex 2: National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030

Indicators		Targets	
indicators	2025	2030	
The rate of female directors or owners of businesses	27%	30%	
The average time women spend doing unpaid housework compared to that of men	1.7 times	1.4 times	
Women suffering from domestic and gender-based violence are given access to at least one of the basic support services	80%	90%	
The sex ratio at birth between boys and girls (per 100 girls)	111	109	
The maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births	42	<42	
Gender equality is integrated into school curricula and pedagogical universities	Yes	Yes	

### Annex 3: Additional Tables on Labor Market Indicators by Gender

### Table 5. Average monthly earnings of wage workers. 2023.

Average monthly earnings (in VND 1,000)			
	Total	Male	Female
Agriculture, forestry and fishery	5,306	5,917	4,228
Mining and quarrying	10,745	11,325	7,978
Manufacturing	7,787	8,449	7,276
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	10,227	10,456	9,279
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	7,411	8,155	6,286
Construction	7,532	7,632	6,666
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	8,113	8,554	7,510
Transportation and storage	9,852	9,988	9,028
Accommodation and food service activities	6,311	7,176	5,785
Information and communication	12,075	12,668	10,987
Financial and insurance activities	11,435	11,902	11,054
Real estate activities	9,803	10,087	9,404
Professional, scientific and technical activities	10,638	11,111	9,869
Administrative and support service activities	8,394	8,229	8,633
Activities of the Communist Party, Political-Social Organizations, Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	8,126	8,376	7,566
Education and Training	8,435	9,365	8,112
Human health and social work activities	8,792	9,684	8,347
Arts, entertainment and recreation	7,149	7,698	6,542

### Other service activities

Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use

Activities of International Organizations and Bodies

Total

### Table 6. Average monthly earnings of wage workers by region. 2023.

Average monthly earnings (VND 1,000)				
	Total	Male	Female	
Total	7,860	8,307	7,295	
Urban	8,860	9,431	8,196	
Rural	7,078	7,484	6,529	

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey Data

### Table 7. Employed population covered by social insurance (compulsory and voluntary schemes). 2023.

	Total (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)		
Economic sector					
Agriculture	1.3	1.1	1.4		
Non-Agriculture	42.5	47.8	37.7		
Employment status					
Wage and salaried workers	57.1	69.0	47.6		
Employers	15.5	12.4	16.6		
Own-account workers	0.5	0.5	0.6		
Unpaid family workers	0.8	0.8	0.7		
Ownership					
Public sector	95.1	96.5	93.7		
Non-state sector	16.9	181	15.9		
FDI sector	97.6	98.0	97.0		
Age group					
15-24	36.9	43.9	30.8		
25-54	36.2	41.2	31.7		
55-59	11.8	6.7	15.3		
60 and over	3.6	1.6	5.3		
Total	3.4	35.5	27.7		

Average monthly earnings (in VND 1,000)					
	6,362	6,883	5,961		
	5,190	5,560	5,176		
	13,840	12,038	14,989		
	7,860	8,307	7,295		

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey Data

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey Data

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### Table 8. Female employment by education. 2023.

	Female employment (% of total female employed)	No education (% of sectoral female employed)	Completed primary education (% of sectoral female employed)	Completed secondary education (% of sectoral female employed)	College and above (% of sectoral female employed)
Agriculture, forestry and fishery	2.3	21.0	32.9	34.8	1.0
Industry and construction	30.0	4.6	17.7	35.8	9.9
Services	43.8	5.5	15.1	22.9	34.1
Total	100.0	9.3	20.6	29.9	18.2

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey Data

### Table 9. Female employment by occupation. 2023.

	Female employment (% of total female employed)	Number of rural female employment (1.000 persons)	Rural female employment (% of total rural female employed)
Leaders at all levels	0.5	49	0.3
Higher levels of technical professions	8.5	657	4.4
Secondary level of technical professions	4.0	407	2.7
Professional workers (including elementary technical workers and office workers)	2.9	237	1.6
Staff of personal service, guard, social security and skilled salespersons	25.9	2.936	19.7
Skilled workers in agriculture, forestry, and fishery	9.0	1.904	12.8
Skilled crafts people	8.1	1.248	8.4
Machinery assemblers and operators	14.2	2.264	15.2
Manual workers	26.7	5.157	34.7
Not classifiable	0.2	13	0.1
Total	100.0	14.873	100.0

Source: Calculations using 2023 Labor Force Survey Data





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