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# Domestic migration among ethnic minority women

## A Situation Analysis

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Ha Noi, October 2021





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# Acknowledgements

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This report was prepared under the partnership between the Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Viet Nam (UN Women). It was produced in an effort to promote policies and programs on gender equality for domestic migrant Ethnic Minority (EM) women in Viet Nam. Since 2018, UN Women has received financial support from Irish Aid Viet Nam to assist the Committee of Ethnic Minorities Affairs (CEMA) in the development and implementation of EM policies towards gender equality and empowerment. Every year, in addition to cooperating with government agencies, UN Women works with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to promote the voice of and enhance information sharing among CSO networks to advocate for the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies in ethnic minority areas.

This report has been written during the first year of the ‘Master Plan on Socio-economic Development of Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas 2021-2030’. ISDS and UN Women hope that it will contribute a perspective on the situation of female EM domestic migrants. In doing so, the report hopes to confirm that programs for EM women under the ‘National Plan on Socio-economic Development of Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas for 2021-2023’ should continue to invest in EM women and girls. In particular, it should increase education, learning, and employment opportunities – especially for vocational training – and promote social mobility for women. Investment programs for infrastructure improvement – such as electricity, rural transport, telecommunications networks, and schools – are also indispensable in enhancing the access of EM women to socio-economic resources. This, in turn, will increase their opportunities for social mobility, employment, and livelihood development. This study also confirms that domestic migration can make a meaningful contribution to enhancing the power and autonomy of EM women. However, in the future, further interventions are needed to transform the traditional gender stereotypes that hinder the mobility and advancement of EM women – and ethnic minorities in general – while ensuring substantive gender equality in socio-economic development programs.

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# Abbreviations

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CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CEMA	Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs
DM	Domestic migrant
EM	Ethnic minority
GSO	Viet Nam General Statistics Office
IDI	In-depth interview
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISDS	Institute for Social Development Studies
iSEE	The Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment
KII	Key informant interview
SEDEMA	The National Targeted Program on the Socio-economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas in the 2021-2025 Period
UN Women	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	The United Nations Population Fund



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# Executive Summary

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Domestic migration is playing an increasingly important role in contributing to the mobility and economic power of EM women in Viet Nam. However, there is a lack of adequate studies on these women and their situation. In particular, more research is required on the multidimensional challenges and cross-cutting discriminations facing domestic EM women migrants and how to ensure that their rights are upheld throughout the migration process.

This study aims to provide a situational analysis of domestic migration among EM women in Viet Nam. In doing so, it hopes to better understand the context and factors that facilitate or challenge EM women migrants, especially amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. The study used a mixed-methods approach. First, quantitative data was collected from male and female EM migrants from 12 ethnicities and 16 different provinces of origin working in the formal sector (specifically, two electronics factories in Vinh Phuc province). This was followed-up with In-depth Interviews (IDIs) with typical cases who reported experiencing many difficulties throughout their migration journey. Interviews were also undertaken with EM women working in the informal sector, families and community leaders in their home provinces, and some Kinh-ethnic colleagues regarding their views and experiences of working with EM migrants.

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## Key findings

### Before migration: Forms, flows, motives, and enabling and challenging factors

This study finds that **low incomes and a lack of employment opportunities remain a poignant issue across many EM areas** in Northern provinces. These factors are **driving more EM people to migrate for better jobs and incomes in more industrialised areas**. It has also become increasingly common for young EMs, both male and female, to migrate for work as soon as they finish high school. Local livelihood development programs remain very limited, both in terms of capital support and schemes. There is a particular lack of technical training or infrastructure to facilitate sustainable poverty reduction alongside livelihood development and diversification. Job opportunities for EMs in non-agricultural sectors are limited, with less attractive incomes compared to work in metropolitan areas. As a result, new graduates can find it hard to secure suitable career opportunities in their hometowns.

The decision of both EM women and men from all age groups to migrate is, for the most part, an autonomous one. However, **EM women tend to face more objections to their migration than men.** These objections come especially from their parents, due to a concern for their safety that stems from persisting gender stereotypes that see EM women as more innocent, vulnerable, socially inept, and unable to protect themselves at their destination.

Regarding pre-departure preparation, **there is a serious lack of support in all aspects deemed essential by the surveyed migrants. These include financial and emotional support, job introduction and training, and traveling to the ultimate destination.** The deficiencies in support for women migrants are most serious in the aspects of finance, accommodation arrangements, travel, and administrative documentation. These deficiencies are 5% to 6% higher for women than men.

**The support EM migrants do get mainly comes from their families or friends. This includes financial support,** which is limited since they usually come from poor households and migrate due to financial difficulties. **This lack of money to prepare for the migration journey can pose many risks for migrants as they are often left penniless for weeks when first arriving at their destination.**

Meanwhile, **there are no pre-migration training courses or career orientation programs for the migrants from northern mountainous provinces** that we interviewed. These could help to increase their capacities and competitiveness on the job market compared to Kinh-ethnic workers. They could even just help to improve access to job information and options, better prepare migrants for their journey, and mitigate possible risks – especially for women.

Regarding the professional skills and competitiveness of EM migrants, (electronic) factory recruiters consider their **technological or computer skills a notable weakness compared to Kinh workers.** Meanwhile, **a lack of proficiency in the Kinh language also creates a significant barrier for older EM women migrants** to apply for jobs in industrial sectors with more stable incomes, or to navigate and negotiate for their labor rights in a Kinh-centric working environment.

Nevertheless, more and more young EM women are migrating for better employment prospects with a high degree of autonomy in their decision-making. **Enabling factors for female EM migrants in their home provinces include social networks among migrants** between the home and host communities that facilitate job opportunities and information exchange. These networks also help to alleviate concerns about safety and encourage the approval of the decision to migrate, especially for women. In addition, over 60% of female respondents have at least a high school diploma. This **increased access to education and the general advancement of gender-equality promotion** in EM areas have also made a meaningful contribution to expanding migration and job opportunities for EM women. Moreover, **the increase in access to the internet and digital information also facilitates greater access to the urban job market for EMs from remote regions.** Other enabling factors

also include the availability of **one-stop-shop public administrative services** for migration and job application-related procedures, as well as **the proactive leadership of well-informed community leaders** who also support and advocate for gender equality and enhanced economic opportunities for women.

## **During migration: Risks, challenges, opportunities, and access to support services**

At their destination, migrants receive opportunities not available to them in their home provinces. These include greater work prospects, opportunities to generate income, and self-growth. However, migrants also face many challenges. **EM migrants in the formal sector worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week** in order to generate an average income of 8.7 million VND per month. On average, **men earned 400,000 VND more than women**. Almost **50% of this income was from working overtime**. Therefore, **mental stress and physical exhaustion is a significant issue**.

Despite working overtime and sharing rooms or having free meals at the factories to cut costs, between **one-third and half of all respondents still struggle to make ends meet or build-up savings, especially those who are married**. This gap between income and expenses is a bigger problem for women than men. This is probably due to the fact that a higher percentage of female respondents were also married or have children.

**Homesickness and exhaustion are also prevalent among EM migrants in the survey. Women experience these feelings much more often than men:** Nearly half of women reported ‘often’ or ‘always’ feeling homesick, while almost 30% ‘often’ or ‘always’ feel tired.

**The most challenging aspects for female EM migrants at the destination include living costs (42%), rent (33%), childcare (28%), accommodation conditions (23%), and public administration procedures (23%),** with female respondents reporting ‘high’ to ‘very high’ levels of hardship in these aspects. **More female migrants also reported encountering ‘high’ to ‘very high’ difficulties around childcare compared to men** (80% of female respondents already have children, versus 68% of male respondents).

**One of the biggest challenges highlighted by the respondents was administrative procedures.** Over one-third (34%) of EM migrants reported **not having any residential status**. This figure is consistent across both genders, and is 2.5 times higher than national survey data of mainly Kinh migrants collected by the Viet Nam General Statistics Office (GSO) in 2015. This is observed more often among those aged 18-24 (34%) as well as the San Diu (23%) and Tay (40%) ethnic groups.

**The work of EM women in the informal sector is precarious, low-income, and carries with it a higher risk of violence.** However, **female participants working in the informal sector have neither social nor health insurances**. 99% of survey respondents (in the formal sector) also consider these insurances to be essential. Insurance is important because both

male (20%) and female (18%) respondents report 'high' to 'very high' challenges with health issues at their destination. Meanwhile, being treated at hospital using health insurance is the second-most common illness treatment approach of both EM men and women migrants at their destination.

**The main sources of support for EM migrants at their point of destination remains their relatives, friends, neighbours, and colleagues; not local governments or their employers.** Both male and female participants report keeping in frequent contact with their families or friends back home, who were also their main sources of support in difficult times. **The social ties of EM migrants at their destination has grown beyond their own ethnic groups.** On average, both men and women have five friends from the same ethnic group and six friends from a different group (with little variation between the genders).

**Over half (52%) of EM women have experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity** (the figure for EM men is even higher, at 60%). The most common forms of discrimination include comments about their distinctive accents or appearance, questions about their work abilities, difficulties in administrative procedures, and being called discriminatory names. **This creates a feeling of being deceived, underestimated, and misunderstood, and was most often experienced in the form of verbal abuse.** This mistreatment by Kinh colleagues/ employers is based on the common stereotypes that EMs get married earlier, are uneducated and unskilled, and can be easily abused. Discrimination also arises from their migration status. However, the study found that **younger EMs are more likely to resist this discrimination rather than internalize it.** While participants did not see the long-term consequences of such abuse, it could create more tension in their social relations at the point of destination.

**COVID-19 impacted EM migrants in both formal and informal sectors.** The factory workers in our study did not lose their jobs and received some assistance, such as COVID-19 vaccination and some benefits through their companies. However, extra shifts can be exhausting and the workers were unable to return home to visit their families. **The workers in the informal sector, on the other hand, not only lost their jobs but were also unable to move to find work elsewhere or return home. In addition, they did not receive any COVID-19 support from the government.** All groups experienced hardship due to the increased cost of daily necessities and the significant burden on their mental and physical health.

## Impacts of migration

**The overall level of satisfaction of EMs with their migration experience is, in general, positive,** with very little difference between genders. However, when examining each aspect separately, EM women often reported a slightly lower level of improvement than men. This is particularly true for savings (where women have, on average, 1.5 times less savings than men); their child's education (where women often reported greater difficulties relating to child care); and decision-making power (women rated their improvement at 3.46/5, whereas men scored theirs at 3.58/5).

**Aspects that see the greatest improvement from migration include income, work skills, social knowledge, personal confidence, and work-related relationships.** Interviews with community leaders in their home provinces highlighted that, upon returning, **EM migrant women have developed practical trading skills and confidence to reform livelihoods in their home communities**, such as online trading or selling vegetables at local markets.

**On average, the decision-making power of EM women also improves after migration.** This is probably due to their becoming more economically independent and as well as more socially confident and mature. **Migration also brings about a shift in traditional gender roles, where men take on the responsibilities of housework and childcare when the women of the house migrate.**

**Negative impacts of migration could include an increase in the burden of care work.** This could have an impact on **the men or women who remain behind.** **Other negative impacts could include the emotional strain on marital and family relations. This can take a toll on the mental health of the children at home as well as the migrants themselves.** Most EM migrants leave their children at home under the care of grandparents. However, due to their advanced age and the generation gap, grandparents have certain limitations when taking care of young children or supervising their education.

The trend for more and more young EMs to migrate also creates a risk that **young labour sources for livelihood development in their home regions will be lost.** It also risks the breakdown of local communities at their places of origin.

**Both male and female EM migrants send about 25% of their monthly income – around 2 million VND – home. This amount is already higher than the average per-person income in their home provinces.** This high level of remittance – when spent on education, health care, agricultural production, home renovations, and savings – can support the sustainable improvement of living standards and livelihoods for EM households in their home communities.

Compared to married men, **the use of married women migrants' remittance is more often decided by their spouses,** who handle all affairs at home when their wives migrate (39% of married female migrants versus 29% of married male migrants).

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## Recommendations

Domestic migration should receive more attention from the government's development programs in EM areas, as it is playing an increasingly important role in improving local incomes and livelihoods as well as the social confidence, decision-making and economic power, and the empowerment of EM women.

It is important to have more **pre-migration training in migrants' home provinces** to improve their competitiveness in the job market and mitigate the risks of migration. This could be integrated into multiple projects relating to job creation, career orientation, and skilled workforce development within the National Target Program for Socio-economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous areas for the 2021-2025 period (SEDEMA). Essential training could include, but is not limited to:

- **Language proficiency**, especially for older women;
- **Practical computer and technological skills** for EMs;
- **Information on safe accommodation, quality jobs, and general safety - especially for EM women, and;**
- **Labor rights and public administrative procedures** for migration, especially regarding **residential registration** at the point of destination.

Pre-migration training could be integrated into SEDEMA. In particular, it could become part of sub-project 2 of Project 4 ('Invest in Education Equipment & Facilities'), sub-project 3 of Project 5 ('Job Creation & Career Orientation'), and sub-project 2 of Project 10 ('Increase Technological Access for Socio-economic Development'). Migration data and beneficiaries of pre-departure support should also be recorded and monitored by gender to ensure adequate and equitable access to this support. The training should also be affordable and accessible to EM migrants.

**It is also important to continue promoting gender equality** in EM areas. This can facilitate better access to education for young EM women and men. This, in turn, could lead to better self-development and career opportunities for EM women, including migration opportunities.

**Additional financial support** to help EM migrants prepare for the initial months of their journey is also essential. This could help to cover accommodation and food costs for the first one or two months until the migrants secure their income at the destination. This support could be mobilized through the budget from sub-project 3 of Project 5 of SEDEMA, extending it to domestic rather than just international migration support.

As demonstrated in this study, EM migrants can bring back a lot of valuable skills and capital upon returning home to improve and even transform local livelihoods. Therefore, it is important to help facilitate this change through **livelihood development projects for returnees** to effectively utilize their new skills, knowledge, social networks, and accumulated capital from migration. This includes the continual improvement of infrastructure for livelihood development, especially in more remote areas, including electricity and roads, internet access, and better-facilitated schools (Project 4 of SEDEMA).

In the long run, education and training strategies are required that **expand the general career prospects for EM youth**. In particular, these strategies could assist them to aim higher than high-school-level factory work that is often hazardous or labor-intensive; or precarious, low-



income, informal jobs with zero social protection schemes. Education investment in EM areas should continue to focus on developing strong career orientation programs and increasing access to information about quality work in the job market. This should be integrated as soon as high-school level. This is also a focus of Project 5 (sub-project 3) of SEDEMA.

The precariousness of informal EM workers is similar to that of Kinh-ethnic informal workers, especially during COVID-19, which will require **a radical reform of Viet Nam's social protection schemes so that more coverage is extended to informal workers.**

On the other hand, EM migrants might find it more difficult to return home. Rural, remote, and less-developed provinces are less-able to prepare for the urgent accommodation of returning workers. This requires **more attention for EM migrant groups from the government's COVID-19 relief programs** in both home and host provinces, including:

- Developing COVID-19 response capacity for local authorities with a culturally-sensitive approach;
- Highlighting EM migrants (especially those working in informal jobs) as one of the priority groups in delivering COVID-19 assistance programs;
- Ensuring COVID-19 and essential social services (such as education and healthcare) do not discriminate based on residential status, and;
- Increasing EMs awareness of, access to, and ease in performing migration-related public administration procedures.

To reduce the stigma and discrimination that many EM migrants face at their point of destination, the diverse voices of EMs should be increased and these groups should be represented in mass media communication. In particular, these should not be in the form of discriminative narratives that put EMs in an inferior position to Kinh-ethnic people.

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# Introduction

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Domestic migration and the associated urbanization are considered key drivers of the socio-economic changes in Viet Nam since the Doi Moi reforms.<sup>1</sup> One of the most significant changes brought about by internal migration is the redistribution of income and job opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Since the 1980s, the government has promoted labor migration as a vital means of increasing jobs and reducing poverty.

In a 2015 GSO study, nearly 37% of Domestic Migrants (DMs) sent money back home to their families. This figure was higher among female migrants. These remittances are often used for families' daily expenses, tuition fees, or the cost of health care.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these remittances, DMs also contribute to community development through acquiring valuable social concepts and innovative practices, as well as connections that offer new opportunities.

According to the National Internal Migration Survey 2015,<sup>4</sup> there is an upward trend in domestic migration in general. However, the ratio of female migrants is also on the rise, reaching 52% in 2015. DMs face multiple hardships compared to non-migrants. These include job opportunities, stability of work, and income; housing conditions; access to health care services; and access to education for their children.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, DMs are also more susceptible to labor rights abuses.<sup>6</sup> However, these inequalities are more acute for women. Female DMs have fewer job opportunities than men due to gender inequalities and discrimination. They are often channelled into lower-paid, informal work with few (if any) labor protections. Female migrants are also disproportionately at risk of violence and abuse from intermediaries and employers, as well as from their partners.<sup>7</sup>

EM migrants on the other hand, tend to be employed in physically-demanding, low-income jobs in the informal sector. As a result, they often lack long-term security, work compensation, and upward mobility, as well as being associated with lower social status. They

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1 A fundamental economic reform policy in Viet Nam in the 1980s, aiming to establish a "socialist-oriented market economy" and encourage privatisation.

2 iSEE, (2019), 'Navigating opportunities and challenges: the case of urban young ethnic minority migrants in Northern Viet Nam'.

3 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey: Major findings', *Statistical Publishing House*.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Harkins et al., (2017). 'Risks and rewards: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia', *ILO, IOM, Rapid Asia*.

7 UN Women, (2016). 'Progress of the world's women: transforming economies, realizing rights', New York, p.92.



are also particularly vulnerable to poverty due to their limited access to social securities and general welfare services.<sup>8</sup> Female EM migrants, therefore, face triple disadvantages from the intersectional discriminations based on their ethnicity, gender, and migration status.

Overall, domestic migration is playing an increasing role in the mobility and economic power of EM women. However, there is a lack of adequate studies on the situation, especially the multidimensional challenges and cross-cutting discriminations facing domestic, EM women migrants in Viet Nam, and how to ensure their rights are upheld throughout the process.

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8 iSEE, (2019), 'Navigating opportunities and challenges: the case of urban young ethnic minority migrants in Northern Viet Nam'.

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# Research Objectives

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The situational analysis of the domestic migration experience of EM women will focus on the following four objectives:

## **Objective 1:**

Explore the context of the home province to understand the forms, flows, patterns, and motives of EM women domestic migrants. To understand the local environment regarding poverty reduction programs and policies in order to identify positive and negative factors that may support or hinder the domestic migration of women.

## **Objective 2:**

Determine cultural and socio-economic factors creating challenges, risks, and opportunities for EM women throughout the migration journey including those at the place of origin, during relocation, and at their eventual destination. The study seeks to understand the experiences of EM women and the potential differences compared to those of female Kinh or male EM domestic migrants.

## **Objective 3:**

Identify the level of access to support services and social networks of EM women, especially those particular to EM communities and/or women. Such services could include, but are not limited to, public administrative and financial assistance; medical and safety networks; and housing or professional unions. Consequently, the study understands the domestic migration experience through related policies and legal documents as well as procedures of implementation.

## **Objective 4:**

Identify positive and negative changes of migration on the socio-economic conditions of EM women and their households as well as their home and host communities.

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# Methodology

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In addition to a desk study to review findings from previous studies of similar issues, a combined quantitative and qualitative approach was used in this study to gain insightful and comprehensive information on the domestic migration situations of EM people.

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## Desk-review

Before embarking on field-based data collection, the research team conducted a desk review. This covered existing research, including NGO and government reports and documents on migration, with a focus on Viet Nam's domestic migration and the socio-economic conditions of EMs in Viet Nam and their experiences of domestic migration. An up-to-date understanding of the situation of EM migration from desk research helped the team to design well-informed and insightful data-collection tools throughout the study.

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## Quantitative method

Initially, our research chose an entirely qualitative approach (focus-group discussions, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and key informant interviews) to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' stories, rationale, challenges, and enabling agencies on a smaller scale, to set the foundation for subsequent research with a larger population.

However, due to the fourth wave outbreak of COVID-19 in Viet Nam, the research team adopted a more flexible research plan to significantly reduce direct contact with participants as a key safeguarding strategy. In particular, a quantitative survey was used to collect data remotely, with the assistance of two local partners who were themselves based in factories with a large number of EM workers in Vinh Phuc province. The survey involved women and men of diverse ethnic groups (around 13), ages (from 18-40), and places of origin (4-5 different provinces), who have all migrated to Vinh Phuc and are working in these factories. To ensure that the sample population was representative of this diverse, heterogenous migrant group, the study used stratified sampling to map out 12 sub-groups based on gender (male and female, with female being the focus of the study); age groups; working sectors; and places of origin. The same number of individuals were allocated to each sub-group (disproportional stratified sample), so that key categories like 'age group' and 'gender' were mutually represented and juxtaposed (female versus male; younger versus older), with a minimum of 30 participants in

each sub-group to ensure statistical significance. The proposed survey samples are detailed as follows:

TABLE 1. **Proposed survey sample**

	Company/Sector 1				Company/Sector 2		Total
	Home province 1 (of diverse EM groups)		Home province 2 (of diverse EM groups)		Home province 3 (of diverse EM groups)		
Age/sex	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
18-34	30	30	30	30	30	30	<b>180</b>
35-50	30	30	30	30	30	30	<b>180</b>
<b>Total survey participants</b>	<b>240</b>				<b>120</b>		<b>360</b>

However, as the team contacted respondents based on their willingness to participate, the result was a survey sample of much more diverse provinces of origin (16 provinces), with a generally balanced gender ratio for the top-three provinces (a minimum 44% of either gender), and much younger age groups. The average age of our respondents being lower than predicted reflects the reality at the electronic companies where the study took place, who mainly recruit younger workers. Participants were, consequently, regrouped into the 18-24, 25-30, and 31+ age groups. The team used both online and paper-based survey forms, with the latter available for respondents who might be unable to access the internet.

Adopting a quantitative survey allowed the study to collect data from a broader population. This helped to confirm insights from previous (mainly qualitative) studies about EM migration in Viet Nam, while also providing larger-scale quantitative evidence for future policy advocacy activities. Another crucial benefit of conducting the survey was that it allowed data collection from a distance. Therefore, it eliminated the chances of spreading COVID-19 from a high-risk area (Ha Noi) to the study population, while still adhering to the proposed research timeline.

From the desk-review of existing studies, we have also directed our research focus on EM migrants working in the formal sector in urban areas when choosing our target survey population, as this has been one of the prominent trends of EM migration.<sup>9</sup> Past studies also suggested that EM men migrate more than women, which contradicts the current feminization of domestic migration in Viet Nam. Therefore, with the advantage of a larger survey population with an equal proportion of EM men and women, this study has the chance to explore how the mobility of female EMs differs from that of their male counterparts. Furthermore, it provides a chance to better understand the structural disadvantages that can hinder the chances of

9 CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'; iSEE, (2019), 'Navigating opportunities and challenges: the case of urban young ethnic minority migrants in Northern Viet Nam'; GSO and UNFPA, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey: Major findings', Statistical Publishing House.

EM women accessing resources and empowering agencies to improve their socio-economic status.<sup>10</sup>

The study also wishes to address the assumption that, by choosing EM migrants working in factories as our surveyed population, the research is constrained to studying economic migration. As iSEE's 2019 research and the findings from this study point out, although EMs (especially the youth) seem to be migrating to cities mainly for employment reasons, in many cases the key motivations (or push-pull factors) for 'work migration' were arguably non-economic. These can range from liberation from cultural and social norms at home to the aspiration for personal growth through capacity-building opportunities and exposure to a more dynamic environment in urban areas. For many EM people, working in factories is a means to an end, rather than the sole purpose of migration.

Another important benefit was that the survey helped participants to better understand the research before the team conducted follow-up IDIs. As all interviews were conducted over the phone due to social distancing, this prior understanding helped facilitate more ease and trust during the conversation. Hopefully, it also reduced misunderstandings due to potential language barriers.

As the survey consisted of multiple closed-ended questions (yes-no and multiple choice), it was important to have adequate and inclusive options. The question design was chiefly informed by large-scale, national studies like those conducted by CARE (2020) and GSO (2016) on domestic and EM migration in Viet Nam in the last decade, as well as more qualitative studies on the internal migration of EMs like that of iSEE (2019). Questions to explore the vulnerability of women during migration were also integrated, drawing from ISDS's previous research experience on both domestic and international female migration.<sup>11</sup> The literature review and experience of research team members in the fields of both gender and migration ensured that the survey questions were well-informed, gender-sensitive, and minimized the risk that important insights might be missed when designing a closed-question survey. In addition, the survey included the option of "Other, please specify" in all key questions. This was done to make sure participants had space to share experiences that might otherwise have been unaccounted for in the provided options.

According to our factory-based partners, employees in both targeted workplaces (electronic companies in Vinh Phuc) must have at least a secondary-school diploma to be qualified for the job. Therefore, there was an assumption that the majority of the target population would be familiar with written and spoken Kinh. Additionally, those who might struggle to understand

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10 CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'; World Bank, (2018), 'Climbing the Ladder: Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in Viet Nam. Updated in 2018'.

11 ISDS, (2018), 'Viet Nam-China cross border marriage'; ISDS, (2011), 'Transnational marriage migration of Vietnamese women to East Asia – Toward a multi-dimensional view'; ISDS, (2010), 'Social protection for rural-urban migrants in Viet Nam: current situation, challenges, and opportunities'.

the written survey had the option of participating in a phone interview instead. In all cases, the survey aimed to use the most accessible and straightforward language. Preliminary surveys were conducted to test the accessibility of questions, language, and form designs with EM participants (using an online Google Form). The team also checked with local partners regarding the availability of personal smart devices, Wi-Fi, and participants' familiarity with completing forms online before deciding to use Google Forms. The pilot survey showed that participants from different sub-groups were able to access online forms with ease. After the quantitative survey data was collected, the results were then either downloaded from the Google accounts of research members or entered into to computer from the paper forms. All data was then anonymized (replacing participant names with code numbers), and cleaned for logical errors, before being imported into STATA for charting and descriptive analysis.

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## Qualitative method

The quantitative survey presented a number of limitations, the most prominent being the inability to deep-dive into the situation and identify the root causes of problems. Therefore, the study compensated for this by also conducting follow-up IDIs with interesting cases drawn from the survey responses.

With the consent and assistance of EM women who participated in IDIs, the team reached out to their family members who still reside in their places of origin. The family members in this study included the parents, spouses, and brothers of EM women. IDIs with family members helped provide a better understanding of their roles in the decision of EM women to migrate, familial factors that may support or hinder the migration process, as well as the impact of their migration on family members at home.

The larger study population from the quantitative survey also provided the study with a larger network of EMs. This was particularly helpful when the team used the 'snowballing' method to reach out to female EM participants working in informal sectors. Unlike those in the formal sector, this group often have no formal contract, social insurances, maternity leave, or other benefits. As such, their position is much more precarious due to this lack of a social safety net, especially during COVID-19. However, informal EM workers are not necessarily always in a disadvantageous position, while the close relationship between EM workers and their employers can become a significant source of career and emotional support.<sup>12</sup>

Besides IDIs with EM women migrants and their families, IDIs were also conducted with Kinh-ethnic colleagues from the factories where the study population were working. This was done to understand their attitudes and perspectives when working with EM migrants, and how these could become empowering or challenging factors for female EM migration.

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<sup>12</sup> iSEE, (2019), 'Navigating opportunities and challenges: the case of urban young ethnic minority migrants in Northern Viet Nam'.

These IDIs, therefore, do not serve to compare the working conditions of EM versus non-EM groups.

Finally, Key-informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted over the phone with two community leaders who were village heads in the hometowns of the interviewed female EM migrants. These KIIs were conducted to identify factors from the local setting (such as policies and programs related to poverty reduction and migration) that might have supported or hindered the domestic migration of EM women.

TABLE 2. **Summary of actual in-depth interview participants**

<b>In-depth interview participants</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
EM migrants working in the formal sector (drawn from survey respondents): From 8 different ethnicities and 7 provinces of origin, aged 18-37, both single and married	11	4	7
Kinh-ethnic colleagues	9	3	6
EM women migrants working in the informal sector	6	-	6
Families of migrant women at places of origin (husbands, brother, and mother)	4	3	1
Local government representatives/community leaders from EM migrants' places of origin (ward/village head)	2	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>12 (38%)</b>	<b>20 (62%)</b>

To analyze the qualitative data, the study used thematic analysis to explore the transcribed interviews for repetitive themes, patterns, and common issues among EM migrant participants. It also analyzed what the interviewee might mean by considering the context of each conversation individually.

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# Ethical Considerations

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## Informed consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, its key content, the contact person for inquiries, and asked to give their consent prior to the interviews and surveys. For interviews taking place over the phone, participants were also asked for permission to record the interviews for internal use. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview or survey at any point and told that they could refuse to answer any question – especially if they felt uncomfortable – with absolutely no consequence. In short, participants were informed that their participation is voluntary.

Verbal consent was obtained for interview participation in order to minimize the recording of personal information, including signatures. With the online survey, participants were asked to begin only after having read and understood: (1) the research purpose, (2) their rights, (3) the voluntary status of their participation, (4) how their confidentiality would be safeguarded, and (5) their agreement to participate.

Our local partners were not employers but, rather, staff members who worked with us independent of the companies. We also discussed with these partners in advance how to introduce the survey so that people did not feel coerced into participating. There was a particular emphasis on information about consent, especially the voluntary principles, and that no consequences would occur.

For interviewees aged under 18, consent from guardians (their main care giver at home, such as their mother, father, aunt, etc.) was also obtained, along with the minor's assent.

## Incentives for participants

At the end of the interview or survey, each participant was given a small amount of money (100,000 VND) as a token of appreciation for their time and participation. This also helped to cover their internet usage fee when taking part in the study, whether doing survey forms or joining interviews online. The participants were not informed about this token before the interview or survey to make sure they did not feel obliged to share information.

## Confidentiality and privacy

For the survey, once all the responses were submitted online via Google Forms (accessible only to the research team), the names of the respondents in the data were anonymized and replaced with



codes. The list of the real respondent names was then extracted and completely delinked from the survey responses and was only used later for the purpose of sending the token to the survey respondents. Therefore, all survey data is archived and analysed completely anonymously.

The real names and responses of participants will not be disclosed to any third party. Demographic data (such as gender, age, hometown etc.) will not be used to identify any particular individual and will only be used for synthesized and anonymized data analysis. All interview and survey data (record tapes, transcripts, and survey responses) will be stored on password-protected devices (ISDS laptops) or recorders that are used exclusively among research team members of this project. The data will be removed from these recorders once it has been safely stored in the password-protected computers of research team members. No personal details of interviewees/informants/survey respondents that could compromise their anonymity and confidentiality will be shared in any reports. Information about the locations of the participants in the report will only be disclosed at the provincial level for the purpose of analysis.

Local partners were asked not to interfere or ask to see the answers of the participants or conduct any close supervision while the survey form was being filled out. Rather, they were asked to provide assistance where necessary, such as guidance for participants to access the survey link online. Meanwhile, all participants were encouraged to take part in phone interviews and to complete the survey somewhere they felt safe and where they knew their confidentiality would not be compromised.

Unfortunately, the team could not approach some family members of EM women to take part in interviews. In some cases, the team was unable to identify a neutral interpreter who would not cause harm for the interviewee. Possible reasons could include that the interpreter was related to the participant, was a representative of the local authorities, or held a position that made the interviewee feel vulnerable. Meanwhile, interviews with members of the same family were done separately so as to avoid any conflict of interest, power imbalance, or possible risk of conflict or abuse to the participants. Furthermore, information shared by one family member was not disclosed to another. In fact, IDIs and KIIs with all informants were conducted individually to ensure confidentiality and safety.

## Referral to services

A list of free helplines for women and children experiencing Gender-based Violence (GBV) available in their current province was prepared for interviewees should the need arise. That said, the team did not encounter any participants who reported cases of GBV during the IDIs.

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13 See the contacts book of support organizations for women and children suffering from abuse, UN Women, (2021): [https://vietnam.un.org/en/123632-danh-ba-dia-chi-co-quan-chuc-ho-tro-phu-nu-va-tre-em-bi-bao-luc-xam-hai?fbclid=IwAR2o9UOE0MBk1TWM4abpimal6493LNswN-Pdp4jZSEO\\_k6f2QsqvhvrXGwA](https://vietnam.un.org/en/123632-danh-ba-dia-chi-co-quan-chuc-ho-tro-phu-nu-va-tre-em-bi-bao-luc-xam-hai?fbclid=IwAR2o9UOE0MBk1TWM4abpimal6493LNswN-Pdp4jZSEO_k6f2QsqvhvrXGwA)

This list was developed by UN Women, and the version shared was updated in March 2021.<sup>13</sup> A link to the soft copy of the helpline book was also advertised in the confirmation message when respondents submitted their surveys.

The ISDS contact number was also shared on the first page of the survey form and when conducting phone interviews, in case participants needed to contact us with any follow-up inquiries or feedback regarding the research.

## **COVID-19 safeguards**

All COVID-19 safeguards in place at the participants' factories and living areas were maintained throughout the survey, and this was reiterated by the local partners. These included, but were not limited to, wearing masks; keeping at least two meters from other people in mass gatherings; participants using their own devices, mainly smartphones, to complete the survey; daily temperature checks and health declarations on the governmental portal; and frequent hand sanitization. The survey format (Google Form) also allows participants to complete the questionnaire in private, at their own pace. The access link, including guidance, was also sent to their personal smartphones.

The research team (based in Ha Noi) did not travel to other provinces for data collection, adhering to the social distancing rules and safety measures at the time to avoid any risk of spreading COVID-19.

## **Ethical training of research team members**

The research team consisted of three members. The team leader has over 20 years of experience working in gender-equality promotion and interventions against GBV for marginalized groups (including migrants, EMs, people living with disabilities, and women who are survivors of sexual exploitation). The senior researcher and research team members have carried out national studies with female migrants and young EMs (aged 10-24) during their work at ISDS, with close ethical supervision from the team leader, and have experience with ethical protocols from sponsoring partners such as the EU, Plan International, and UN Women.

All researchers have PhDs and an MSc in either Sociology or Anthropology. Their degrees all required them to complete compulsory modules on research methodology and research ethics, which were also assessed through their graduation theses. The overseas training of the research team might be influenced by a western-centric approach. However, their prior experience of working in the field in Viet Nam, ranging from three to more than thirty years – especially with EM groups and in the area of migration – helped ensure that the research approaches and practices were culturally informed.

## Limitations of the research

As mentioned above, since the study companies were electronic factories that prefer younger workers, the age groups of the survey population were younger than originally anticipated (nearly 80% were under 30, and the oldest was only 41 years old).

Moreover, to cover all the initial topics, the survey ended up being quite long. This caused response fatigue that might have led to higher inaccuracies in some answers, especially for matrix questions (found when cross-checking survey answers with follow-up interviews). Most respondents were either working night shifts or overtime with no weekend breaks. Therefore, they were probably exhausted by the time they did the survey late in the evening or during the one-hour lunch break.

To collect information from a distance, another limitation is that the team relied more on local partners to organize the survey for participants. These partners helped to distribute guidance to participants regarding consent and privacy protection measures (which were also included at the beginning of the survey form). However, they could not help the team to check for logical errors in the survey to ensure privacy for the participants.

The survey and all interviews were conducted in the Kinh language. This might have excluded the voices of those not fluent in spoken and written Kinh. This proved to be a significant challenge when the study tried to approach family members of EM migrants. Some were unwilling to speak Kinh and it was not always possible to find a neutral interpreter. Only four out of 13 women migrant interviewees agreed to let the team reach out to their families. The rest (nine out of 13 participants) did not refer the team to their families, either because of their difficulties with the Kinh language; inadequate signals for phone calls; or for other, undisclosed reasons.

There was also the risk of meanings getting lost in translation when conducting surveys and interviews in Kinh. Likewise, participants might not have had enough Kinh vocabulary to fully or accurately express what they want to communicate.

Conducting phone interviews also meant that interviewers could not fully detect non-verbal communication signs – such as participants' facial expressions – nor could the research team observe in-person the household and working conditions of EM migrants in their home and host communities. Interview conversations were also interrupted, or even cut short at times, due to background noise or certain people coming in and out of the room.

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# Literature Review

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## The context of modern domestic migration in Viet Nam

Viet Nam has witnessed many major domestic migrations throughout its history. During the French colonial period and war against the United States (1958-1975), internal movements were mainly characterized by warfare, as people fled the battle hotspots in the North or actively migrated to resettle in the South.

Since the country's liberation and unification in 1976, the government has introduced a number of initiatives to fundamentally rebuild the country, which involved mass migration to redistribute the population and economic resources. Migration to or between rural areas was promoted at the time, rather than from rural to urban areas.<sup>14</sup> One example was the establishment of "New Economic Zones" in 1976, which mobilized about six million mainly Kinh-ethnic farmers from low-land areas to the Central Highlands and other mountainous regions that were historically inhabited by EM communities.<sup>15</sup>

However, this trend of rural-rural migration has gone into reverse since the launch of the reform policy ("Doi Moi") in 1986. This drastic reformation opened the country's former state-owned economy to private ownership and foreign investment and led to substantial economic growth and poverty reduction. The policy has also significantly reshaped internal migration in Viet Nam in several ways. First, the decentralization of agriculture and the introduction of individual land holdings allowed many unattached rural labourers to move. Second, the uneven concentration of industrial development, foreign investment, livelihood opportunities, and incomes among different regions strongly motivated people from less affluent regions (rural, remote, and mountainous areas) to migrate to wealthier places (urban areas). By 2015, rural-to-urban migration was three times larger than urban-to-rural migration and, at 36.2%, dominated domestic migration in Viet Nam from 2010 to 2015.<sup>16</sup>

The cost-benefit calculation of migration is complicated, whether domestic or international. Findings from multiple studies of both Asian countries and others around the world have demonstrated the evident economic benefits of migration thanks to the redistribution of labor

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14 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'; Dang et al., (2003), 'Migration in Viet Nam: a review of information on current trends and patterns, and their policy implications', retrieved from <https://pubs.iied.org/G00479>.

15 Hirsch et al., (2015), 'The Political Economy of Land Governance in Viet Nam', *Mekong Region Land Governance*.

16 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

and employment opportunities, increased incomes, large remittances to home communities,<sup>17</sup> and poverty reduction in general.<sup>18</sup> However, it is important to note that the financial benefit for the migrants themselves could be very short-term, if skills learned in the host communities cannot be applied to create a long-term, sustainable livelihood upon their return home.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, migration also poses risks to the physical and mental well-being of migrants and their families at home, from the inadequate provision of – and access to – social welfare services and information.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, this drawback has not slowed the flow of migration.

Regarding the migration of EM groups in particular, there has yet to be segregated national migration data to fully understand their situation. The 2019 Report on the Socio-economic Situation of the 53 Ethnic Minorities in Viet Nam pointed out that a decrease in the size of local EM households could be explained, in part, by the increasing outward migration of EM labourers.<sup>21</sup> However, there is a serious lack of data and tracking mechanisms at both national and local levels of EM migration movements which would provide an adequate understanding of their situations and the implications for supporting policies.

## Definition, types, and trends

The most common and fundamental understanding of the term “migration” is “a residential movement in space” (Mangalam, 1968 as cited in Roseman, 1971). While the change of places is a distinguishing aspect of migration, time is also implied. Indeed, migration is a complex, unfolding process with diverse spatial and temporal contexts (Roseman, 1971). Such diversity means that, for different studies with different focuses, the definition of “migration” also varies in its spatial and temporal context. For example, the GSO’s national survey of Viet Nam’s internal migration (2016) identifies migrants as those who have either resided or planned to reside in districts different than their usual place of residence for one month or more, including unregistered residents, within the five years prior to the study. By this definition, the study estimated that there were roughly 12.4 million internal migrants in Viet Nam between 2010 and 2015, accounting for 13.6% of the total population.<sup>22</sup>

This research supports the GSO’s definition for collecting and analyzing Viet Nam’s internal migration data, as it covers the diverse and more vulnerable forms of migration. These include

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17 Korpi, M. and Clark, W.A.V., (2015), ‘Internal migration and human capital theory: To what extent is it selective?’, *Economics Letters*, vol. 136, pp. 31–34, doi: 10.1016/j.econlet.2015.08.016; Deshingkar, P., (2006), ‘Internal Migration, Poverty and Development in Asia: Including the Excluded’, *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 88–100, doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00272.x; GSO, (2016), ‘The 2015 National internal migration survey’.

18 Le, T.K.A., Lan, H.V., Bonfoh, B., and Schelling, E., (2012), ‘An analysis of interprovincial migration in Viet Nam from 1989 to 2009’, *Global Health Action*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 9334, doi: 10.3402/gha.v5i0.9334.

19 Nguyen, Q.P., and Venkatesh, S., (2016), ‘Does “buyer beware” work in migration? Contracting between brokers and migrants in Viet Nam’, *International Migration*, vol. 54, no. 6, pp. 94–108, doi: 10.1111/imig.12252.

20 Deshingkar, P., (2006), ‘Internal Migration, Poverty and Development in Asia: Including the Excluded’, *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 88–100, doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00272.x.

21 CEMA, (2020), ‘Socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minorities in Viet Nam 2019’.

22 GSO, (2016), ‘The 2015 National internal migration survey’.

the more short-term and circular movements that are growing in size and significance in the household livelihood strategies in Viet Nam.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of the differences in definitions, our research stresses the understanding of migration in the learning of its motives, characteristics, and socio-economic conditions that revolve around migrants' experiences when navigating and adapting to and between host and home communities.

As migration is influenced by interrelated spatial and temporal dimensions, it can also be classified in varying ways, depending on the research focus. Regarding geographical scale, there is international migration and internal or domestic migration, with the latter being the focus of our study. Internal migration can be further segregated into the movement of people from one urban or rural area to another: rural-urban, urban-rural, urban-urban, or rural-rural.<sup>24</sup> The spatial categorization method allows us to examine the flow and incentives of migration that might arise from differences in job and income prospects, living standards, environmental conditions etc. between distinctive regions, the integration of migrants at the destinations and re-integration experiences upon returning to their places of origin, as well as the directional impacts of migration on the host and home communities.

Regarding the temporal aspect of migration, the relocation of migrants could be permanent if migrants choose to completely reside in a new area (and eventually move their family there). Alternatively, it could be only partial, if migrants remain or want to remain in their place of origin for social ties or assets. Partial relocation could be short-term or long-term, which might last for at least a year, using the classification of the European Migration Network (EMN). Circular migration – the repetitive movement of a migrant between home and host areas – either periodically or related to episodic events such as graduation or weddings etc.,<sup>25</sup> is also common, especially for seasonal labor migrants. The temporal characteristics of migration (i.e., long-term, short-term, circular, permanent, or temporary) could significantly influence the decision-making process, adapting strategies, attachment, attitudes, and behaviours of migrants at the home and host communities.<sup>26</sup>

In this study, we aim to employ a flexible and hybrid migration classification strategy, where the research shall engage with one or more relevant categories of migration that are useful to gain insights into the challenges or empowering agencies of different EM migrant groups. Therefore, the study will strive to record both spatial and temporal migration data of the subject individuals.

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23 Dang et al., (2003), 'Migration in Viet Nam: a review of information on current trends and patterns, and their policy implications'. Retrieved from <https://pubs.iied.org/G00479>.

24 IOM Glossary on Migration, (2011).

25 Roseman, C.C. 'Migration as a Spatial and Temporal Process', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 61, no. 3, 1971, pp. 589–598. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2569235](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2569235); The European Migration Network, n.d.

26 Griffiths et al., (2013), 'Migration, Time and Temporalities: Review and Prospect', *COMPAS Research Resources Paper*; Bastian, (2011), 'Temporal Connectivities: A scoping study of the available research on time and community', *Connected Communities Discussion Paper*; Roseman, C.C. 'Migration as a Spatial and Temporal Process'. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 61, no. 3, 1971, pp. 589–598, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2569235](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2569235).



Additionally, the study will also review the experiences, circumstances, and needs of individuals through different stages of the migration process, using the Drachman and Ryan framework as a source of reference.<sup>27</sup> This framework divides the migration process into three subsequent stages: (1) Pre-migration and departure, (2) Transit (the physical movement to the new place), and (3) Resettlement (adjustment and assimilation to the new residence). The study refers to some of the critical factors that influence migrant experiences in each stage as proposed by the framework. These include the migrant's age; family composition; socio-economic, educational, and cultural characteristics; occupation; rural or urban background; and social support. The Drachman and Ryan framework is useful to cater for the long-term and extensive social services for migrants, as it views migration as a recurring process rather than a one-time, isolated event.<sup>28</sup>

Studies of Viet Nam's internal migration have highlighted several important patterns to depict the main characteristics and trends of major population movements. These include the rural to urban migration flow, the feminization of migration, and the decreasing age of migrants.

Interprovincial migration in Viet Nam includes the rural-urban, urban-rural, rural-rural, and urban-urban migration flows. Of these, the rural-urban flow represented 36.2% of total domestic migration in Viet Nam from 2010 to 2015.<sup>29</sup>

The increase in rural-urban migration has boosted the growth of the urban population (by 3.4% a year from 1999 to 2009 compared to 0.4% in rural areas)<sup>30</sup> and the urbanisation process in general from the ample labour force. On the other hand, this also puts increasing pressure on infrastructure, service provision, and the environmental quality and sustainability of the areas with high migrant in-flows. Viet Nam's two largest metropolises, Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi, are also the cities with the highest in-migration ratio.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the Mekong Delta, the South-Central Coast, and the North are the main sources of migrants. The main drivers for rural to urban migration are disparities in economic development, employment prospects, income, and living standards.

The continual rise in female migration in recent decades is another notable trend in Viet Nam. Since 1994, the female migrant population has seen constant growth, and came to represent over half of the domestic migrants in Viet Nam in 2015.<sup>32</sup> However, in the case of EMs, more men are migrating than women due to traditional gender norms that keep women close to the home and household responsibilities.<sup>33</sup> These traditional gender norms are not unique to

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27 Drachman, D., (1992), 'A Stage-of-Migration Framework for Service to Immigrant Populations', *Social Work*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 68–72, doi: 10.1093/sw/37.1.68

28 Ibid.

29 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

30 GSO statistics, as cited in UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, and UN-Habitat, (2018), 'Overview of internal migration in Viet Nam', *Policy Briefs on Internal Migration in Southeast Asia*.

31 Anderson et al., (2017), 'Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines', [online] *Plan International*. Available at: <http://coraminternational.org/wp-content/uploads/Analysis-of-Migration-YEE-and-Gender-in-Viet-Nam-and-the-Philippines-ENG-v2.pdf>.

32 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

EM groups. Vietnamese women, in general, continue to face multiple stigmas and restrictions compared to men when it comes to migration. In addition to discriminatory gender roles that force women to prioritize family over personal goals and aspirations, perceptions of their sexuality – such as being more susceptible to sexual abuse, or concerns over their infidelity especially if women migrate alone – have also been observed as major barriers to the mobility of women.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these hindrances, the recent increase in female migration can be attributed to the increase in the opportunities and educational attainment of young women in their home communities.<sup>35</sup> In addition to providing women with greater mobility, freedom, and empowering agencies; migration is also transforming traditional gender roles as husbands take over household responsibilities when their wives are away.<sup>36</sup> However, studies have shown that women tend to resume their former roles upon returning home.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, another study shows that men who stay behind also adapt new narratives, such as that the domestic tasks they now perform are masculine, and imply their unchanging position as the “pillar of the family”.<sup>38</sup>

Another major trend is the decreasing age of internal migrants, especially to cities. According to a GSO survey in 2016, over 80% of Vietnamese internal migrants were aged between 15–39. Rural-urban migrants were the youngest group, with female migrants slightly younger than their male peers. Key factors contributing to this increase in mobility of younger people include the higher level of education of them and their parents, and the family’s socio-economic capital.<sup>39</sup> Young people move to cities mainly to seek job opportunities or pursue higher education. They also have a tendency to marry later in life compared to peers who do not migrate.<sup>40</sup>

## Motives of migration

The reasons people migrate is among the most studied aspects of migration, and an important basis in categorizing and investigating migration patterns for interventions.

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33 CARE, (2020), ‘Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications’.

34 Ibid.; Anderson et al. (2017), ‘Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines’; Hoang, L.A., (2011), ‘Gender Identity and Agency in Migration Decision-Making: Evidence from Viet Nam’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 37, no. 9, pp. 1441–1457, doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2011.623618.

35 Gavonel, M.F., (2017), ‘Patterns and Drivers of Internal Migration Among Youth in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Viet Nam’.

36 Nguyen, T.N.M., (2018), ‘Waste and Wealth: An Ethnography of Labor, Value, and Morality in a Vietnamese Recycling Economy’; Oxford University Press, New York; Dang, T.T.T., (2016), ‘Understanding the lived experiences and identities of young rural to urban migrant workers in Viet Nam’, The University of Queensland, doi:10.14264/uql.2016.664.

37 Resurreccion, B.P. and Ha, V.K.T., (2007), ‘Able to come and go: reproducing gender in female rural–urban migration in the Red River Delta’, *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 211–224, doi: 10.1002/psp.434.

38 Nguyen, T.N.M., 2018, ‘Waste and Wealth: An Ethnography of Labor, Value, and Morality in a Vietnamese Recycling Economy’.

39 GSO, (2016), ‘The 2015 National internal migration survey’; Coxhead, I., Vu, L., and Nguyen, C., (2015), ‘Migration in Viet Nam: New Evidence from Recent Surveys’ [MPRA Paper], viewed 28 March 2021, <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70217/>.

40 GSO, (2016), ‘The 2015 National internal migration survey’.



The motives of migration are most commonly examined using the model of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, especially in interprovincial migration in Viet Nam.<sup>41</sup> Push factors motivate migrants to leave their home communities. On the other hand, pull factors are decisive in the individual choice of migration destinations. The push and pull factors are, however, interrelated and complement one another in shaping the migration decision-making process.

Specifically, in the case of Viet Nam, individual surveys show that employment opportunities and other economic reasons are, in general, the top push and pull factors for domestic migration by all genders and regions, at 34.7% of all internal migration (GSO, 2016). The second and third most common migration motives are familial reasons (25.5%), such as marriage or to live closer to relatives, and educational opportunities (23.4%). The 2016 survey also shows that more men migrate for reasons of employment than women (by 7%). Meanwhile, more women migrate for non-work-related reasons, such as for marriage or study.

### **Motives of domestic migration for women in Viet Nam**

When examining the motives of female migrants in Viet Nam, the top push factors in their home communities included a lack of access to employment opportunities – especially those matching their level of education – lower income, lack of access to higher education, land poverty, and to escape early marriage and domestic abuse.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the top pull factors at the destination communities included the expectations of better employment and education opportunities, better income, a more dynamic urban environment, and the prospect of marrying someone better-off. The last reason is quite prevalent for women migrants.<sup>43</sup>

The motives of migration at the individual and familial levels also resonate well with the push and pull factors from the broader socio-economic settings at the macro-level in Viet Nam. The most prominent setting is the uneven status of economic development among different regions. This is most pronounced between urban and rural areas due to the shift in focus from agricultural production (concentrated in the countryside) to industrial production and trading in the prioritized metropolises since Doi Moi. Secondly, gender norms and gender segregation are also important push or pull factors in dividing the employment sector. These also predetermine the demand for labor, job opportunities, and income available for migrants depending on their gender.<sup>44</sup> Another tremendous push factor for internal migration at the macro-level in Viet Nam is the increasing threat of climate change. Viet Nam is predicted to be among the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change in terms of the proportion

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41 Cu, C.L., (2005), ‘Rural to urban migration in Viet Nam’, in H.H. Thanh and S. Sakata (eds.), *Impact of socio-economic changes on the livelihoods of people living in poverty in Viet Nam*, Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization, Japan; Truong, H.H. and Nonneman, W., (2012), ‘Push and pull forces and migration in Viet Nam’, *CAS Discussion Paper*, vol. 80.

42 Anderson et al., (2017), ‘Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines’, *Plan International*.

43 Coxhead et al., (2015) analysis of the VHLSS 2010 data.

44 Anderson et al., (2017), ‘Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines’, *Plan International*.

of the population affected, GDP reduction, saltwater intrusion causing agricultural land loss, as well as extreme weather events. These consequences will further exacerbate the livelihood insecurities of the more vulnerable population groups. Climate change will increasingly push them from poorer and rural areas, where most of the agricultural production is concentrated, to central urban areas.<sup>45</sup>

The drivers of internal mobility can be studied at multiple, interdependent levels; from the individual and familial to the broader, structural-institutional level. While the macro structural-institutional factors always translate into micro-individual and household decision-making, examining the drivers of migration at the broader level will help to explain and predict mass migration events and patterns, and prompt interventions and structural changes at institutional levels.

### Key challenges of domestic migration

Most DMs, especially those migrating from rural to urban areas, are often channelled into lower-paid, informal work sectors with unfavorable working conditions and little to no labor protections.<sup>46</sup> In 2016, the majority of female migrants were employed in the garment industry, sales, and domestic work. Meanwhile, for male migrants, manufacturing, construction, retail, and transportation were the dominant jobs.<sup>47</sup> The percentage of migrants holding leadership positions is also very low (at 2.3% for men, and only 0.4% for women). Sixty percent of migrant workers do not have a formal labor contract and almost 10% have no contract at all, neither written nor verbal. As a result, they usually do not have social insurance paid by their employers. They are also more susceptible to labor rights violations, exploitation, and abuse. Regardless, this does not stop people from moving for economic/work reasons. Over 50% of migrants think that their employment and income have improved at their destinations. Moreover, half felt more satisfied with healthcare services and living conditions.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, the gaps in income between migrants and non-migrants in host communities exists, and migrant households are still poorer on average.<sup>49</sup> The quality of life and service access of migrants, in general, are disadvantageous and unsustainable compared to non-migrant groups. Among these disadvantages, housing conditions stand out as the major source of dissatisfaction.<sup>50</sup> Over half (54%) of all domestic migrants live in rented accommodation. This rises as high as 82% in the Southeast region. High rents and utility costs and living in areas of poor-quality infrastructure and limited access to affordable public services are the main

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45 UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, and UN-Habitat, (2018), 'Overview of internal migration in Viet Nam', *Policy Briefs on Internal Migration in Southeast Asia*.

46 Harkins et al., (2017), 'Risks and rewards: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia', *ILO, IOM, Rapid Asia*.

47 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'; UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, and UN-Habitat, (2018), 'Overview of internal migration in Viet Nam', *Policy Briefs on Internal Migration in Southeast Asia*.

48 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

reasons for housing dissatisfaction. These stem from the less advantageous economic position, and possibly social networks and status of migrants more broadly, in the host communities. Over 50% of the migrant population lives in temporary, unhygienic, and unsafe housing, often in overcrowded conditions. On average, almost one fifth (18%) have a living space of less than six square metres per person. Meanwhile, over 40% have less than 10 square meters of living space per person. Migrants are also less likely to own household appliances (televisions, refrigerators, and washing machines) or vehicles (such as motorbikes) compared to non-migrants, often by as much as 10% to 20%. In general, the main problems raised by migrants include housing issues (42%), lack of income (39%), job seeking and unemployment (34%), and adapting to the new environment (23%). Female migrants often report encountering more of these difficulties than their male counterparts.

Additionally, an alarming 13% of school-age children (aged 5-18) who migrate with their parents do not attend school. The main reason given for this is economic difficulties.<sup>51</sup> In another study about EM labour migration in five provinces in Viet Nam,<sup>52</sup> quantitative data showed that 15% of EM migrant workers had to return to their home towns because they were unable to send their children to schools in the host communities due to their lack of permanent residential status. According to a 2016 GSO survey, 13.5% of migrants nationwide admitted to not having residential registration: 40.2% of migrants held temporary residential status, compared to 46.2% with permanent residence. Temporary residential status does not hinder employment opportunities and income in the private sector. However, the household registration system still limits the access of people with temporary residence to important public services such as public school enrolment, health insurance for young children, and motorcycle registration.<sup>53</sup> Specifically, 10% of migrants without household registration mentioned that it caused some difficulties in school enrolment for their children, health insurance registration, and job seeking. This was a particular problem in Ho Chi Minh City and the Southeast region.<sup>54</sup> Household registration is now being delinked from the provision of essential public services. Even so, several barriers still exist for migrants to access more affordable, state-provided services, such as social insurance, reduced electricity prices, poverty reduction programs, or education for their children.<sup>55</sup>

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51 Ibid.

52 CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'.

53 World Bank and Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences, (2016), 'Viet Nam's Household Registration System', Ha Noi: Hong Duc Publishing House.

54 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

55 CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'; Anderson et al., (2017), 'Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines', *Plan International*; De Luca, J., (2017), 'Viet Nam's Left-Behind Urban Migrants', *The Diplomat*, [online] Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/04/Viet-Nams-left-behind-urban-migrants/>; World Bank and Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences, (2016), 'Viet Nam's Household Registration System', Ha Noi: Hong Duc Publishing House.

It is important to note that 80% predicted these issues before moving. Of the remaining 20% who did not anticipate the challenges of migration, most would still choose to migrate again if given the chance.<sup>56</sup> This suggests an implicit acceptance that the difficulties related to migration are inevitable.

The social alienation of migrants in destination communities also affects their mental health and general well-being. Loneliness and social exclusion can drive younger migrants towards drinking, gambling, sex work, or petty crime. Meanwhile, the lack of friends also exposes female migrants to a higher risk of sexual abuse and violence.<sup>57</sup> Besides having to spend time familiarising themselves with their new environment, in many cases, migrants working night shifts are also side-lined in general socializing activities.

One positive change is that most migrants (around 68% in 2015) have health insurance. However, this figure is much lower in Southern regions (50%), and the percentage of migrants using their health insurance to cover medical costs further decline to 50%. Non-migrants also report visiting health care establishments more than migrants, while migrants often choose to self-diagnose and self-treat at home.

### **Key challenges of domestic migration for women in Viet Nam**

In Viet Nam, women are considerably more susceptible to GBV, stigma, and discrimination when it comes to migration.<sup>60</sup> Even before embarking on their migration journey, they are already stigmatized due to gender stereotypes regarding the roles and duties of women in the family. Women were also found to depend more on other family members for their migration decisions: 36% of women relied on the decision of their husbands, while 31% reported conforming to the ideas of their parents.<sup>61</sup> During their migration journey and resettlement, the percentage of women unable to adapt to a new place or encountering other common challenges such as no job/income or housing problems is also higher than men.<sup>62</sup> Social isolation can also increase the risk of violence and abuse for women.<sup>63</sup> Regarding education and employment opportunities, the percentage of women with higher levels of education and technical training is lower than men in both migrant and non-migrant groups. Consequently, female migrants often take up informal jobs with lower pay and no social insurance. It is also difficult for them to access other insurance for healthcare, retirement, or death.<sup>64</sup> On average, female migrants

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56 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

57 Anderson et al., (2017), 'Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines', *Plan International*.

58 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

59 Ibid.

60 CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'; Anderson et al., (2017), 'Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines', *Plan International*; UN Women, (2016), 'Progress of the world's women: transforming economies, realizing rights', New York, p. 92.

61 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

62 Ibid.

63 Anderson et al., (2017), 'Women in the Wind: Analysis of Migration, Youth Economic Empowerment and Gender in Viet Nam and the Philippines', *Plan International*.

earn one million VND less than their male counterparts each month.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, they are also under-represented in leadership positions and higher-skilled occupations compared to male migrants.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, although more female migrants send remittances back home, the total amount remitted by men is still higher.<sup>67</sup> This might result in a stronger preference for men to migrate for work in their home communities, while women continue to suffer from unequal opportunities in education, training, employment, and income.

Regarding sexual and reproductive health, the GSO survey also noted that 60% of female migrants were not using any contraception (including male condoms and male sterilization). This ratio was higher in the younger age group (15-24). The dominant reasons for this were that female migrants did not yet have sexual partners (61%), were planning to get pregnant (14.2%), or were already pregnant (7.4%). Condoms were the most common contraceptive among migrants. However, the usage ratio was only 11.6%. Therefore, those with sexual partners who did not report condom use may be exposed to the risk of sexually transmitted infections. Due to informal employment being common for women migrants, they also have little to no access to maternity benefits or social insurances for more affordable services when health problems occur.

### **Access to support services**

Over half of migrants reach out for help from external sources when encountering difficulties related to their migration, especially circular and return migrants.<sup>69</sup> However, most depend on their friends (41%) and relatives (61%) for support, rather than on government agencies or external services. Just 4.1% seek help from local government agencies, with Ho Chi Minh City reporting the highest percentage of support received in difficulties (16%). This percentage is lower for female (3%) than male (5.5%) migrants. Only 2.4% receive help from the labor unions at their workplace. Meanwhile, just 0.6% found support from job centres. This is despite employment being the current top reason for internal migration, probably due to their inefficiencies.<sup>70</sup>

The access of migrants to affordable public services – such as health insurance, access to loans, social protections, public-school education, or motorcycle registration – are still limited due to a lack of permanent household registration. The new Law on Residence 2020, effective since July 2021, requires that all provinces and cities have uniform regulations for household registration, including the capital Ha Noi. Previously, Ha Noi and cities like Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang, Hai Phong, and Can Tho have all applied more rigid requirements for permanent

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64 CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'.

65 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

70 Ibid.

household registration, such as the minimum length of time living in the cities (from 1-3 years). However, the 2020 Law still requires that the dwelling place must ensure a minimum living space of eight square meters per person to be eligible for permanent residential status, which is still unsuitable for the living conditions of some 20% of migrants in Viet Nam.<sup>71</sup> It is important to implement strict regulations to ensure sustainable management and development of the population, especially in urban areas. However, the debate mainly lies in whether or not citizens' rights and access to essential public services should be associated with, and thus limited by, their residence status.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, it is important to take into consideration how to delink permanent household registration from access to public services and social protections, especially for more vulnerable groups, while still ensuring adequate social management.

## The impact and contributions of domestic migration

Given that the dominant drivers of domestic migration in Viet Nam are the redistribution of labor and job opportunities, migrants help to fulfil labor demands in regions with intense economic expansion, while also contributing considerable remittances back home. Around 51% of people registered as temporary residents reported having sent money back home, at 8% of the total household income per month on average.<sup>73</sup> According to GSO (2016), the amount and frequency of remittances will increase in the case of intermittent migrants, or if the migrants have more family members to take care of back home (such as children or elderly parents). These remittances are mostly used for essential but short-term expenses back home, such as daily expenses (78%), events characterized by social ties like funerals and weddings (15.4%), health care (14%), and education (11%). Using these remittances for long-term purposes like savings, house repairs, or investment in business are rare (less than 3%).

However, closer inspection of the impact of migration on an individual level shows contrasting results. While personal and household incomes increase, alongside other social networks and work skills,<sup>74</sup> there have also been adverse effects on the mental health of migrants and their family members who remain behind.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, it is possible that the skills and relationships they learn at their places of destination cannot be utilised upon returning to build a sustainable livelihood in their home communities.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the social-cultural impacts and contributions of internal migrants to the host and home communities in Viet Nam are still underrepresented in the research.

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71 Ibid.

72 World Bank and Viet Nam Academy of Social Science, (2016), Viet Nam's Household Registration System, Ha Noi: Hong Duc Publishing House.

73 Ibid.

74 Korpi, M. and Clark, W.A.V., (2015), 'Internal migration and human capital theory: To what extent is it selective?', *Economics Letters*, vol. 136, pp. 31–34, doi: 10.1016/j.econlet.2015.08.016; Deshingkar, (2006); GSO, (2016).

75 Deshingkar, P., (2006), 'Internal Migration, Poverty and Development in Asia: Including the Excluded', *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 88–100, doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00272.x.

76 Nguyen, Q.P., and Venkatesh, S., (2016), 'Does "buyer beware" work in migration? Contracting between brokers and migrants in Viet Nam', *International Migration*, vol. 54, no. 6, pp. 94–108, doi: 10.1111/imig.12252.



## The situation of ethnic minority women in Viet Nam

Viet Nam has a diverse population with 54 ethnic groups. The Kinh ethnicity make up 85.4% of the total population, with the remaining 15% comprised of 53 minority groups. While the EM groups are scattered across the country, they mainly reside in remote and under-developed areas. Consequently, EMs face many hindrances in accessing resources which impacts their socio-economic development. Poverty is one of the chronic and long-standing issues among EM groups.<sup>77</sup> Despite the number of poverty reduction programs put in place to tackle this issue, EM groups have little chance of escaping poverty if they continue to live in their home communities. One of the major causes of poverty among EM groups is the lack of meaningful employment.<sup>78</sup> This is partially caused by a lack of proper educational opportunities that could make them competitive in waged employment. This, in turn, is caused by poor financial backgrounds, language barriers, and limited access to information and resources.

Among the EM groups, women face cross-cutting disadvantages due to their marginalized position as both EMs and as women. EM women encounter similar disadvantages to women in the general population. These include income inequalities, higher participation in informal sectors and unpaid care work with more limited access to social protection, lower levels of technical training and fewer opportunities for higher-paid jobs in the STEM sector,<sup>79</sup> less representation in leadership roles in both private and public sectors, as well as less ownership of important assets like land and housing. Meanwhile, women also suffer from high reproductive health risks during pregnancy and childbirth, etc.<sup>80</sup> These challenges are further exacerbated for women and girls belonging to EM groups, due to distinctive barriers related to EM customs and the prevalence of ethnic discrimination.<sup>81</sup>

In particular, minority women are unpaid family workers and are less involved in business compared to their ethnic majority counterparts.<sup>82</sup> Gender stereotypes in the household division of labor place the burden of unpaid care work mainly on the shoulders of EM women and girls, who tend to start working much earlier than their Kinh counterparts. At the age of 15, many EM girls are already working, while most Kinh girls are still attending school.<sup>83</sup> The proportion of EM women doing unpaid domestic work (52%) is twice as high as that of EM men (26.6%). Likewise, the proportion of EM men who are business owners or work in the formal sector is also higher than that of women.<sup>84</sup>

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77 Baulch, Nguyen H. T. M., Phuong P. T. T., Pham H. T., (2010), 'Ethnic Minority Poverty in Viet Nam', *Chronic Poverty Research Centre*, Working paper No. 169, ISBN: 978-1-906433-63-5.

78 Demombynes, G., (2013), 'Why is Ethnic Minority poverty persistent in Viet Nam?', *World Bank Blogs*, available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/why-ethnic-minority-poverty-persistent-viet-nam>.

79 STEM is the abbreviation of the four sectors: Science – Technology – Engineering – Math.

80 Jones, N., & Thi Van Anh, T., (2012), 'Politics on gender and social protections in Viet Nam: Opportunities and Challenges', London: Overseas Development Institute.

81 UN Women, (2019), 'Policy recommendations to advocate for gender equality in ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam'; CEEMA, (2020), 'Socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minorities in Viet Nam 2019'.

82 Dang, H. A., (2012), 'Viet Nam: A Widening Poverty Gap for Ethnic Minorities', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, doi:10.2139/ssrn.2346307.

83 Ibid.

Minority girls also have a high dropout rate in school due to financial challenges, early marriages, long distances to school for people living in mountainous areas, and negative perceptions of higher education.<sup>85</sup> According to the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) in 2014, around 75% of minority women had not attained an elementary school education.<sup>86</sup> The rate of Kinh-language illiteracy among EM women was also much higher than that of men, limiting their mobility, job and income opportunities in various sectors.<sup>87</sup>

In terms of health care, the proportion of EM women attending antenatal care and giving birth at health facilities is much lower than that of Kinh women. The mortality rate of both mothers and infants in some EM groups is also 3-4 times higher than Kinh women. In addition to the limitations of health care in EM areas, long-standing language and customs barriers, and the inability of EMs to pay for health care, also creates inequalities in access to medical services (including access to health-care-related public administration services) for EM women. Furthermore, the high rate of child marriage also threatens the health of mothers and children and limits the access of EM girls to education and career opportunities, making them even more vulnerable to violence and discrimination.

### **The migration of EMs and research gaps in the migration of EM women**

As discussed in the previous section, internal migration has been a common phenomenon in Viet Nam throughout its history. The migration of EM groups, however, has been understudied, especially in the context of modernization. Existing studies suggest that the rate of domestic migration is substantially lower among EM groups.<sup>88</sup>

The 1999 census concluded that, across the country, EMs accounted for 14% of the total population and were responsible for 4.03% of all reported migration. While the Hoa and Khmer ethnic groups were more likely to migrate within provinces, the Hmong and Dao ethnic groups were more likely to migrate across provinces. In the North-eastern regions, where a lot of EM communities reside, migration resulted in a significant loss of population in almost all provinces. This can be explained by the displacement of specific ethnic groups to other provinces between 1994 and 1999.<sup>89</sup> A 2009 study from the World Bank noted that, during the initial stages of Viet Nam's migration programmes, Kinh migrants were provided with more government support and land allocation compared to their EM counterparts. They also received the same economic assistance when migrating to areas predominantly occupied

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84 UN Women, (2019), 'Policy recommendations to advocate for Gender equality in ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam'.

85 Pham, T.T.P., Ta, T.T., Vo, T.H.H., Vu, N.X., (2020), 'Employment Issues Among Ethnic Minorities: The Case Of Viet Nam', *Asian Journal Of Humanities And Social Studies*, vol 8, no. 1, doi:10.24203/ajhss.v8i1.6083.

86 UN Women Viet Nam, (2015), 'Briefing Note On The Situation Of Ethnic Minority Women And Girls In Viet Nam'.

87 CEMA, (2020), 'Socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minorities in Viet Nam 2019'.

88 Coxhead, I., Vu, L., and Nguyen, C., (2015), 'Migration in Viet Nam: New Evidence from Recent Surveys'. <https://mpr.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70217/>; Do, V.H., (2000)), 'Situation of spontaneous migration and suggested solutions for the upcoming time', paper presented at the National Conference on Population Policy, Reproductive Health and Development in Viet Nam, *Committee for Social Affairs of the National Assembly*: Ha Noi.

89 Ibid.



by EM groups. Consequently, in terms of the outward-migration of EM groups as well as the inward-migration to majority-EM provinces, Kinh migrants are more prevalent and at a greater advantage.

Even though overall poverty rates in Viet Nam have fallen significantly, it is still a persistent issue among EM groups.<sup>90</sup> According to Coxhead et al. (2015) a lack of mobility is an important contributing factor to poverty. Many reasons have been cited for the immobility of EM groups. These include high migration costs due to the remoteness of destinations with better work opportunities. However, these reasons go beyond the “geographical poverty traps.” It is a multifaceted dynamic with different push and pull factors.

A common push factor is the lack of employment and income-generating opportunities. This is then elevated by the existing networks and acquaintances of previous migrants with knowledge regarding migration and experiences of its benefits.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, one of the pull factors attracting EM migrants to cities is a high demand for workers, especially in line-production companies who even recruit EM workers in their localities.<sup>92</sup> Coxhead et al. (2015), however, argue that:

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*“Members of Viet Nam’s ethnic minority groups clearly face barriers to mobility that are not accounted for by our explanatory variables. Whether these are supply-side (the pull of localized cultural and kinship ties, for example) or demand-side (discrimination on the part of potential employers), or a mix of the two, remains to be discovered.”*

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In the case of young EM migrants, more factors come into play when it comes to migration. A 2019 iSEE study pointed to three non-economic motivations for ethnic migrants related to liberation from cultural and social norms at their place of origin, as well opportunities for personal capacity building through learning skills that optimize future opportunities. Another motivation to migrate consists of other social and ecological challenges EMs face in their hometowns. With the complexity of these motivations, EM migration is seen to be seasonal or temporal,<sup>93</sup> while young EM migrants are less motivated by economic drivers at home.<sup>94</sup>

The implications for economic migration are of great significance to the sending communities, through its contribution to livelihoods and household incomes. In the long-term, this improves the living conditions of EM households and impacts local poverty reduction.<sup>95</sup> According to

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90 Kozel, V., (2014), ‘Well Begun but Not Yet Done: Progress and Emerging Challenges for Poverty Reduction in Viet Nam. Equity and Development’, World Bank Group, Washington, DC.

91 CARE, (2020), ‘Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications’.

92 Ibid.

93 iSEE, (2019), ‘Navigating opportunities and challenges: the case of urban young ethnic minority migrants in Northern Viet Nam’; CARE, (2020), ‘Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications’; Anh, N.T., Rigg, J., Huong, L.T.T. and Dieu, D.T. 2012, ‘Becoming and being urban in Ha Noi: Rural-urban migration and relations in Viet Nam’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 1103-1131, doi:10.1080/03066150.2011.652618.

94 iSEE, (2019), ‘Navigating opportunities and challenges: the case of urban young ethnic minority migrants in Northern Viet Nam’

the World Bank (2018), the percentage of EM households with salaried incomes climbed from 31% in 2010 to 43.9% in 2016. This is exemplified in the case of Muong Phang commune in Dien Bien province where the CARE (2020) study took place. It was established that, before the mid-2010s, EM migration in this commune was infrequent. However, during the period of this study (2016-2019), close to 50% of working-age adults relocated to other places far from home in pursuit of jobs. The most common destinations were Ha Noi, Bac Ninh, Hai Duong, Thai Nguyen, Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, and Lao Cai. The income generated from this migration was reported as follows: “VND40-60 million/year (or US\$1,700-2,570) [raising] the commune’s annual income per capita from VND18 million (or US\$770) in 2016 to VND30 million (or US\$1,285) in 2019 and contributed to lowering the commune’s poverty rate from 42.05% to 11.04% in the two respective years”.<sup>96</sup> Investigating the use of remittances of EM migrants, it was found that the main expenditure is put into renovating or building houses; buying home appliances, motorbikes, or televisions; and schooling for children.<sup>97</sup> These categories of expenditure are similar to those of domestic migrants in general.<sup>98</sup> However, a larger proportion is spent on re-investment (in agricultural expansion), savings, and house repairs among EM groups.

The above studies provide an important evaluation of EM migration. However, the imperative from a gender perspective also needs to be taken into account. While there has been a feminization of migration within Viet Nam in general, this is not the case for EM groups.<sup>99</sup> This is due to the fact that EM migrant women are subject to challenges at multiple levels. Migrants, EM people, and women have the lowest incomes compared to non-migrants, Kinh people, and men.<sup>100</sup> With regard to skills, employment, and income, these three groups are at the greatest disadvantage.<sup>101</sup> This can be explained by the fact that they are more likely to work in an informal sector where their income is lower and with little to no security. In this respect, Guest (1997) argued that “hộ khẩu” (the registration system) and residential status at the destination could be an important factor contributing to such inequalities. On the other hand, the social and cultural expectations of women as home-carers and other prejudices toward women as migrants – especially towards EM women – place them in the position of a non-migrant. In addition, migration policies do not consider the gender and gender roles of the migrant women while existing research lacks gender-based investigation.

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95 CARE, (2020), ‘Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications’

96 Ibid.

97 CARE, (2020), ‘Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications’.

98 Ibid.

99 GSO and UNFPA, (2016), ‘The 2015 National internal migration survey: Major findings’, *Statistical Publishing House*.

100 GSO, (2005), ‘The 2004 Viet Nam Migration Survey Major Findings’, *GSO Statistical Publishing House*.

101 Oxfam, (2018), *Inequality Matters*, vol. 2.

## Literature gaps regarding domestic migration of EM women in Viet Nam

There have been multiple studies capturing the domestic migration situation in Viet Nam. The most comprehensive of these is the GSO's 2016 national migration survey. There have also been multiple studies into the socio-economic situations and vulnerabilities of EM groups in general and EM women in particular. However, very few studies have explored the domestic migration situations of EMs in recent times, and even fewer on the topic of EM women.

The 2016 GSO national migration survey did collect data from EM participants. However, the data presented throughout their report was not segregated by ethnicities. On the other hand, reports from CARE (2019) and iSEE (2018) painted quite a detailed picture about EM migration in recent years. CARE covered nationwide EM domestic migration in different sectors, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. Meanwhile, iSEE explored the situations of younger EM immigrants in urban areas with a very insightful and thorough qualitative analysis. However, this research was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic and, therefore, has not covered the unique situations as well as migration trends of EM migrants in the past two to three years. Furthermore, the studies also have not looked at the situation of EM women migrants separately and compared them with those of EM migrant men. This would have allowed them to identify the gender issues and propose interventions that particularly promote gender equality and rights for EM women in domestic migration. Therefore, this study first sets out to complement the existing gaps in the current literature on Viet Nam's domestic migration. Second, it seeks to address the important issues of EM women's vulnerabilities, challenges, and opportunities. Third, it aims to increase agency through the context of increasing domestic migration of EMs and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, this research hopes to make a meaningful contribution to policies and programs that promote substantive gender equality, rights, social mobility, and economic power for EM women and EM groups as a whole, in particular the SEDEMA.

# Key Findings

## Demographics of survey respondents

TABLE 3. Demographic of survey respondents

	Total	%	Male	Female	% total male	% total female
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>46.67%</b>	<b>53.33%</b>
<b>Age group</b>						
18-24	153	43%	64	89	38%	46%
25-29	126	35%	68	58	40%	30%
30 and above	79	22%	35	44	21%	23%
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
San Diu	140	39%	72	68	43%	35%
Tay	66	18%	32	34	19%	18%
Cao Lan	48	13%	18	30	11%	16%
Muong	33	9%	10	23	6%	12%
Dao	18	5%	9	9	5%	5%
Nung	17	5%	8	9	5%	5%
Hmong	15	4%	13	2	8%	1%
Thai	14	4%	1	13	1%	7%
Other	9	3%	5	4	3%	2%
<b>Places of origin</b>						
Vinh Phuc	142	39%	79	63	47%	33%
Tuyen Quang	96	27%	44	52	26%	27%
Yen Bai	31	9%	15	16	9%	8%
Phu Tho	29	8%	9	20	5%	10%
Ha Giang	21	6%	10	11	6%	6%
Son La	11	3%	2	9	1%	5%
Lao Cai	8	2%	1	7	1%	4%
Lang Son	7	2%	1	6	1%	3%
Hoa Binh	5	1%	3	2	2%	1%
Other	10	3%	4	6	2%	3%
<b>Marital status</b>						
Married	232	64%	96	136	57%	71%
Single	116	32%	69	47	41%	24%
Other	6	2%	0	6	0%	3%

TABLE 3. **Demographic of survey respondents (cont.)**

	Total	%	Male	Female	% total male	% total female
<b>No. of children</b>						
None	92	26%	53	39	32%	20%
1	92	26%	42	50	25%	26%
2	123	34%	46	77	27%	40%
3	13	4%	6	7	4%	4%
More than 3	2	1%	1	1	1%	1%
<b>Education</b>						
Graduate high school	222	62%	107	115	64%	60%
Graduate middle-school	87	24%	32	55	19%	29%
Graduate vocational school/college/university	41	11%	26	15	15%	8%
No certification yet	10	3%	3	7	2%	4%

Source: UN Women – ISDS study in 2021.

A total of 360 EM migrants (53% female) working in factories in Vinh Phuc province participated in the survey. The study strived to collect data for a generally balanced gender ratio among all age groups, the most common ethnic groups, and places of origin. However, in reality, there were disproportionately more EM women than men working at the studied factories. This is because their particular occupation (manufacturing and processing electronic components) favor female workers for jobs that require thoroughness and precision. The average time working at the factory of the study cohort was 1.5 years, with the shortest being one month and the longest 11 years. The average length of employment at the factory for men and women was roughly the same.

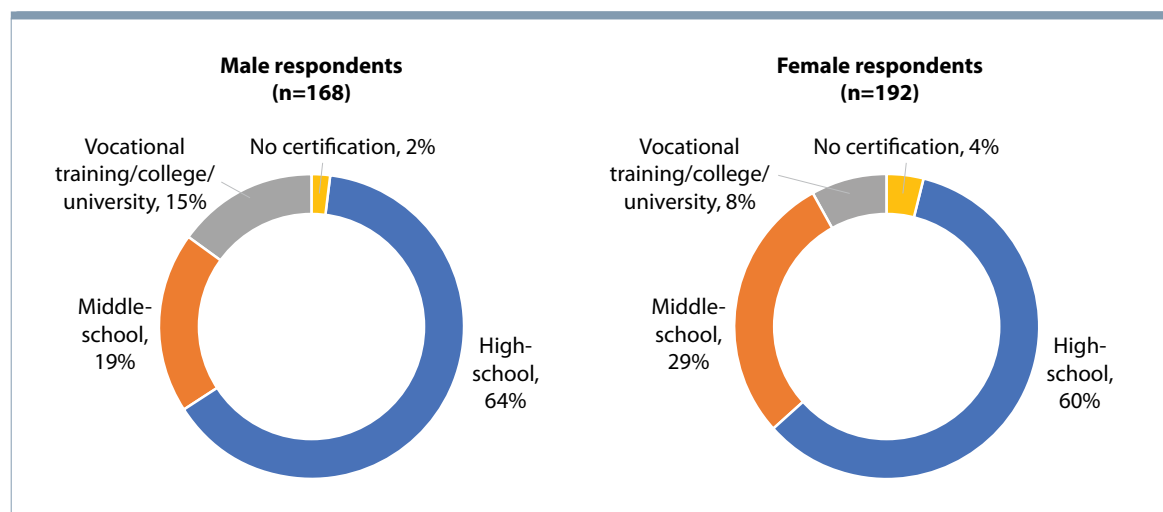
Of the 12 different ethnicities participating in the survey, San Diu (39%), Tay (19%), and Cao Lan (13%) were the most common. Most of the study cohort tended to migrate close to home, with the largest proportion (39%) migrating from the more remote districts within Vinh Phuc province, or from nearby provinces of Tuyen Quang (27%) and Yen Bai (9%). A small proportion also migrated from much further regions like Ha Giang, Son La, Lao Cai, or Lang Son (4-6 hours away by car). Interviews with EM migrants, company recruitment staff, and village heads also show that COVID-19 might have affected the number of workers coming from more distant regions in the last two years.

The surveyed cohort mainly consists of young EMs aged 18-29 (nearly 80%) due to the characteristics of factory work. Those aged 30 and above only account for around 22%, with the oldest being 41 years old. Almost two-thirds (64%) were married, and 60% have one to two children, who mainly stay with their parents and/or spouses back home. Very few

migrated with their children. More female migrants were married (71% compared to 57% for men) and have children (80% compared to 68% for men).

Most participants (62%) were high-school graduates. However, the ratio of male migrants who attained higher levels of education (high school or above) is higher than that for female migrants. The percentage of men with vocational training or college and university degrees (15%) is twice as high as that for women (8%). Meanwhile, the percentage of women without an educational qualification (4%) is also higher than that for men (2%). This contradicts findings from the 2019 national survey of the 53 EM groups, which shows that EM women have less access than men at lower rather than higher education levels (elementary and middle-school), while performing better at higher levels (college and university). However, this might be because the current study cohort is limited to only younger EMs (aged 18-41) who chose to work in factories. This could, in turn, indicate that EM women with higher levels of education (college/university degrees) are less likely than EM men to become factory workers.

GRAPH 1. Education level of survey participants by sex



## Pre-departure

### Forms, flows, patterns, and motives of migration

More and more EM women and men from several different northern provinces (Vinh Phuc, Son La, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang etc.) are migrating to urban and industrialized areas for higher-income work. Often, these are factory jobs in the formal sector (i.e., “work in company”), mainly found via the introduction of their relatives, friends, or other peers in the community. This prominent pattern is found in all IDIs with EM migrants (men or women of different age groups, single or married, working in formal or informal jobs); their family members, and community leaders in their hometowns. The common destination provinces our interviewees often mentioned include: Vinh Phuc, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Hung Yen, Hai Phong, and even very remote southern provinces like Binh Duong and Dong Nai.

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*"Yes, they migrate a lot, mostly young women, only grandparents and children left in the village now." (Husband of an informal migrant worker living in Son La province, Thai-ethnic, 36 years old)*

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*"...Most of the young people now, they all migrate far for work, to provinces like Binh Duong, Hung Yen, Hai Phong etcetera. The young generation is all gone now only old grandparents and parents remain at home to take care of the little children... around 50 young couples in my village have all migrated." (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)*

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The trend of young EMs migrating for factory work in more industrialized provinces is increasing. Compared to employment opportunities in other sectors (agriculture, services, or the public sector), and the informal sector in general, industrial jobs generate the highest and most stable incomes for EMs, especially in regions closer to metropolis areas. According to the survey results, EMs who worked in the industrial sector (before migration) received a higher average income (almost 7 million VND/month) compared to those working in agriculture (2.5 million VND/month on average), or services (5.6 million VND/month).

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*"...up here, the situation is that young people, once they finish high school, will all leave home to work to earn money for the family... we can't afford to continue to college or university, and the trend now is to go work in companies [i.e., factory work] you know." (Brother of a female migrant working in an electronics company, Thai-ethnic in Son La, 17 years old)*

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*"From what I see, it [i.e., number of EM employees] is increasing fast. They mostly come from Tuyen Quang, Phu Tho... Some are from Tam Dao or Song Lo district (of Vinh Phuc) as well." (Kinh-ethnic, male HR staff with six years of experience, 29 years old)*

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Job opportunities in factories are highly gendered. However, demand is high for both women and men, with women taking on the more meticulous tasks and men the more laborious ones:

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*"Actually, it is 50/50 for my company, as there are tasks particularly suitable for women, while more laborious work is for men. For women is the task that requires meticulousness, like labelling or glass inspection. For men it's heavy work like loading-related or hot-pressing." (Kinh-ethnic, male HR staff with six years of experience, 29 years old)*

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Interestingly, one female migrant also shared that a reason for more people to choose textiles over electronics companies is the assumption that working at the latter can pose serious health risks, such as cancer. She also shared that this information resembles news on the TV stating that working at Samsung in Thai Nguyen was very hazardous and gave people cancer.

### **Household situations before migration**

***The household incomes of both male and female EM migrants were just above the poverty line, with a higher percentage of men coming from poor families.***

The average income of EM households at the places of origin (minus remittance from migrants) is around 8.4 million VND/month. For an average-sized family of 4.4 people, this is equivalent to 1.9 million VND (or 84 USD) per person per month - just a little above the poor-household threshold for rural areas of 1.5 million VND/month.<sup>102</sup> Normally, a family in the hometown will consist of migrants' parents (90% of the cases), siblings, children, and spouses (60% of the cases).

Over one-fifth (22%) of female and one-quarter (25%) of male respondents stated that their hometown families were a poor or near-poor household. Meanwhile, a further 9% were unsure about this issue.

***Nearly 60% of female migrants have children, but their children often remain at home with their parents and/or spouses.***

Almost 60% of the surveyed women have children. However, only about 3% migrated to the study area together with their kids. The same is true of EM men, though the ratio of migrant men who have children (42%) was much lower than for women (58%). Migrants often work very long hours in order to send home more money.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, it is more logical and economical to leave their children at home with their spouse or grandparents who have more time to look after them. This also helps to save on childcare costs. From the interview data with EM migrants, another reason could be that host communities are often perceived as “complicated environments”, full of “temptations” and “vice”, and not ones where it is safe to raise children.

***Low-income agriculture jobs were the most common occupation before migration, with EM women being more often unemployed or earning less than men***

Before migrating to the study area, most EMs had agricultural jobs (42%) back in their hometowns with very little income (2.5 million VND/month on average). Meanwhile, one-third (33%) used to work in the industrial sector (e.g., factory jobs) in the same or different

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102 Decree 07/2021/ND-CP regulating the multidimensional poverty indexes and threshold in the 2021-2025 period

103 Evidence and analysis on this can be found in the Push Factors, Expectations, and During Migration sections.

province. The average income of EM men before migration was also slightly higher than that of EM women. This is probably due to a higher percentage of men working in the industrial sector, and a higher percentage of women never having had a job before migrating to Vinh Phuc. The gradual transition among EM groups from agriculture to the industrial sector was also illustrated in CEMA’s 2020 report of the socio-economic situations of 53 ethnic minorities in Viet Nam.

TABLE 4. **Jobs before migration**

<b>Job before migration</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture	151	42%	75	45%	76	40%
Industry	119	33%	63	38%	56	29%
Long-term unemployed	65	18%	15	9%	50	26%
Service	18	5%	9	5%	9	5%
Others (military service/ public sector/medical staff...)	6	2%	6	4%	0	0%
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Avg. monthly income before migration (VND)</b>	<b>3.74 mil</b>		<b>4.39 mil</b>		<b>3.16 mil</b>	

The ratio of female EM migrants who were long-term unemployed before migrating is much higher than that of men. However, from our follow-up interviews, more often than not, these women had already taken on unpaid care and household agricultural work early on. Regarding how a lack of formal work experience might affect work adaptation for women and men, the human resource staff interviewed had mixed reviews. In general, though, no notable differences were seen between EM men and women in catching up with the new job.

***A fifth of households were without access to the electricity grid, and nearly half did not have the internet, hindering their technological capacity and access to information***

The majority of respondents (42%) had homes located 3-5km from the commune centre (with schools, clinics, and public administration offices). A further 31% stated that their houses are located less than 2km away. However, 17% lived 5-10 km from the central area. As a result, these respondents had more difficulties accessing services like schools, clinics, and public administration services; or utilities like electricity and the internet. Although 91% of EM households have motorbikes, follow-up interviews with relatives show that they still need to walk an extra 2-3km before riding it (due to poor road conditions).

The majority of EM households (64%) use well water, with a third still depending on stream water. Just 11% have tap water. Over four-fifths (84%) stated that their electricity comes from the grid (which is safer and more stable). For those who use an electric generator, power is usually very weak and unstable; only enough to power lightbulbs but not televisions or electric fans.

Regarding the facilities for EM households to access information, 76% have smartphones but only 48% have internet access. The ratio of EM households with computers is also very low (13%). This might indicate the limited opportunities for EM people to develop computer skills. This, in turn, lowers their competitiveness in the job market, as highlighted in our interviews with HR staff from the factories:

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*“(Kinh-ethnic workers from low-land areas catch up faster because) they have heard or seen or practiced on similar computers before. But for EM from the highlands, they have never seen those devices. Even the most basic, like computers, most of them weren’t able to do it. Those from down here it’s just that they have more experience playing video games or chatting so they still catch up faster. Now in my company data and everything has to be typed into a computer. Same for running machines you have to know a little bit of computer or how to read that machine data.”* (Kinh-ethnic, male HR staff with six years of experience, 29 years old)

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## Push factors

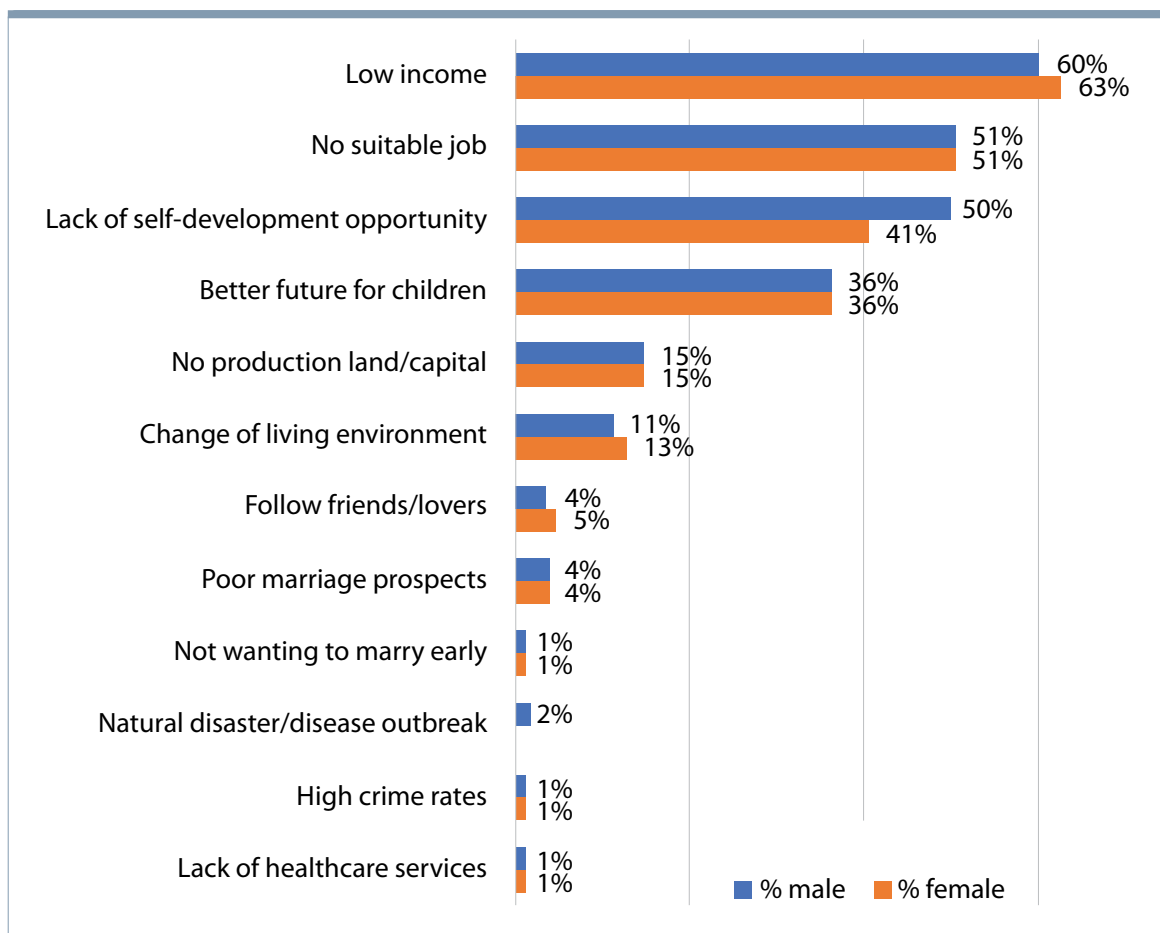
### ***Push factors for EMs were low incomes and a lack of jobs, with women quoting self-development reasons less often than men***

The top push factors of EM migration for both EM men and women are low incomes and a lack of employment opportunities at home. Younger EM migrants (those aged 18-24) also mention learning opportunities and self-development as key motivations for migration (1.5 times higher than for those aged 25+ and 3 times higher than for those aged 30+). On the other hand, married migrants often mention the future of their children as their key motivation. From the follow-up interviews, this translates into better incomes to improve living standards (housing and meal quality) and access to education for their children.

TABLE 5. Household facilities at hometown

Facilities at home	Total	%
Electrical grid	301	84%
Explosive pulsed power	17	5%
Tap water	39	11%
Wells	229	64%
Stream water	127	35%
Motorbike	327	91%
Bicycle	173	48%
Internet	174	48%
Computer	46	13%
Smartphone	274	76%
Television	265	74%
Electric fan	318	88%
Air conditioner	103	29%
Gas/electric stove	271	75%
Fridge	11	3%
Water heater	112	31%
Washing machine	150	42%

GRAPH 2. Push factors



There are no significant differences between EM men and women regarding the reasons given for leaving their home, except that EM men quote self-development (50%) more often than women (40%), even though more women aged 18-24 participated in the survey. The percentage of EM women who quote reasons like low incomes, wanting a change of living environment, and following friends or lovers, is also slightly higher than men.

***Job deficiency remains a poignant issue that motivates EM migration, with low-income, precarious agricultural work being the dominant occupation.***

Survey data of the incomes of migrants and interviews with EM migrants in this study both show that income from agriculture is the lowest and most unstable among all sectors. On one hand, this is because of the challenging mountainous terrain and northern climates. On the other, it is a result of the lack of farming experience on the part of EMs. According to interviews with village heads, investment in agriculture is also very limited. This is because a large percentage of these communities are poor or near-poor households, and most of the young labourers have migrated for work:

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*"Farm work is very precarious because the weather here is unstable, storm and flooding every year. Just one storm or a hailstone and all is gone. Income is very low and so they can't make any longer-term investment either. Even if they do, the risk of losing everything after one bad weather is high. So they prefer to leave for a company job to get money faster. The land here also varies, where it is mountainous it is hard to get water for irrigation; where it is flatter with more water the land area is too narrow..."*  
(35-year-old Hmong man in Son La, husband of a migrant factory worker)

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EMs with higher education levels rarely find anything other than farm work if they stay at home. Joining our survey were many EMs with a college or university degree, some had jobs in medicine or the government sector before migration. Even so, they still decided to leave their hometowns to become factory workers for the familiar reasons of low incomes (only 3-5 million VND/month), a lack of suitable jobs, or seeking better self-development opportunities:

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*"...back home there is just farm work and nothing else to do, you see. From my hometown, you have to go another 45km to the city in order to find another job."* (18-year-old Dao woman from Yen Bai, worker at an electronics company)

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*"My parents are in shrimp fishery... so unstable, some days they make 100,000 Dong and other days just about 50... When my parents call, they also encourage me to try to stay here to work, to have some savings, for there is no income or anything to eat if I return home now."* (18-year-old Thai woman from Son La, worker at an electronics company)

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*"There are basically very few jobs where I'm from. The only jobs were waiters/waitresses or hotel jobs with much lower incomes than down here. If you work in hotels, you only get three million Dong a month or so."* (26-year-old Giay woman from Lao Cai, worker at an electronics company)

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*"...in my area, there are also many who went to college or university but couldn't get a job when returning home. A career after graduation is also a problematic issue."*  
(35-year-old Hmong man in Son La, husband of a migrant factory worker)

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For many EMs, migration is almost an obligation borne out of difficult financial circumstances:

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*"I half want to stay half want to go home... it's so hard... But I try to work to earn some money for my children to have a better future, so it's okay if I suffer a little bit... If I return now with no income then who knows when I can afford a piece of land and build a good home for my children." (37-year-old Thai woman from Son La, an electronics factory worker)*

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*"My sister should be staying in school at her age, but she has to migrate because our family has no money... after finishing (high) school I probably will have to go work in companies (down there) too... Up here in my hometown there are also companies but the salary is very low, just 800,000 Dong a month for newbies in textile companies, then just 2-3 million Dong after 1-2 years." (Brother of a female migrant working in an electronics company from Son La, 17-year-old Thai-ethnic)*

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**Government support and infrastructure for local livelihood development is still limited and, therefore, inefficient.**

Annual loans for livelihood development from the Viet Nam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) are limited. On top of this, poorer households are unable to access these loans or make good use of them, since they lack the necessary training and long-term financial resources for such a precarious profession like farming. Meanwhile, local infrastructure for the development of industrial or service jobs – such as roads, electricity, and water access – are still at the bare minimum and remain insufficient, especially in the more remote areas of poorer households.

Interviews uncovered these limitations in government loans and the lack of technical training programs in farming:

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*"Each year, there are also loans from the VBSP, but not much, just around 20 million Dong a year or less, or up to 50 million for poor households. There are years when there are farmers who couldn't pay back the interest, then the bank will also cut off the loan for that year and only resume in the next year..."*

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*"...They give out loans, but then no guidance for the farmers on how to raise cattle or tend to the plantation... Farmers mostly follow their own experiences with not much knowledge on vaccination for livestock, for example... that the failure risk is still high." (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)*

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*“...the household finance is limited, plus no arable land for our women and they also don’t know how to improve the soil for farming. That’s why many have to migrate to other provinces to make money for their family.”* (35-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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*“Up here they also have farming programs, like growing fruit crops, for example. But there are still many problems: one is that people here don’t have the knowledge to develop these crops, another is they don’t have the capital for investment in fertilizers etcetera, so in the end the scope and efficiency is not high...”*

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*“... Another paradox is that the poor need the loans more, but the VBSP don’t want to give loans to poor people for fear that they cannot pay it back. And poor people just get poorer.”* (35-year-old Hmong man living in Son La, husband of a migrant worker)

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*“There are times when I thought of many ideas for a living but I have no money to start with. The VBSP, they do give loans to the poor and near-poor households, but our family isn’t categorized as such although we are also very poor.”* (36-year-old Thai man from Son La, husband of a migrant working as a family helper in Vinh Phuc)

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Interviews also described the limitations in infrastructure for livelihood development:

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*“Water and electricity in remote regions are still limited, they still have to use stream water. In fact, the government should be responsible for developing the irrigation source for local people, or provide consultation on job opportunities elsewhere. Electricity is just a recent thing, and some villages still haven’t got the electrical grid. So, even if people want to start a business, they can’t. No electricity to buy or sell or to preserve their stocks...”* (35-year-old Hmong man in Son La, husband of a migrant factory worker)

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*“(my home)’s too far away, no road for it (electric grid) to make it to here, Mang village already had the electric grid but not us.”* (36-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, mother of a female migrant who works as a nanny in Vinh Phuc)

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**Gender-based and other forms of violence were not a prominent push factor in this study.**

No respondents chose the option of migrating because of “conflicts/disputes with someone



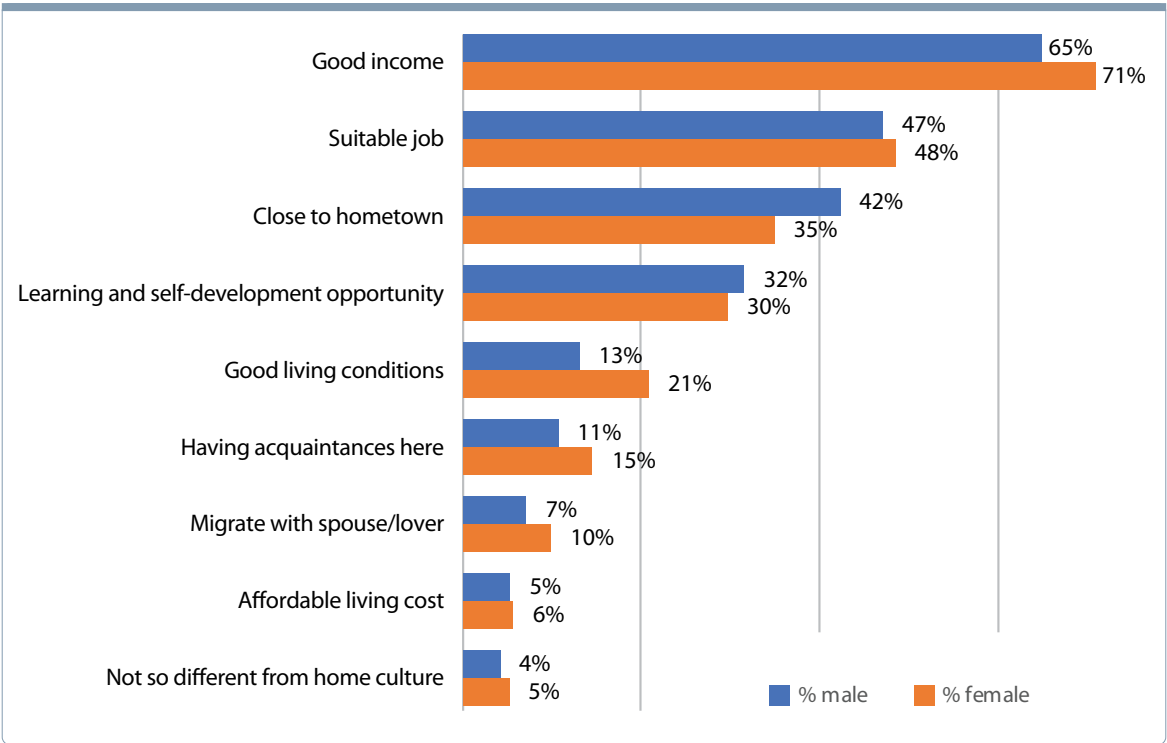
at home”. Therefore, this option does not appear in the push-factor chart above. In addition, participants were also surveyed about their GBV experiences. However, GBV cases before migration were rare. Follow-up interviews also found no one who migrated because of GBV.

**Pull factors**

*Similar to reasons for leaving, good incomes and suitable jobs are the key pull factors with little gender differences, except that EM women tend to care more about living conditions and having acquaintances at the destination.*

The qualitative interview data in this study shows that the job with the best income for EM women at the destination was work in electronics factories.

GRAPH 3. Pull factors



Other prominent pull factors include the destination being close to migrants’ hometown, so they could return more frequently and easily, and learning opportunities.

There are no significant differences between the reasons that male and female respondents gave. One exception is that women seem to care more about the living conditions at the destination (i.e., a safe, convenient environment with many surrounding services). Women also care a little bit more about having an acquaintance or spouse/lover with them at the destination place. This could come from the fact that women have greater concerns around safety, and the general stigma against women migrating alone.

## Migration decision

***Ninety-five percent of respondents reported deciding to migrate on their own, with the decision autonomy of women being slightly higher than that of men. However, EM women still met with higher objection rates from stronger safety concerns.***

More female (96%) than male (93%) respondents stated that they decided to migrate according to their own wishes. Only 3% reported following the wishes of their spouse. This ratio is the same for both genders.

Similarly, 95% stated that they met with no objection to their migration decision. Most EM families now also support migration for work:

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*“If parents send their children to school, then they also agree to let their children migrate for work. Parents do support their children’s migration to alleviate the hardship at home, but the larger part is still their (i.e., the migrants’) own will and own decision.”*  
(35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

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*“Yes, my family is very supportive of my (migration) decision, like, they respect my decision. They rarely intervene in my personal life as well.”* (18-year-old Dao woman from Yen Bai, electronics factory worker)

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The objection (if any) usually comes from the parents (about 3%). Objections to a daughter’s migration (4%) is slightly higher than to a son’s (2%). The main reason for objecting is concerns about the migrant’s safety and the hardships of migration. These worries are more common for female than male migrants. This fits with the gender stereotypes found in some of our IDIs that see EM women as being more fragile, vulnerable, and innocent compared to men.

In addition, compared to men, only female migrants mentioned the reasons for objecting as “to marry close to home” and “stay home to take care of children”, which probably reflects the traditional gender roles of women. However, very few of these objections (less than 1%) were found in our study cohort.

***For married people, migration is often a co-decision between husband and wife for financial reasons. EM women migrate with their spouses more often than men.***

According to our IDIs with EM migrants and their spouses, a common plan was for the wife to migrate for work for just a few years to improve the household’s finances and then return home. It was also quite common for husbands and wives to migrate together (43% of survey respondents).

The survey data also shows that EM women migrate with their spouses more often than men (31% of married women versus 26% of married men). More studies could be done to check whether this is a pattern, and whether the reason could be the stigma against married EM women who migrate alone.

There are also many families where the wives migrate instead of the husbands. From our interviews with female migrants and their husbands, the reason could be that the husbands already have a job at home (e.g., in the military), or are used to working freelance jobs and dislike the rigorous timeline of factory work:

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*“Because my husband prefers the work at home with more freedom, while working at companies is too constricted (for him).”* (Muong-ethnic woman, Yen Bai, 23 years old, electronics factory worker)

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***On the other hand, single and young EMs mostly decide to migrate on their own, with female participants showing equal determination and autonomy in making their own migration decision.***

Young EMs also cite employment opportunities as a key motivation to migrate, and many express the urge to migrate from the boredom of “just staying at home with nothing to do.” They often see migration as a chance for self-development through the change in living environment and the increase of social exposure and interactions. As shown in the survey data, although women tend to meet with slightly more objections due to family concerns for their safety, the percentage of women making autonomous decisions was higher than that of men. This determination is confirmed through qualitative interviews with EM women migrants at a very young age (between 18 and 20):

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*“Yes, they all (young people in my hometown) migrate for work as soon as they finish school... To earn money for themselves, for their families, and also to acquire more knowledge.”* (21-year-old Tay man from Tuyen Quang, electronics factory worker)

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*“She said she’d decided to go, and up here everyone goes, so we let her go... She said she’s a grow-up now, if others can do it then so can she.”* (36-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, mother of a female migrant who works as a nanny in Vinh Phuc)

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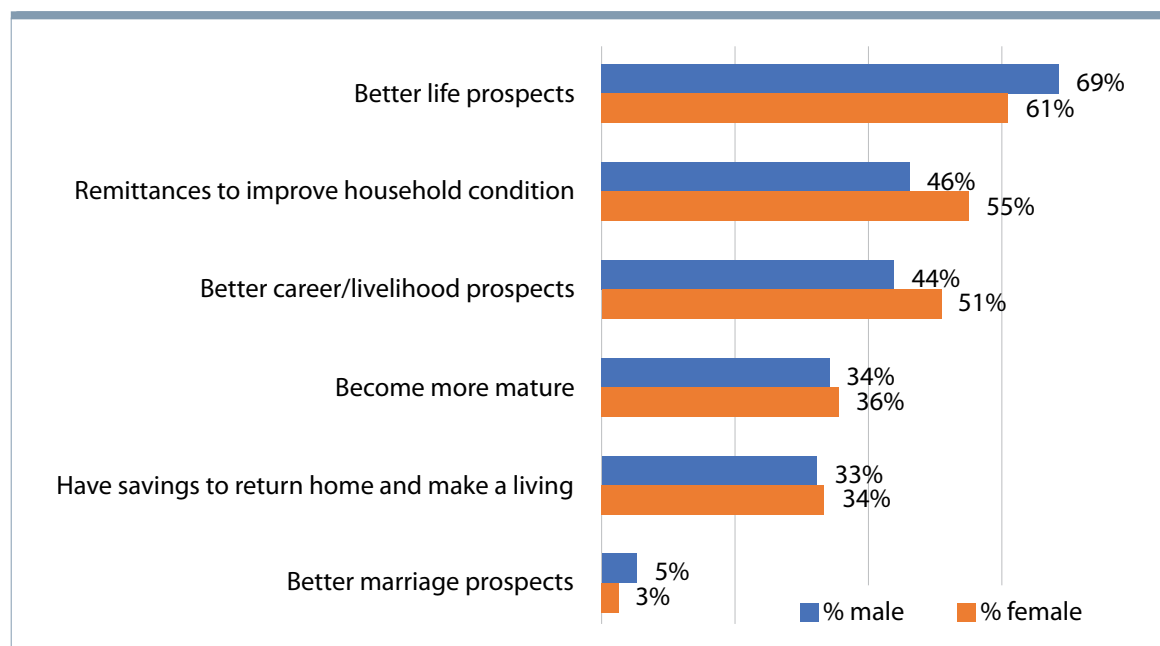
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*“Well, in the first year my mum actually didn’t want me to go, but then I still decided to go, and in time my mum eventually accepted my decision and didn’t object anymore.”* (20-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, electronics factory worker)

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**Migration expectations: women were expected to send money home more often than men.**

GRAPH 4. Top expectations from the family



Family expectations of migration are mainly concerned with the migrant's own interest, such as better life and career prospects, maturity from the experience, or building up savings to make a living upon returning home, with little gender differences.

However, 50% of migrants are also expected to send money home to help with their family's financial situation. This expectation is found more frequently for female (55%) than for male (46%) migrants.

All these expectations from EM families, including remittances, fit with the migration aspirations of EM migrants themselves.

**Key job referral channels include EM social networks and Facebook recruitment, with fewer women finding jobs on the internet than men.**

According to the survey results, many respondents (almost 40%) found their current job via acquaintances (usually a relative or friend). Meanwhile, a prominent 37.5% found job opportunities online (mainly advertisements of recruiting companies or agencies on Facebook groups and fan pages for job seekers). About 22% stated they knew of the job through the company's local recruitment announcement (mostly via banners), and less than 1% found jobs through job centres or government programs. Follow-up interviews with local village heads and EM migrants also confirm these results:

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*"I added as a friend an HR staff from my current company by chance, she's in recruitment. Before I came down here, I tried to call but failed so I switched to texting on Facebook asking if her company is still recruiting, then she told me they would get in touch if anything appropriate for me came up."* (28-year-old Hmong man from Yen Bai, electronics company worker)

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*[Channel that gets the most contact from potential candidates?] "Facebook mainly, they don't have to come down here in person (to know of the recruitment notice)."* (Kinh-ethnic, male HR staff with six years of experience, 29 years old)

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*"I saw it online, in the Vinh Phuc recruitment Facebook group, so I gave it a try."* (26-year-old Giay woman from Lao Cai, working in an electronics company)

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*"They mainly follow people who went before them. Back in the day, I actually was one of the pioneers... I worked for almost two years then returned and became the village head, then people started to follow."* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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Women more often rely on referrals from acquaintances, while men are more likely to find jobs online. The percentage of surveyed women finding jobs via the internet (35%) was lower than that of men (41%). This could suggest uneven internet use and access to job and migration information available online.

## **Enabling factors before migration**

### **Social networks between the home and host communities are key to EM migration, especially for women.**

As indicated in the previous sections, the majority of EMs – and particularly women – migrate through their acquaintances, friends, or relatives who went before them. These personal networks bring about job opportunities and information about the destination places to help with pre-departure preparation. They also help to alleviate concerns about migrants' safety for family members at home, and encourage the approval of the decision to migrate, especially for female migrants:

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*"My uncle and two brothers are there. So I'm not worried when she went down there to work."* (35-year-old Hmong man in Son La – husband of a migrant factory worker)

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*"We didn't want to let her go, but she said that her brothers and sisters have migrated and so would she, if they are fine with that so would she."* (36-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, mother of a female migrant who works as a nanny in Vinh Phuc)

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In preparing for their migration, the greatest source of support for EMs in all respects, as shown from the survey and interview data of this study, also came from EM migrants' families and friends. This could be financial or emotional support, or information about job opportunities and the destination place – all of which EM migrants considered essential. While recruitment companies now play a part in providing job information before the journey (via social media contact or phone calls), EM migrants rarely seek or get support from local government agencies or job centres.

### **Increase education access and job opportunities for women.**

As shown in CEMA's 2020 report, EM women are gaining equal or even higher access to middle and high-school education compared to men.<sup>104</sup> The survey of EM migrant workers in this study shows that only 4% of female respondents had no diploma. Meanwhile, the majority (60%) had graduated high school.

From the IDIs with community leaders in the hometowns of EM women, this increase in access to education (and, consequently, job opportunities) can contribute to local gender-equality advocacy:

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*"Before, people wouldn't send girls to school anymore after 9th grade (middle-school), but, starting from 2017, there has been a lot of propaganda so that isn't a thing anymore, be it boys or girls, if they wish to go to school then their parents will support and invest in their education just the same."* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader, Son La province)

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*"Nowadays, women are much better off because they can go to school and learn more about the society, which then improves their social communication skills and also increases their social exposure, so they are better-off than their former generations."* (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

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<sup>104</sup> CEMA, (2020), 'The socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minorities in Viet Nam 2019'.

A formal education for young children is becoming more and more crucial for EM parents, especially younger couples: Many migrants share a strong motivation to earn money to send their children to school. Combining EM school admissions data by 2019,<sup>105</sup> we can be optimistic that access to education has been on the rise for both EM boys and girls. However, the survey cohort in this study still shows that EM men tend to have a higher education level than women. Therefore, it is important to keep monitoring this data, especially regarding the gender ratio in higher-level education like high schools, vocational schools, colleges and universities.

### **Increase in internet access and usage.**

Another advantageous factor for EM migration in general is the increase in access to the job market through information on social media. This stems from the rise in EMs – especially younger ones – accessing and using the internet. As presented above, Facebook recruitment groups were the second-most common channel for both EM women and men to find jobs at the destination. These were used by 35% of EM women and 41% of EM men in the survey. This statistic is much higher than the data from CARE’s 2020 report, which showed that about 18.6% of EM migrants found jobs online. The survey cohort in this study were of a younger age group (80% under 25), and mainly come from the Northern mountainous provinces, with data being collected more recently (two years later). This could, therefore, indicate that internet usage among EMs is increasing over time. Alternatively, it could indicate that age and region can affect the rate of internet usage in accessing the job market.

Smartphone usage:

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*“Now, almost everyone here uses it... They normally use 3G or 4G.”* (35-year-old Hmong man in Son La, husband of a migrant worker)

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*“Yeah, 4G is so common now and easy to get, just 9,000 Dong and you’ve got 3G data for 3-day usage.”* (The 17-year-old brother of a Thai female migrant in Son La)

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*“I look it up online in the Vinh Phuc recruitment page. I look up the salary of the job and whether the income is stable, and also whether it is better than the jobs available in my hometown.”* (26-year-old Giay woman from Lao Cai, working in an electronics company)

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.



### **Effective public administration services is also a factor that assists EM migration.**

Most EM migrants who work in the formal sector comment that it is not difficult to acquire all the necessary documents for a job application at home. The whole process generally takes just a day at the communal administration office. In addition, the company that we interviewed also allowed extra time for EM employees to complete their profiles after admission if their homes are far away and they did not have adequate documents right away:

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*“No difficulties at all, because up where I’m from they also encourage people to migrate for work, so it’s just normal procedure.”* (26-year-old Giay woman from Lao Cai, working in an electronics company)

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### **Proactive community leaders who support women’s migration and gender equality.**

In their home communities, the proactive and well-informed community leaders have also encouraged better access to education for women, female migration, and gender-equality in general, as well as proposed and initiated more livelihood development and social assistance programs for poorer families to higher-level government and NGOs:

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*“Old men are like that a long time ago (gender prejudices), not until I returned and participated in social work that children and women gradually started to go to school, that the old men then started to let women go to school and go outside to communicate. For this COVID-19 outbreak, our village also got some support for the households in particular difficulties. With social distancing, the people really suffer, for those poor households when I visited them at their homes, they really had nothing to eat, even rice. So, I made some proposals and sent the list of those households to the Party for review, and some extra support for those families was provided.”* (35-year-old Hmong man from Son La, nine years as village head and a few years as a local Youth Union volunteer member)

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### **High employment demand in more industrial areas is a crucial pull factor that encourages EM migration.**

EM workers are also highly regarded by many employers from these areas for their strong commitment to the job, diligence, and honesty.

[Interview with Kinh-ethnic HR staff with between two and six years of experience, one male and one female]:

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*"Nowadays, the labor source is also scarce, so almost everyone from the upper land who comes down here to apply will get the job. The labor demand of electronic companies in general is now very high."*

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*"Firstly, because they've decided to move down here from very far away, they're already determined that they need this job. So, in a way, the recruiters generally have more choice. Unlike the others (Kinh-ethnic employees) who apply today but don't show up the next day when they get a call back. With Ems, they will certainly accept the job once we have interviewed them. Secondly, they are very honest, so throughout the interview they will tell you exactly what's what... also, they abide by the company rules very seriously, even more than Kinh employees. Whether it's working time or a rule that forbids bringing food to the workplace, they never play tricks or break the rules... Because they really appreciate the job and don't want to bounce around from job to job."*

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*"They are very friendly and honest, so there is no such discrimination with others. Most of them are not savvy or cheeky at all."*

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*"Although they might not adapt as quickly as those from here, since they haven't got much exposure to the work and not really catch on quickly enough, but instead they are very hard-working and want to stay with the company."*

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*"Since they really appreciate the job, they are very obedient to the line manager, and hardly ever complain about working overtime and such. We also want them to have more income from overtime, since everyone is in difficult circumstances now. The workers all said that they can earn up to 12-13 million Dong a month now, and everyone wants to work overtime."*

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*"Work efficiency is higher since they rarely take leave because their home is far away and they couldn't visit home often, so the attendance rate is higher."*

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However, as positive as this might sound, this also indicates that EM workers, in general, have less choice (must and want to work due to financial circumstances) and, therefore, less negotiating power (regarding their rights at work, for example) compared to Kinh-ethnic workers. Comments from an HR staff member also shows that EM workers might care less and know less about the labor policies of the company:

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*“Generally, they don’t understand the HR policy like people from low-land areas. They don’t pay much attention to that in general. With them it’s like whatever the company says, they will follow and hardly ever raise any inquiries.”*

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## Challenging factors before migration

### Poverty, coupled with gender inequality and early marriage, hinders access to education for EM women and girls.

Although financial difficulties are a strong motivation for migration among EM groups, widespread poverty in EM areas can limit educational opportunities. This is especially true for girls when it is coupled with gender inequalities. For instance, some parents prioritize education for their sons while preferring their daughters to stay at home and get married.<sup>106</sup> This can lead to poorer career outcomes and income prospects. The participants in our survey prove that a diploma does not really affect current incomes, since there were no differences in the average salaries of groups with different education levels, as workers receive the same salary rate. However, not having certain qualifications could be a disadvantage if employers strictly require high-school diplomas in formal recruitment. Those without a qualification are then channeled into seasonal, less secure, and lower-income employment. Moreover, this also reduces the prospects of EMs choosing a different career path if they wish to:

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*“Between men and women, women are in the less advantageous position because in the old days people didn’t send girls and women to school as much... That was somewhat because the old generation were rather favoring men over women... Old men are like that a long time ago, not until I returned and participated in social work that children and women gradually started to go to school, that the old men then started to let women go to school and go outside to communicate...” (35-year-old Hmong community leader in Son La)*

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106 ISDS, (2021), ‘Ethnic minority girls, boys, young women and men use the digital space to understand and claim their rights, access support services and raise their voice towards policy makers: Baseline Assessment.’

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*"Before, people wouldn't send girls to school anymore after they finished 9th grade..."*  
(26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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Gender-equality promotion is becoming more common in EM areas and positively influences the access of EM women to education. However, many women – particularly from previous generations – are still left behind. In the past, social norms kept these women around the house, with no access to formal education, and often had to marry early. As a result, they are now less equipped in both the Vietnamese language and social skills when the economic situation forces many to migrate to low-land areas for work. Even now, early marriage still disproportionately affects the career and future prospects of women and girls, including their migration for work:

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*"Normally, men migrate much more often than women... For women, the majority of them just graduate middle school or get to 10th grade, then they get married and never go to work in companies, most of them are like that... in this village, only a few women went to vocational school."* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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### **Lower Kinh language proficiency among older EM women hinders their mobility and job opportunities.**

Other than educational qualifications, interviews with community leaders showed that Vietnamese language proficiency can greatly affect the ability and confidence of EM people to communicate, navigate, and negotiate for their rights in a working environment that is heavily Kinh-ethnic-centric. In this respect, women from some ethnic groups – especially older women – are also in a less advantageous position than men.

CEMA's 2019 national survey on the Socio-economic Situations of 53 Ethnic Minority Groups in Viet Nam also pointed out that, while the percentage of EMs aged above 15 who could read and write in the Kinh language increased over time, 19% were still illiterate. The percentage of EM men fluent in Kinh (86.7%) was higher than that of EM women (75.1%) by 11.6%.<sup>107</sup>

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*[Are women encouraged to migrate for work in your village?] "On this matter I've told them many times, to not marry early and try to migrate to make a living. But it's no use because the number (of women) who know and can speak Vietnamese is not a lot. Limited Vietnamese and lack of social exposure makes them hesitate to go."* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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107 CEMA, (2020), 'Socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minorities in Viet Nam 2019'.

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*“Communication skills are limited, so are the social knowledge of the majority of them (women). As shared by some women who migrated to work as far as Binh Duong, often with their husbands, they said they met with many difficulties. Firstly, because they couldn’t read or write Vietnamese it’s very hard to apply for jobs in companies. And secondly, for example if they work more hours but don’t know the language, then they might not get a record for their actual working hours.”* (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

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### **Lack of pre-departure training, especially in technological skills for both men and women.**

In general, EM people have a less advantageous starting point in education and training. As a result, they become less competitive in the job market compared to Kinh-ethnic workers, especially in terms of language and technological skills:

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*“(Kinh-ethnic workers from low-land areas catch up faster because) they have heard or seen or practiced on similar computers before. But for EMs from the highlands, they have never seen those devices. Even the most basic like computers, most of them weren’t able to do it. Those from down here it’s just that they have more experience playing video games or chatting so they still catch up faster. Now, in my company, data and everything has to be typed into a computer. Same for running machines, you have to know a little bit of computer or how to read that machine data.”* (Kinh-ethnic, male HR staff of 6-year experience, 29 years old)

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Having said that, there are currently no pre-departure training or career orientation programs for migrants that we interviewed (from seven different northern mountainous provinces) to increase their capacities and competitiveness on the job market compared to Kinh-ethnic workers, or just to improve their access to job information and increase their career options, and better prepare themselves for the migration journey and mitigate possible risks, especially for women:

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*“...they haven’t got up here to provide any job consultation or training. (Local) people also don’t know about it or have any consultation, same with school admissions if they don’t come up here to provide consultation people wouldn’t know to apply.”* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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*“In my village, women migrate on their own. There’s no training to prepare them for that.”* (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

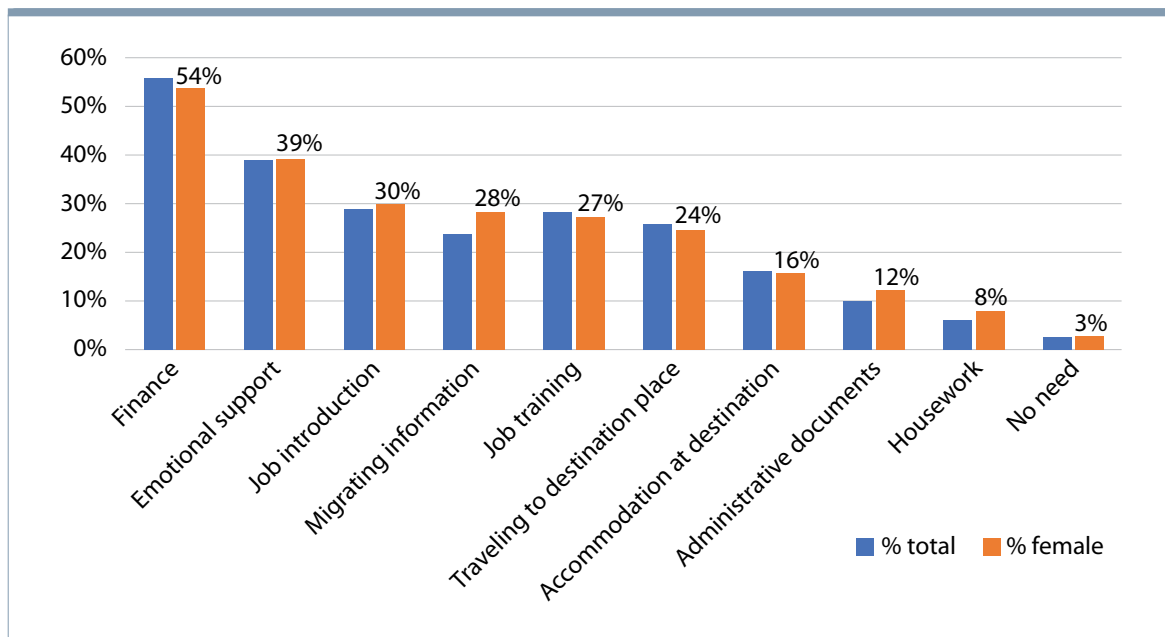
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*“One difficulty is that often they lack some documents to complete their application profile... Because they didn’t know of the requirements... and some of them only found the job after they’ve come down here. Many a time they’ve got down here then found out they didn’t have that document. As for those who call to ask before they come, they still prepare adequately.” (Kinh-ethnic, female HR staff at an electronics company, 27 years old with two years of experience)*

**Lack of support in much-needed aspects like finance, job referrals and training, migration information, and traveling to the destination.**

The support EM women need most to prepare for migration includes finance (54%), emotional support (39%), job introduction (30%), migration information (28%), job training (27%), and traveling to the destination (24%). Of these, women’s need for support in job introduction, migration information, administrative documents, and housework is slightly higher than the average total for both genders.

**GRAPH 5. Most needed pre-departure support**



Though the percentage is low (less than 10%), EM women also require more help with the housework after leaving home than men. This might indicate that (unpaid) care work responsibilities still fall mainly on EM women:

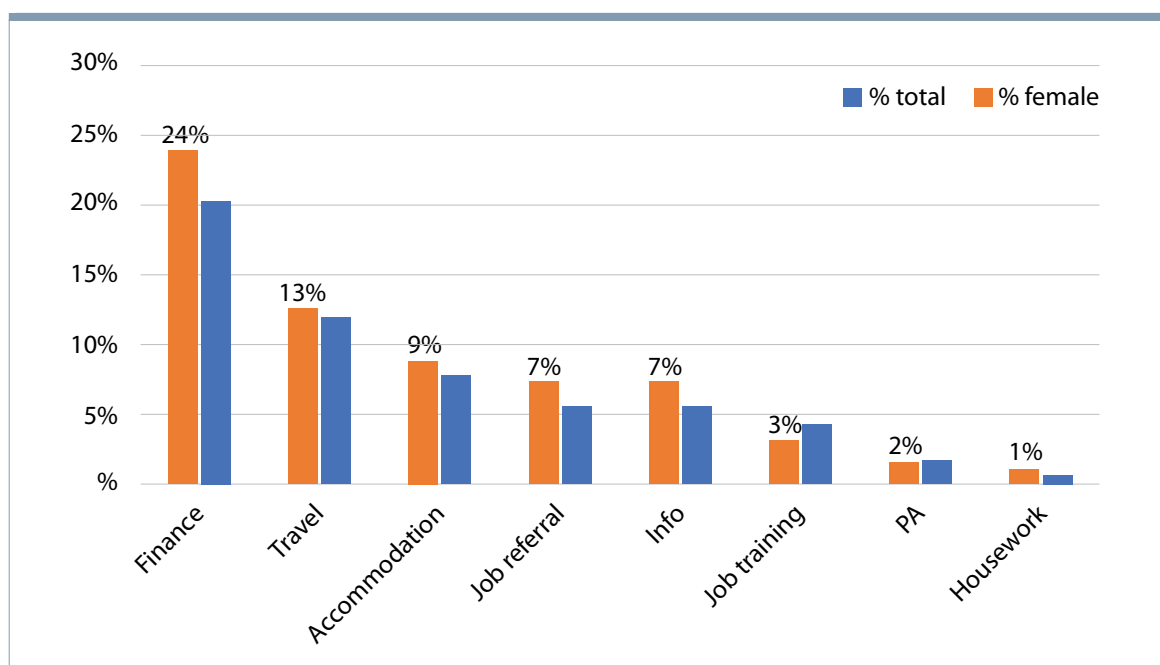
*“To be honest, it’s more difficult for women to migrate than men, because we women always tend more to the family. There’s a lot to worry about, but because of having no money (I) have to go to work for others.” (45-year-old San Diu woman from Vinh Phuc, working as a family helper)*

*“The main difficulty is that I can’t be with my baby girl to take care of her better, unlike her father as he could be quite undemonstrative you know, so my daughter still often gets upset.” (23-year-old Muong woman from Yen Bai, electronics company worker)*

**About half of women did not receive the support they needed in finance, traveling to the destination, and information for relocation.**

When comparing the support EM women need to prepare for migration with whether or not they received such support, the lack of support is highest in the aspect of finance (24%); travel to destinations (13%); and important information for relocation at the destination, including accommodation arrangements (9%), job referrals (7%), and other general information about the destination place such as the working conditions or what the host communities are like (7%). EM women were almost always more likely than men to lack support in all areas.

**GRAPH 6. % who received no support despite needing it**



According to the 2021-2030 National Target Program on Socio-economic Development for Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas, job creation and livelihood development for EM groups are among the key focuses and projects.<sup>108</sup> However, the program has not focused

<sup>108</sup> The non-agricultural livelihoods development components (including training, job placement, and loans) in the National Target Program for Sustainable Poverty Reduction in the 2021-2025 period; the National target program on building new rural areas in the period 2021-2025; and the National Target Program for Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas in the 2021-2030 period.



on domestic EM migrants, but rather on international EM migrants or those working in the forestry and agricultural sectors at home. In addition, as highlighted earlier from interviews with community leaders in the hometowns of female EM migrants, no such support programs in finance, migration information, or traveling to the destination are available for migrants.

### **The frequent lack of financial support for relocation puts EM migrants in a precarious situation at their destination.**

As indicated earlier, what support EM migrants do get mainly comes from their families or friends. This includes financial support, which is often small since migrants usually come from poor households and migrate because of financial difficulties. Survey data shows that over 40% of women and over 30% of men received no financial support to prepare for their relocation. EM migrants also shared in the interviews that they were often left penniless for weeks and were unable to pay for accommodation or food when they first arrived at their destination without a job or a first-month salary. This put them in a very precarious situation:

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*“She’d just worked for 3-4 days and hadn’t got enough money for food so she said she borrowed from her friends in Vinh Phuc and would pay them back once she got her first salary. When she left, we were only able to give her 500,000 VND,<sup>109</sup> but 500,000 was already a lot of money for us.”* (36-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, mother of a female migrant who works as a nanny in Vinh Phuc)

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*“I don’t have any hardship per se, except that I wasn’t able afford my own food when I first came down here. I moved here empty-handed, and borrowed money from friends, then only after the first month I got my first salary. During that whole period, I had no money to spend on anything.”* (28-year-old Tay man from Lang Son, electronics company worker)

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*“When I left, my husband gave me some money for rent and food for a month. About more than 1 million VND.”<sup>110</sup>* (24-year-old Muong woman from Yen Bai, electronics company worker)

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109 Equivalent to 22 US dollars.

110 Equivalent to 44 US dollars.

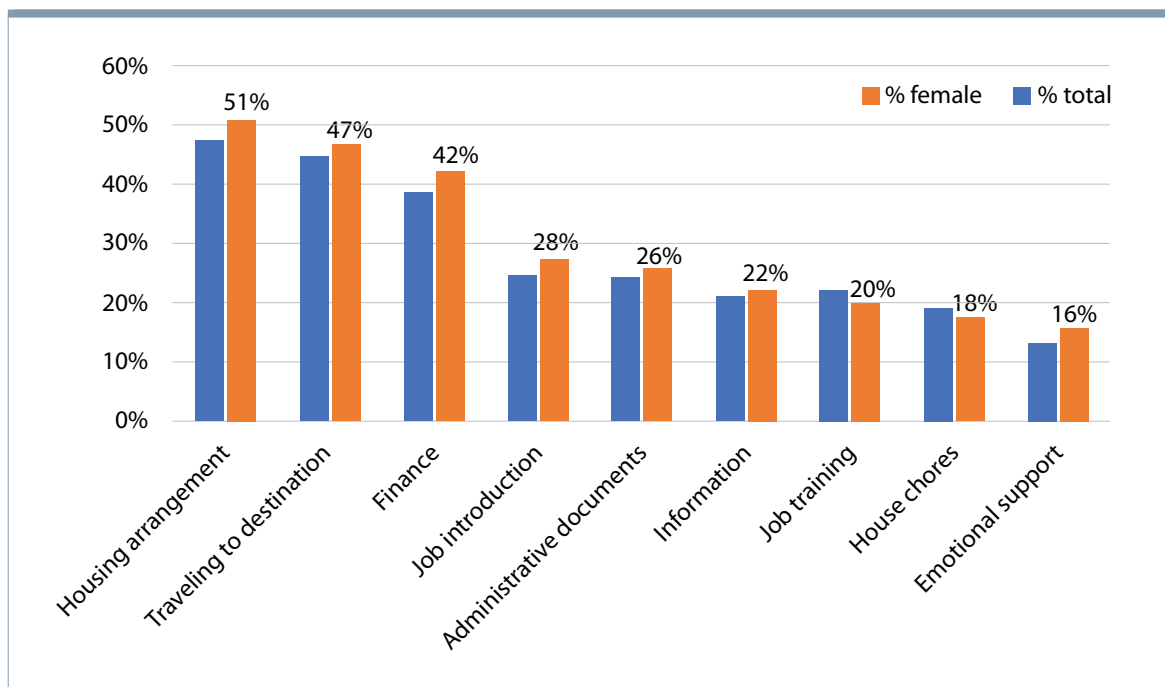
*“When I first came down here looking for jobs but hadn’t found one yet, that was my most difficult time. No money whatsoever, just painfully hovering around, what a time that was!” (20-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, electronics factory worker)*

*“When I first got here, I didn’t have a job or money for living, and having to rely on acquaintances made me feel a little bit self-conscious. I didn’t get my first salary until 45 days working at the company, because my company pays salaries on the 15th of the month and I started right at the beginning of the month” (25-year-old San Diu man from Vinh Phuc, electronics company worker)*

**Except for job training and housework, female EM migrants received support less often than men in all other aspects.**

The survey also showed that the lack of support for female EM migrants is highest in the aspects of accommodation arrangement (51%), traveling to the destination (47%), and finance (42%). Looking at the data of migrants’ difficulties at the destination in the next section, living costs (42%), paying rent (33%), and accommodation (23%) were also among the most challenging aspects for EM women, with female respondents encountering high difficulties in these areas. The lack of any support for EM women is also greater than the average for both genders in all these aspects.

**GRAPH 7. % who did not receive pre-departure support**



## The perception that it is not safe for women to migrate.

Besides the serious lack of support services mentioned, female EM migrants also have to face other challenges resulting from negative gender stereotypes, especially concerns from family members regarding the sexuality of EM women and their general knowledge of wider society:

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*“Compared to women, men are always bolder, and (it’s) safer (for men to go out), unlike girls who are always worried or scared when going outside, feels like it’s not safe and full of temptations for women... Generally speaking, women can be abused more easily... I’d advise that women shouldn’t (migrate too far), (they) should instead choose places like Bac Ninh or Bac Giang which are closer to home, and more options there as well so it’s easier.”* (28-year-old Tay man from Lang Son, electronics company worker)

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*“Well, there could be a lot of risks for women, cause if they don’t know Vietnamese when communicating with men from outside, then that could lead to bad behaviors... They are very easily swayed in that matter... in my view, it’s certain (that women are much more likely to be sexually harassed than men), because their (social) knowledge is poorer so that could be hard to avoid.”* (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

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*“Here, what I think is that for some people who have had social experiences, then they will know. But then those who don’t know or don’t have much experience, it’s easy for them to fall prey to temptations and vices. For example, at the company, for women who are knowledgeable and know what’s right and wrong, they can avoid being deceived. For example, if someone told them to follow some guy for a better salary, higher income, if they are not alert, they could be taken or deceived and end up in those karaoke shops or doing other crimes...”* (35-year-old Hmong man in Son La – husband of a migrant factory worker)

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*“...she hasn’t traveled so far from home for such a long time ever before, so I’m afraid, what if she met some guys and follow them, so I’m afraid of losing her.”* (36-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, mother of a female migrant who works as a nanny in Vinh Phuc)

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From our interviews with community leaders of the Hmong ethnic people and studies of the Hmong group, women are traditionally refrained from traveling or hanging out. Meanwhile,

married women are often overburdened with excessive housework.<sup>111</sup> This might explain the worries about EM women's lack of exposure to the "complicated" and "full of vices" society which makes migration riskier for EM women:

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*"Well, those who go as far as Ha Noi to work, the salary is surely higher, but because we women are from an ethnic minority, if we work over there then there will be a lot of clashes ("va chạm") and too many people, so I wouldn't like that either."* (55-year-old San Diu woman from Vinh Phuc)

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Besides gender roles and stereotypes, EM women are, at times, also refrained from migrating for work out of fear of the emotional strain a long-distance relationship could put on the marriage. Then there is the jealousy and possessiveness of husbands enforced by collective social norms, which then become a form of emotional and economic violence against the women:

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*"...because it so happened that many couples have divorced, plus the traditional mindset, that they don't want to let their children migrate because they fear that (divorce) will happen... to be specific, they allow only the husband but not the wife to migrate, because they said if the wife goes, she will meet other men, and he will end up losing his wife if he let her go for 1 or 2 years. Those husbands who haven't got a mind of their own then they won't let their wives go, and so household finances and living standards cannot develop."* (26-year-old Hmong man from Son La, two years as village head)

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### **COVID-19 prevents EM migration from more distant regions.**

The COVID-19 pandemic is preventing EM people from migrating for work, especially for job opportunities that are further from home and in more prosperous areas:

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*"Before the outbreak, the number of employees that were ethnic minorities were rather high. They often migrate from Lang Son, Ha Giang or Lao Cai a lot. But since the outbreak in June until now, in Vinh Phuc we couldn't recruit from outside of the provinces, and so the number of (ethnic minority) employees also decline."* (Kinh-ethnic, female HR staff at an electronics company, 27 years old, two years of experience)

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<sup>111</sup> Nicola Jones et al., (2014), 'Early marriage among Viet Nam's Hmong: How unevenly changing gender norms limit Hmong adolescent girls' options in marriage and life'; Nozomi Kawarazuka et al., (2019), "A Bird Locked in a Cage": Hmong young women's lives after marriage in northern Viet Nam'.

Candidates who might have to return home frequently for childcare or family affairs will also become less desirable in the eyes of the recruiter, especially when the job market becomes more competitive. Meanwhile, ironically, those with children are also those who need the job more:

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*“Normally, we will check whether they are the right legal age to work. That’s the main thing. Other than that, we also check whether they are occupied with family affairs, for example, having small children and couldn’t go down here to work, or sometimes the child gets sick and they have to return home etcetera, but that’s not too big an issue.”*  
(HR staff at a company in Vinh Phuc)

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## During migration

### Risks, challenges, and opportunities

**Nearly 50% of formal workers’ income was from overtime work, with EM men earning more than women working in the same sector.**

The surveyed participants worked in diverse positions in the factory. The migrant workers in the formal sector in this study had a stable income, even during the pandemic and lockdown, when Vinh Phuc was heavily affected in the 3rd wave in May 2021. However, to gain what workers consider a “stable or satisfactory income”, they have to take on additional shifts. Table 6 below presents different dimensions of the income of the surveyed participants:

TABLE 6. **Monthly income of factory workers by sex**

Average amount by sex	Male (VND)	No. of men	% total income	Female (VND)	No. of men	% total income
Basic salary	4,490,404	166	49%	4,353,037	191	51%
Overtime income	4,104,572	166	46%	3,981,203	187	47%
Other income	168,929	168	4%	33,684	190	2%
<b>Total income monthly</b>	<b>8,994,072</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8,541,518</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>100%</b>

On average, regardless of gender or age, employees work eight hours of their main shift and an additional 3-4 hours, possibly seven days a week, in order to generate an income of 8,000,000 to 10,000,000 VND per month. The income from these extra shifts accounts for 46%-47% of their total income. The conditions at the current company are considered to be decent because of quite favorable policies compared with some textile companies where a number of the participants had worked before. In their experience, even with overtime, the income in other textile companies is only around 5,000,000 – 6,000,000 VND. For context, the basic

salary of the workers is slightly higher than the average in Vinh Phuc (classified as ‘Area II’) which is 4,200,000 VND plus extras for a total of VND 4,600,000 - 4,800,000. Therefore, the numbers demonstrate that while the income of the participants is secure and competitive, in order for it to be satisfactory, the workers need to constantly work overtime.

On average, EM men earn around 400,000 VND more per month than EM women working in the same sector. This difference in income comes from both basic salaries and overtime. Similarly, the 2016 GSO national migration survey with both Kinh and non-Kinh migrants in Viet Nam found that male migrants of all age groups were earning more than female migrants, by 1,000,000 VND per month on average.

### **Job security is influenced by the migrants’ age, especially during COVID-19.**

The qualitative data illustrated that the stability of work is impacted by age: Both under-age as well as older participants in this study mentioned job insecurity. Specifically, the participants aged under 18 could not apply for a legal labor contract and only worked as seasonal workers with much lower incomes. On the other hand, older participants also mentioned their age as a factor for losing their jobs in the formal sector during COVID-19, as presented in the following narrative:

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*“I worked at the company before, but I am older now so they don’t let me work there anymore so I am now babysitting so I can have some extra income for my children. My children are still in school, they are at university... When you are older, they let you go so they can hire younger ones. If you are still young, they keep you, but older people like us- they fire you... without any compensation. According to the long-term contract we signed, if they fire us, we need to get some compensation, but they told us this leave is temporary for 6 months and when the company is back to operation, they will call us back. But that’s just a sneaky way for getting rid of us. In reality, we received nothing. From the start of this year, it has been nine months now, more than promised six months, right? They still haven’t called. So, when I lost that job, I had to start babysitting to get some extra income.” (45-year-old San Diu women, working as a baby sitter in Vinh Phuc)*

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Similarly, another narrative from workers in the informal sector who usually work at food stalls, restaurants, or as a domestic help, presents the precariousness of their jobs as well as their income. The upside of working in the informal sector, according to the participants, is the flexibility of time and the ability to easily take leave. However, the income of this group is significantly lower than that of factory workers, even with similar hours. Because there is no binding contract, many of these workers depend on the generosity as well as the kindness of their employer, as shared in the story below:

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*“The fate of us who do babysitting, it really depends on the employer. If you are lucky, you get an understanding, caring employer. But if you are unlucky, you get very strict families. It isn’t a joke. You get more than two million in pay so you must work really hard, no fun there in your work. Some families are nice and sometimes they even give you some extra money, or if you go back to visit your family, they buy you some treats.”*  
 (Informal sector worker from Vinh Phuc, of the San Diu ethnic minority, 48 years old)

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**Despite cost cutting and working overtime, between one-third and half of the respondents still struggle to make ends meet or have any savings, especially female migrants.**

One advantage of informal jobs like babysitting or domestic work is that the earnings from these jobs can become savings or remittance as the workers live with their employers. Therefore, they do not have the financial pressure of paying bills or traveling to work every day.

However, the spending of factory workers from the survey tells a different story, in which the cost of food and rent were their highest outgoings. The breakdown of workers’ average spending by category and gender is presented in the table below:

TABLE 7. **Average monthly spending by category and by sex**

Average monthly value by sex (in VND)	Male	Total	%	Female	Total	%
Rent	984,502	164	11%	841,712	186	10%
Food	1,746,890	164	19%	1,725,916	191	20%
Electricity, Water, Internet	416,834	165	5%	460,392	190	5%
Commuting	768,293	164	9%	815,946	185	10%
Entertainment	383,758	165	4%	255,878	188	3%
Other costs (clothes, facilities...)	683,190	163	8%	728,723	188	9%
Avg. remittance in the last 3-6 months	2,361,759	163	26%	2,110,901	185	25%

One-quarter (25%) of the income of female migrant workers was sent home, and over 50% was allocated for daily expenses. Entertainment spending (3%) accounts for the smallest percentage of their total income. In general, the situation is the same for EM male migrants. This means that, while EM migrants work day and night to make ends meet and send money home for their families, they spend very little on their own leisure activities to make up for the enormous workload (12 hours a day, 7 days a week).

Although food and rent are the two largest expenses, the factory workers in this survey were already able to save on food costs each month because the company provided them with two meals if they worked overtime. However, migrants working in other companies with less favourable policies might have to spend a lot more on food and end up saving much less.



On average, the cost of rent each month was under 1 million VND as 72% of EM migrants share a room with others. Eight percent of women reported sharing accommodation with at least five other people compared to just 2% of men. Male EM migrants are also more likely to live alone, with 30% reporting not sharing a room with others (compared to 26% of women). As a result, men spend 1 million VND more on rent each month and share rooms with fewer people than women on average. Even so, their total average income, savings, spending on entertainment, and remittances are still higher than that of women.

Despite the considerable savings on food costs and accommodation, one-third to half of the respondents still struggle to make ends meet. Their marital status, as well as whether or not they have children, also affects levels of satisfaction with their current income, and whether it is enough for their needs. Among those surveyed, the younger participants (18-24) were most likely to indicate that their income was sufficient. This declined with people in groups older than 25 years old.

Moreover, more women than men stated that their income was insufficient for their needs. One possible reason for this is that, among those surveyed, more women than men were married or had children. Therefore, they need to provide not only for themselves but also their families.

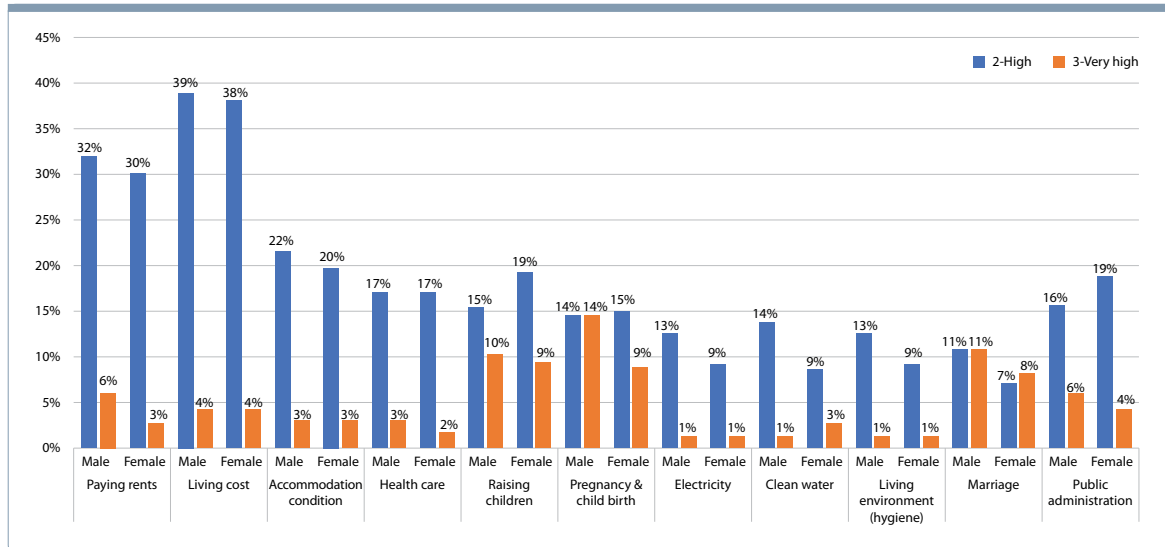
Furthermore, almost 32% of the women in our survey had no savings. Of these, 88.5% were married and 90% had children. Meanwhile the percentage of men without savings is much lower, at around 20%. Having no savings could be quite precarious for female migrants, especially in the unprecedented times of COVID-19.

As presented so far, the primary motivation for migration of the participants – regardless of their gender, age, EM group, or work sector – was financial. However, finance has also become a hindrance to the relocation and living standards of migrants. It creates a considerable source of pressure for them to generate savings and send money home. Comparing different demographic characteristics, more female than male migrants see challenges in acquiring a livelihood. Consequently, it is more difficult for women to save and send remittances to the families in their hometowns.

### **Living costs and accommodation were the most challenging aspects, with women reporting more difficulties than men in childcare and public administration.**

The above-mentioned financial struggle of female migrants is again reaffirmed through the survey data which shows that living costs and rent are the most challenging aspects of life for EM women at their destination. One-third (33%) of female respondents reported a ‘very high’ level of difficulties in these aspects, with 42% reporting a ‘high’ level of difficulties.

GRAPH 8. Most challenging aspects at the destination



Other major difficulties for female EM migrants at their destination include childcare (28%), public administration procedures (23%), and accommodation conditions (23%). From follow-up interviews with women migrants, childcare often poses a great challenge. This is probably because they often migrate without their children, and have to live far away from them for months, especially during COVID-19. Compared to the EM men in the survey, women tend to report fewer difficulties in most aspects, except for raising children and public administration procedures. Whereas, with accommodation conditions, as mentioned above, female EM migrants tend to share a room with more people and spend less on rent than their male counterparts, which might reflect their less favourable housing conditions. In general, both EM men and women encountered many difficulties in accommodation conditions. This echoes the 2016 findings of GSO (which mainly involved Kinh migrants). GSO's data also concluded that, in general, migrants' housing conditions are worse than those of non-migrants.<sup>112</sup>

### Living and working with physical and mental pressure.

While taking on extra shifts and working overtime has its advantages, this also entails a number of consequences. The work itself includes a certain pressure to perform, which had an impact on the workers' mental health. The survey asked workers to rate their satisfaction regarding: Salaries, bonuses and benefits, overtime and leave policies, other benefits, working conditions, labor safety, opportunities for promotion, suitability with personal likes/interests, relationships with colleagues, and relationships with line managers on a scale from 1 to 5. The percentage of those who answered 'a bit dissatisfied' to 'entirely dissatisfied' was very low in all categories: Less than 15%, except for dissatisfaction regarding bonuses and benefits (an average of 20%). However, the level of 'complete satisfaction' was also low (10% on average).

112 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

Interestingly, in all categories, the level of dissatisfaction of female workers was higher than that of men except for leave policies. Regardless of the level of satisfaction, the pressure to earn money was still present in a form of pressure rather than motivation for continuing the work, as can be seen in the case below:

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*"The line managers of each production unit pressure us to meet the production target. If we do not meet that, or if we make any mistakes, they will then verbally push us. It's so much pressure I just want to go home. But I still need to try to make some money."*  
(Female factory worker, Giay ethnicity from Lao Cai, 26 years old)

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Another common issue regarding work pressure was the lack of work-life balance resulting in a lack of time for self-care and pleasure, as shown in the narratives below:

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*"If I have a lot of time, then I go out but when I work 12-hour shifts, once I get back from work, I just shower and go sleep, I don't go anywhere."* (Female factory worker, Muong ethnicity from Yen Bai, 23 years old)

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*"Each day, we spend 12 hours (on work), excluding time to shower and do chores, we get like 8, 9 hours which we spare for sleep, no fun."* (Male factory worker, San Diu ethnicity from Vinh Phuc, 25 years old)

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*"My work includes Saturdays and Sundays, no rest, no fun. There is no time for it."* (Male factory worker, Hmong ethnicity from Yen Bai, 29 years old)

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Based on the stories above, it can be seen that these demanding jobs, accounting for around 12 hours of daily work – including weekends – has both a mental and physical impact on male and female participants. The working conditions and the pressure of work was also reflected among those working in the informal sector:

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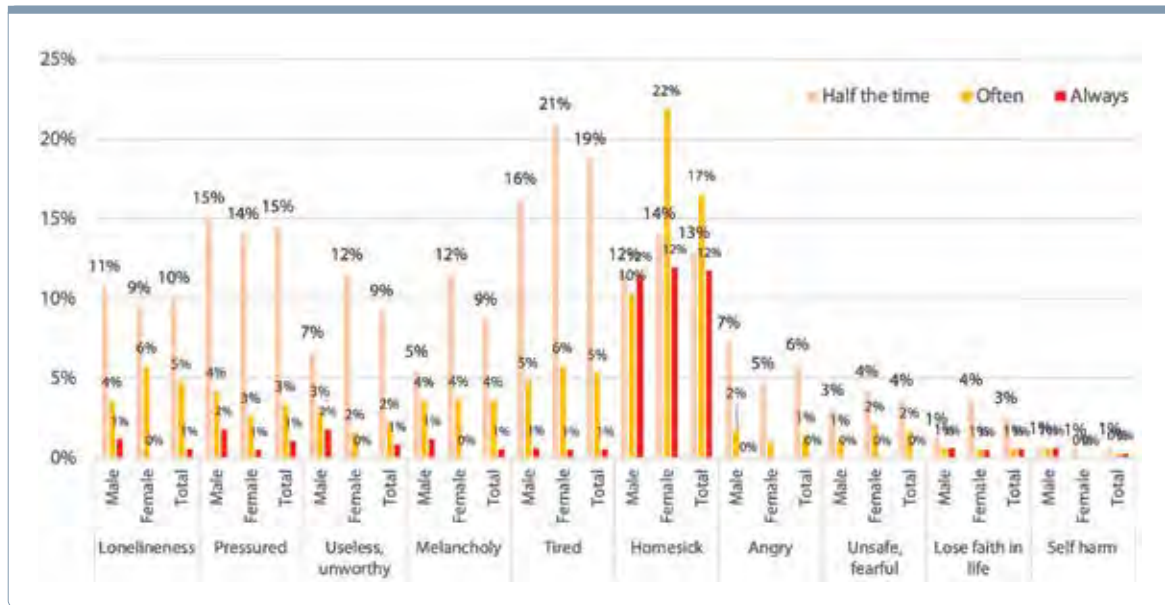
*"Where the working conditions are not good enough, you might have to stand the whole day."* (Worker in the informal sector, Dao ethnicity from Ha Giang working in Bac Ninh, 17 years old)

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Being tired and homesick were the most prevalent feelings reported by EM migrants, with women experiencing these feelings much more than men. Just under half (48%) of women reported feeling homesick and tired 'half the time', with 28% 'always' having these feelings. Feeling homesick is similarly prevalent for both married and single women, as well as those who have children.

A sense of ‘uselessness/lack of self-worth’, or ‘feeling unsafe’ is also more present among female migrants. Meanwhile, men more often reported ‘self-harm/suicidal thoughts’.

GRAPH 9. Experience of negative feelings since resettling at the destination



**While social connections with home are important and remain strong, EM migrant networks at the destination are expanding to different ethnic groups as well.**

For young women, such as a 17-year-old Dao woman from Ha Giang, migration came with other anxieties such as independent life without the support of their families:

*“It was really tiring to ask mom for money when I was still in my hometown but only when I had to earn money myself did I realize how challenging it was for my parents... When I come back home from work, I change then go to do grocery shopping, once I finish cooking and dinner, it is already late. I want to have a couple hours of sleep before I go to work again. When I come to the company, I had to accept being scolded (as I was new) but over the past few months I learnt the job so no one is saying anything... Some of the co-workers, they know how to do it because they came last year or in 2019. They used to criticize me because there was a lot in the warehouse but I didn’t know what to do so they shouted at me, that’s it.” (Female factory worker, Dao ethnicity from Ha Giang, 17 years old)*

Having a strong social connection is important when migrating to a new place, especially in terms of emotional support. When faced with the difficulties mentioned so far, participants sought help from relatives (78% of men, 77% of women); friends (35% of men, 24% of women); neighbours (23% of men, 10% of women); and workmates (18% of men, 13% of women).

Local authorities and employers are the least desirable sources of support. The percentage of EM women reaching out for help from non-family connections like friends, neighbours, or colleagues was lower than men. The majority of respondents (84% female and 77% male) reported keeping in frequent contact with their families at home via phone calls or social media. However, the frequency of contact with friends from home was much lower – about 32% of women and 39% of men reported often contacting their friends from home.

According to the survey, the social connections of the factory workers at the destination was distributed quite evenly among same and different-ethnic friends. Female migrants reported having, on average, four friends from the same ethnic group (one fewer than male respondents), and a slightly higher 5.9 friends from different ethnicities (the same as their male counterparts). This differs from the reports of CARE (2020) and iSEE (2019), which found that EM migrants were mainly confined within the network of their own ethnic group, which could result in their further segregation with the host communities.<sup>113</sup> On this point, the fact that the survey was conducted with migrants working in factories with many Kinh colleagues, who had more friends from different ethnic groups, and with just 5% reporting difficulties making friends with Kinh people, means that it is safe to assume that EM migrants working in the formal sector are expanding their social networks outside their own ethnic group, probably via relationships with their workmates at the factories. Follow-up interviews with some respondents also indicated that they were living among mainly Kinh neighbors, and not necessarily close to people from the same ethnicities or hometowns, or with those who introduced them to their current job.

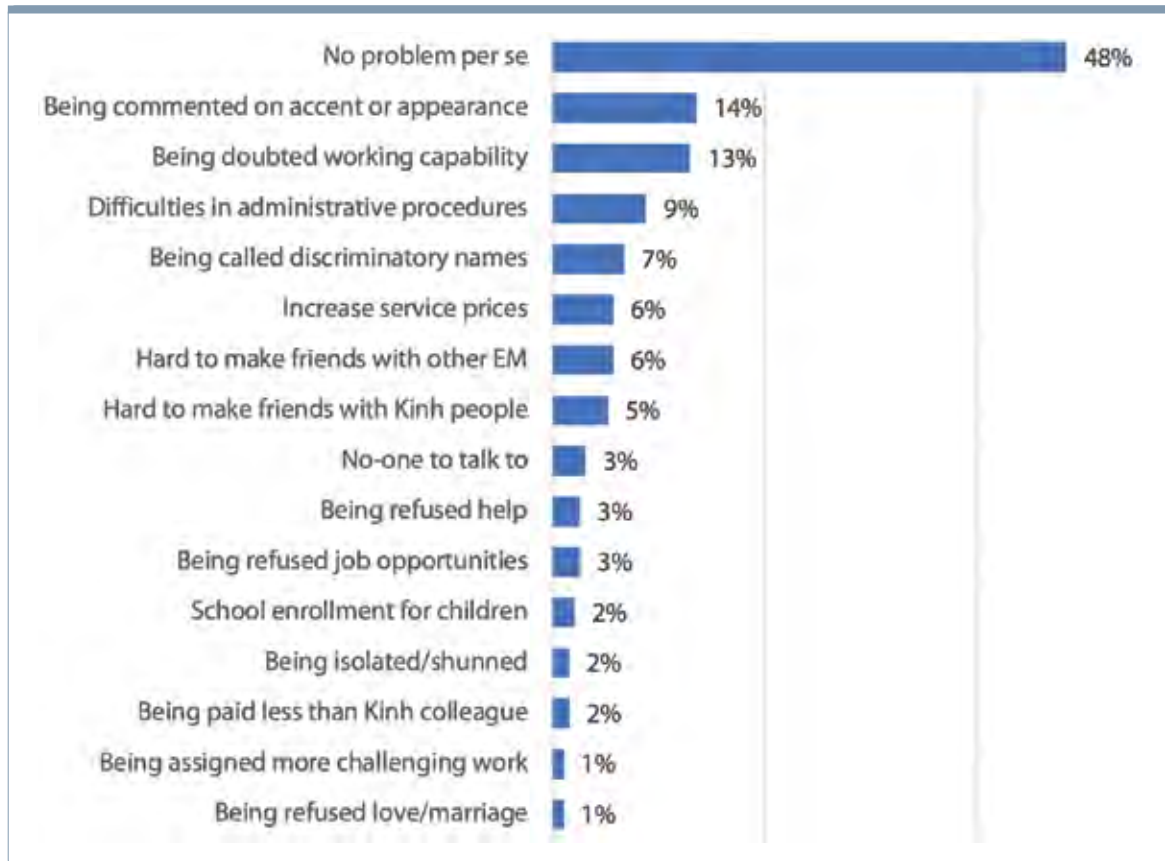
### **Over 50% of female EM migrants experienced ethnic discrimination.**

A majority of EM migrants (60% of men and 52% of women) reported experiencing discrimination due to their ethnic background. The forms of this discrimination are presented in the table below, with the most common ones being: Comments about accent or appearance, doubts about working capabilities, difficulties in administrative procedures, and discriminatory name-calling. Nearly three-quarters of Tay and almost half of Cao Lan and San Diu workers reported experiencing some form of discrimination. Tay workers suffered from doubts about their working capabilities (23%) or comments on their accent or appearance (23%). They also found that the price of services was increased for them and found it difficult to make friends with people from other EM groups.

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113 CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'; iSEE, (2019), 'Navigating opportunities and challenges: the case of urban young ethnic minority migrants in Northern Viet Nam'.

GRAPH 10. Perceived discrimination by female ethnic minority migrant workers



In the working environment, as an EM person, workers often feel tricked and taken advantage of, as described in the narrative below:

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*"I have been tricked many times. Generally, people here are very sneaky... they use you, take advantage of you, push hard work onto you and choose easier work for themselves... also take advantage financially."* (Male factory worker, Tay ethnicity from Lang Son, 28 years old)

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EM workers are most often judged on their work capabilities due to a presumption that they have limited language, computer, and technical skills. This is stated by those surrounding them, such as staff members at the company and their colleagues:

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*"There are some issues when they come here like machines and computers. They are not used to operating different machinery. So you know, have to teach them from very basics. People from here, at least they have some experience so they are better at it."* (Colleague at the factory, Kinh ethnicity, 29 years old)

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This peer discrimination is connected to levels of education and productivity and can cause verbal and physical conflict:

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*"Maybe the discrimination is not so visible, but when ethnic minority workers work at the company it is still present. For people that graduated from high school, vocational training or college, then it's not a case but for those who haven't finished high school, year 10, year 11, year 9 then when they go to work and at some units, they might get shamed with derogatory words (such as "thằng Mèo", "cô Mèo"). I think often they get pressured by such language or annoyed by them... When it happens among women they can bicker and among men it can get physical. There is quite a lot of such cases in the company... Even when relating to work, some ethnic minority women learn very fast and are very productive which can also cause jealousy among co-workers."* (Male head of the village, Hmong ethnicity from Son La, 26 years old)

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This perception was confirmed by others, such as the family members of migrant workers. When asked about his wife's migration experience and whether being an EM woman could subject her to more discrimination, the husband stated:

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*"There might be some discrimination... you know because you are of ethnic minority due to social interactions, the communication, the awareness while working in the company. Ethnic minority workers are enthusiastic, but they have limited skills when it comes to technical skills, less experience with the machines compared with people there.... But it also depends on the person. If you are educated, then you learn faster but if you have not studied much then that partially affects it."* (Husband of a factory worker, Thai ethnicity from Son La, 36 years old)

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As discussed, male EM workers reported issues such as doubts about their working capabilities, difficulties in administrative procedures, and discriminatory name-calling – the aspects that speak to stereotypical male traits relating to work and being in charge (of paperwork). Compared to their EM female co-workers, men's experience of discrimination was lower in issues such as comments about their accent or appearance, loneliness, being refused help, being refused job opportunities, and being isolated/shunned. The discrimination that women face speaks to common gender stereotypes where women are remarked upon for their appearance and are seen as shy and even helpless. The qualitative study data demonstrates that their EM status was the main reason for verbal abuse and belittlement:

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*"I felt uncomfortable they kept teasing me... what did they say... they told everyone that this girl, she is ethnic minority, you can talk to her, she may curse at you, but you still wouldn't know. They just say that while laughing. It really gives me an unpleasant feeling."* (Female factory worker, Dao ethnicity from Yen Bai, 18 years old)

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*"Sometimes I hear people's whispers and questioning whether I have enough capacity to do this work. I get upset by those comments, but I think to myself it doesn't matter, I should just focus on my work. I don't need to care about what people say... They even see my appearance as different, my accent as unusual, basically not similar to them so they find it weird and laugh at me."* (Female factory worker, Giay ethnicity from Lao Cai, 26 years old)

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This discrimination occurs not just because the workers are from EM groups, but also because of their rural background and outsider status. This perception is based on the common stereotypes and misconceptions about EM groups as presented especially well in the words of women in the informal sector:

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*"It's not about saying you are from the countryside but rather whatever you do, they would say that you are an ethnic minority when they don't know much about us... They stigmatize child marriage and more. Honestly, those things are not always correct... but it's not that important, they also say that people from the countryside have lower skills."* (Female worker in the informal sector, Tay ethnicity from Ha Giang working in Vinh Phuc, 19 years old)

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*"We get teased a lot because we are ethnic minority... They often stigmatize ethnic minorities. They don't tell us that but tell each other."*

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*"They often undervalue us because we are from the rural areas... Honestly, maybe everyone is like that, as humans we all have some dignity... I haven't seen anyone beaten yet but there are insults. I heard people share their experiences to be so."* (Female worker in the informal sector, San Diu ethnicity from Vinh Phuc, 48 years old)

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Despite being affected by the prejudice from their surroundings, younger generations of EM workers do not internalize it. Amongst younger people, there is a growing awareness of and understanding about the unfairness of their treatment as well as a growing confidence to react if necessary:

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*"If they criticize, I react instantly... we are all equal now, maybe if you meet older people or people from the city then it might be different, but the youth isn't as before anymore."* (Male factory worker, Tay ethnicity from Lang Son, 28 years old)

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*"We are all ethnic people, even Kinh is also an ethnicity, but many people do not understand that."* (Female factory worker, Pa Them ethnicity from Ha Giang, 25 years old)

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While such discrimination exists, the interview participants do not see its long-term impact on their work but rather the fact that it takes a toll on their social relations, especially for women. Consequently, the situation can affect their settlement at the new destination. However, it is also accepted as a part of the reality of being an EM migrant worker:

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*"Of course, as people from rural areas, as ethnic minority we have less opportunities for social interaction than people from the cities... but also because we are from the countryside and of ethnic minority, we quietly put up with that to avoid any conflict."* (Female worker in the informal sector, San Diu ethnicity from Vinh Phuc, 48 years old)

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### **Violence occurred for both male and female migrants, especially emotional abuse.**

On top of the discrimination described above, the collected data revealed the existence of some cases of sexual, physical, mental, and economic violence. There were 42 cases in total, reported by 31 respondents (8.6% of the total), summarized below:

**TABLE 8. Breakdown of reported cases of violence by different demographic categories**

Form of violence	Age			Sex		Time of occurrence		Marital status		Ethnicity
	18-24	25-29	30+	Female	Male	Before migration	After	Single	Married	
<b>Sexual</b> (11 cases)	6	4	1	6	5	8	3	5	6	Dao, Tay, Thai, Muong, Cao Lan
<b>Physical</b> (10 cases)	8	1	1	5	5	8	2	6	4	Dao, Tay, Muong, Cao Lan, San Diu, Hmong
<b>Economic</b> (21 cases)	11	4	6	10	11	11	10	5	15	Dao, Tay, Muong, Cao Lan, San Diu, Hmong

The results obtained from the survey analysis present the forms of violence, demographic information about the survivors and perpetrators, as well as the reaction to each case of

violence. The occurrences recorded in the surveys included different forms of violence and happened to people of different ages, genders, ethnic groups, and marital status. However, because the respondents did not indicate violence as a motivation to migrate, it is more relevant to the migration experiences to look at the violence that took place after migration.

The most common was emotional abuse/economic violence. This took the form of verbal abuse; being isolated, controlled, forbidden from meeting friends, threatened, pressured, and followed; and someone else reading their mail or messages. These cases are seen among both men and women of diverse EM groups and ages. The perpetrators of this abuse are often supervisors/employers (5 cases), strangers (5 cases), colleagues (5 cases), someone in a friendship group (3 cases), a housemate (3 cases) or others. The responses to these actions varied among respondents and included fear, annoyance, or suffering in silence (if the perpetrator was a relative/supervisor/employer); informing HR or the union (if the perpetrator was a colleague); telling family members and/or friends (if the perpetrator was a supervisor/employer/authority); or finding it normal (if the perpetrator was a family member/friend).

Common forms of reported sexual violence were: Hearing inappropriate sexual phrases, receiving unwanted flirty/sexual messages, and being shown pornographic images/videos. This was experienced by both male and female respondents. The survey only recorded three cases after migration among both single and married individuals under 30 years old. The perpetrator was a stranger, and the respondents felt frightened but suffered in silence.

The most common forms of physical violence reported by respondents were being slapped, punched, hit, or having things thrown at them by strangers (4 cases), someone in a friendship group (4 cases), and other. Of the cases that happened at the destination, one included a married man who reported the incident to HR or the union and one of a married woman who instead felt frightened and annoyed but suffered in silence and only told a family member.

Physical violence was also experienced among workers in the informal sector, as highlighted by a 17-year-old female restaurant worker:

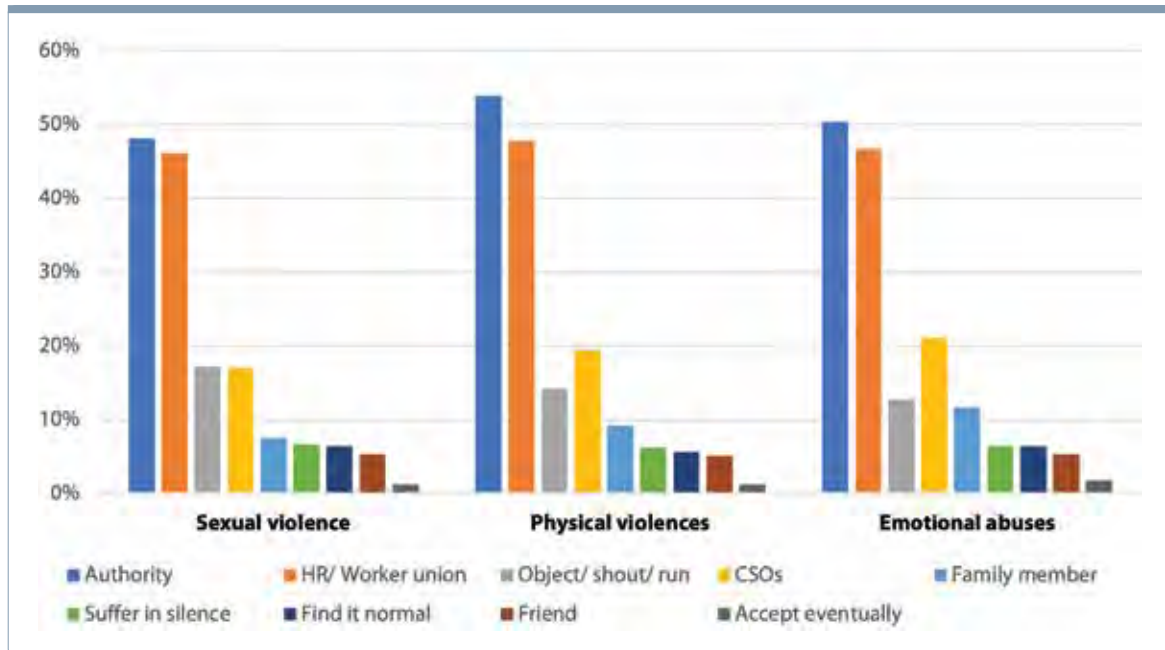
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*"I remember once when it was really crowded at the restaurant I worked for, I was asked for the bill by the customer, not actually they wanted to order but I had to go get the bill for another table. So, when I eventually came to the first table the customer hit me saying I should have taken their order... they slapped me and said I should have done that first even though somebody already did that." (Female worker in the informal sector, Dao ethnicity from Ha Giang, 17 years old)*

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This section of the survey also required respondents who did not experience any form of violence to state their predicted action in case of sexual, physical, emotional, or economic violence. The most popular answers for both women and men in response to all three forms of violence were: Report it to the authorities, report it to HR staff or the worker's union, ask CSOs for help, object, shout, or run away:

GRAPH 11. **Handling violence**



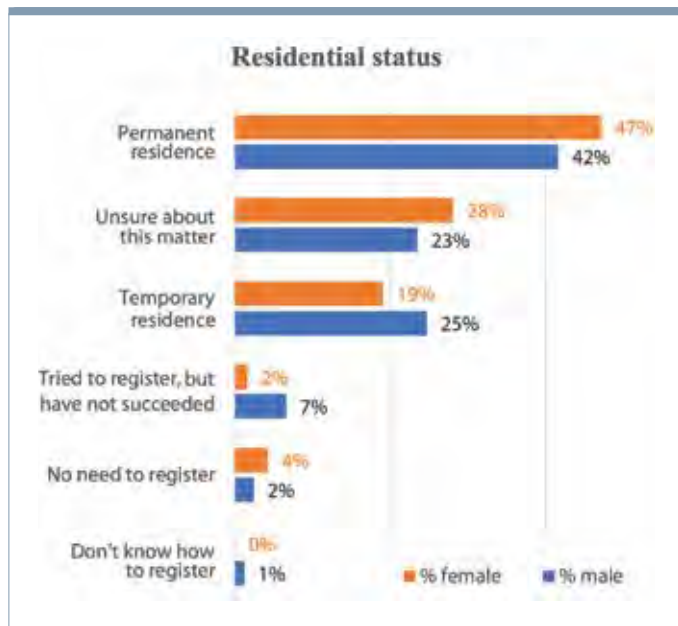
A large majority of respondents demonstrated their knowledge about the existence of the authorities, HR staff, the worker’s union, and CSOs as well as their confidence in seeking help from those places. Furthermore, just 1-2% believe that, in cases of violence, one should object but eventually accept regardless of the form of violence.

### Access to support services

This section summarizes the residential status of respondents and their access to services.

About one-quarter of respondents reported having ‘high’ to ‘very high’ difficulties with public administration procedures at the destination, with women reporting more difficulties than men. One of the reasons could be their residential status. The current residential status is presented in the following table:

GRAPH 12. **Residential status**



Of the 360 respondents, two-thirds (66%) had permanent or temporary residence, while the remaining one-third (34%) did not know how to register, tried but did not succeed, or were unsure about this matter. Compared to 2015 GSO migration data, which mainly represented Kinh migrants, the percentage of EM migrants without residential registration in this study is 2.5 times higher (34% versus 13.5%), indicating that EM migrants are at a clear disadvantage in this matter. The percentage of respondents without residential registration was the same for both men and women.

Looking more closely at the numbers, not being registered was more common among people aged 18-24 (34%) and among the San Diu (23%) and Tay (40%) ethnic groups. One reason given by a Thai woman who arrived at the company in November 2020 was COVID:

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*"I have not been able to get my temporary residency registration yet. I went to get it 2 months after my arrival and COVID-19 happened. Only my younger brother and his wife got it."* (Female factory worker, Thai ethnicity from Son La, 36 years old)

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Not having a residential registration can limit the access of EM migrants to services and benefits as well as complicate a number of administrative procedures.<sup>114</sup>

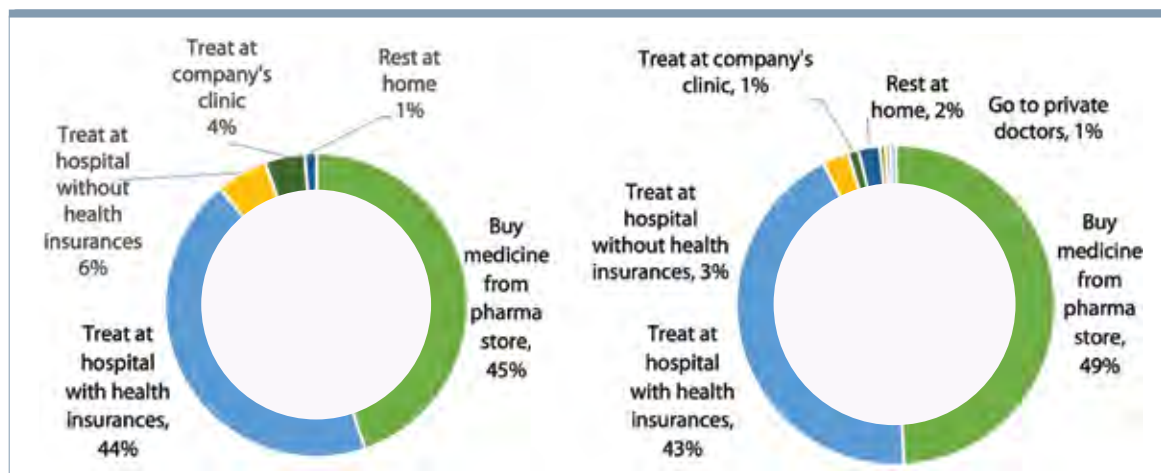
Another important issue for the workers concerns social and health insurance. The response rate for believing that social insurance is essential is 98% for men, 99% for women, and an average of 1.5% do not know. Of the respondents, 99.4% of men and 99.5% of women have insurance while the remaining less than 1% are unsure.

In response to the question "Do you think health insurance is essential?", 99% of men and women responded that it is. Meanwhile, 95% of women and 89% of men have insurance provided by the company. The remaining 11% of men and 5% of women have none. In reality, according to company staff, 100% of the workers have both social and health insurance as per government regulations, except for those still on probation. Having insurance is important because 20% of male respondents and 18% of female respondents mention having 'high' to 'very high' challenges regarding health at their destination. When falling ill, workers usually buy medicine at the pharmacy or get treatment at the hospital (with or without insurance) or use the company clinic. Details and difference in choices of service used between male and female respondents when ill can be seen in the charts below:

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114 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'; World Bank and Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences, (2016), 'Viet Nam's Household Registration System', Ha Noi: Hong Duc Publishing House.

GRAPH 13. Responses to treating illness by sex



Participants from the informal sector reported having neither of the two above-mentioned insurances.

One particular health issue covered in the survey was pregnancy and childbirth. Over one-quarter (26%) of respondents reported having ‘high’ to ‘very high’ obstacles regarding this issue, with the remaining three-quarters reporting no challenge at all. One participant shared that, during the pandemic, it was tough to access healthcare for his wife due to the limited free time of the workers but also their restricted access to healthcare services:

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*“We had to go to private clinics but those don’t really check anything or even those are closed. And hospitals are closed on Saturday and Sunday.” (Male factory worker, Tay ethnicity from Lang Son, 28 years old)*

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In general, most workers migrate alone and, when met with sickness, do not ask for help. Fortunately, workers in the formal sector have insurance provided by the company. This can be used at local hospitals and also reduces costs. However, workers in the informal sector do not have such privileges after migration.

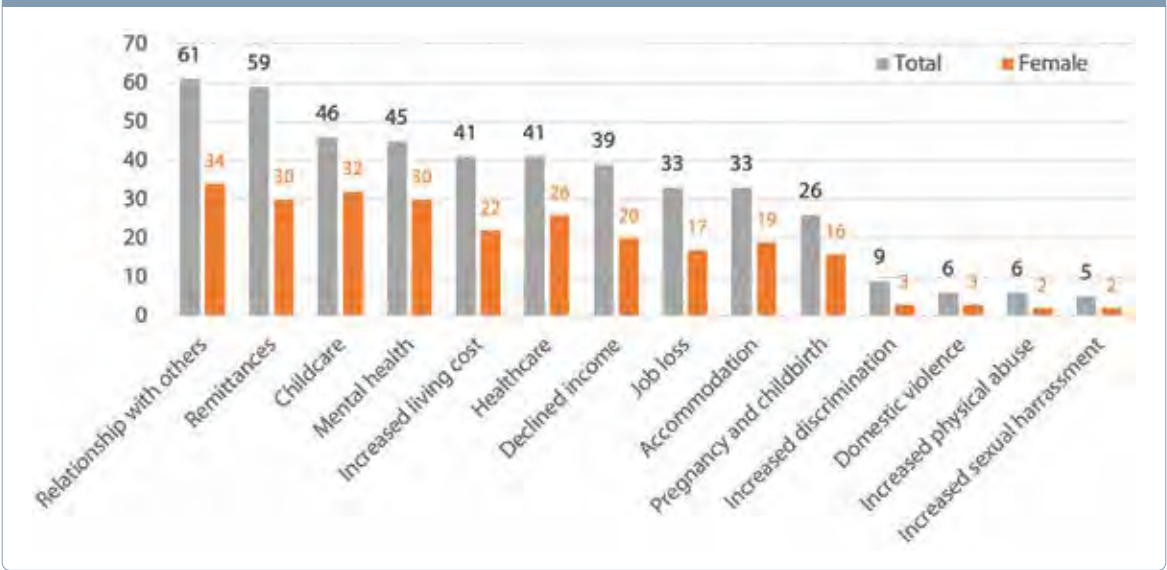
## COVID-19 impacts

The past two years (2020-2021) have been challenging for many workers around the world as well as in Viet Nam. As mentioned before, workers in the formal sector who participated in the survey were not heavily affected, as their factories remained open and the workers continued to work. However, the survey also pointed to a number of challenges due to the pandemic and lockdown. The aspects that saw the most cases reporting severe impacts of COVID-19 included social relationships and family issues, such as childcare, as well as both physical and mental health. There was also some form of job losses or the loss of additional shifts, which in turn led to a decline in income and the amount of remittance. The cost of accommodation



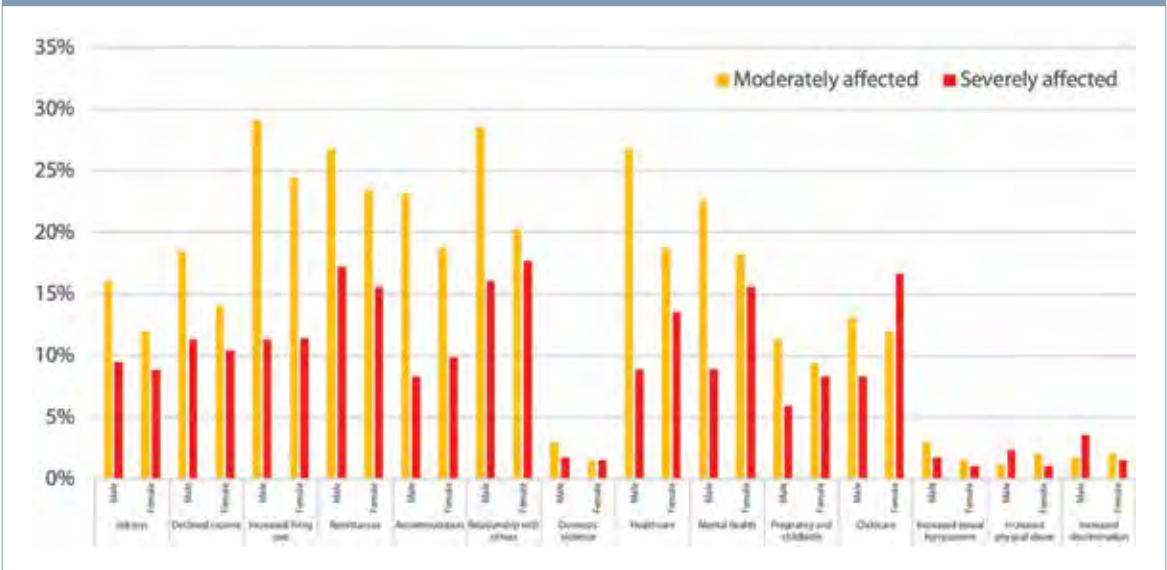
and everyday expenses, in general, also increased. The following chart presents the number of cases where the respondents reported the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In which, the cases reported by female participants usually account for more than half of the total reported cases.

GRAPH 14. Number of cases reported being severely impacted by COVID-19



It is important to note that, comparing the experiences of men and women, women suffered a more severe impact in a number of categories such as relationships with others, healthcare, mental health, and childcare.

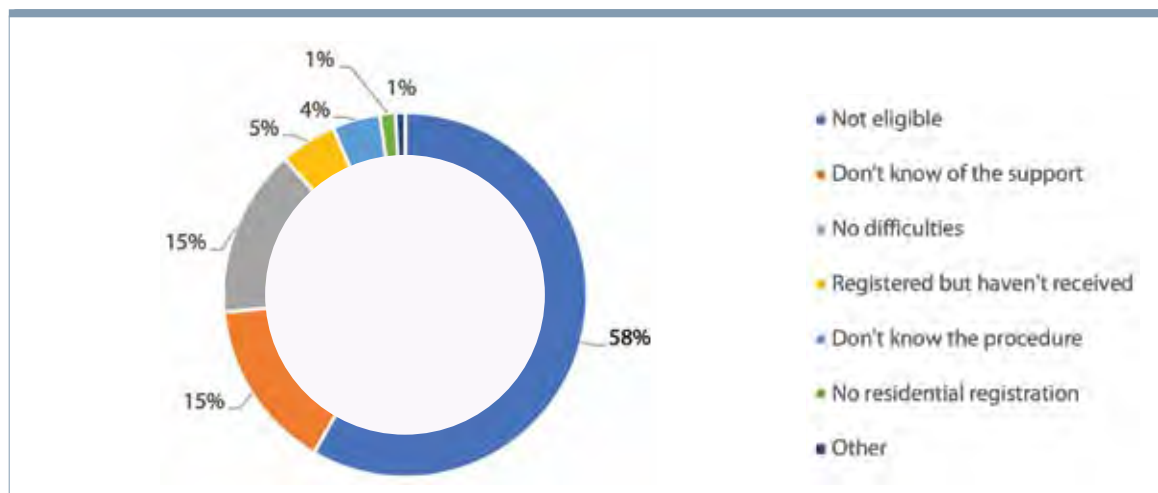
GRAPH 15. The negative impacts of COVID-19





In response to the difficulties caused by COVID-19 and the lockdown, respondents also indicated receiving limited support overall from companies, the government, or charitable organizations. Among the support that was received was free testing and vaccination supported by the company, and poor/near-poor household welfare support, quarantine fees, and social protection welfare for the vulnerable from the government. Meanwhile, a limited number of women received support with pregnancy and childbirth from their company. Respondents who had yet to receive support stated the reasons for this, presented in the chart below:

GRAPH 16. **Reasons for not yet receiving any COVID-19 support**



Moreover, a key aspect of COVID-19 response is vaccination. Workers at the company were provided with the chance to register for a free vaccination without the need for residential registration. According to the survey, 87% of respondents wanted to receive the vaccination, 3.5% did not, and 1% did not care. Among the remaining group, 7% of men and 10% of women were unsure. One female participant in the interviews explained her doubts came from a rumour that the vaccine may affect future pregnancy and babies. Meanwhile, others feared that they might have to take sick leave due to side effects.

### **Higher precariousness for EMs working in the informal sector.**

From the IDIs with EM women working informal jobs, the precariousness of the informal sector was especially visible during COVID-19 as many non-contract workers lost their jobs. However, many have not been able to go back to their families due to the lockdown and mostly depended on the generosity of their former employers who provided shelter and food. Nevertheless, no income was generated in this period. Interestingly, a number of people went to work in factories to ensure a more stable income. Another disadvantage for workers in the informal sector was a lack of support from the government:

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*"I heard that, for those who work in retail at the markets or even at stores, if they have to stop selling due to COVID-19, they would receive some support. But, in reality, nobody got anything, in my village those that worked in the informal sector did not get any help."* (Female worker in the informal sector, Muong ethnicity from Yen Bai, 24 years old)

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Overall, the major challenge of COVID-19 and the lockdown was the loss of jobs, as shared by a family member of one participant:

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*"There is no salary. My daughter had worked for 2 months before the lockdown, all the restaurants closed so she only stayed home. Tell me, how is she supposed to manage if she can't work and cannot come back home. She told me that the restaurant is feeding her, that's what she said, otherwise, where would she get money from to eat? When she called home and said "mom, I don't have a job anymore, not doing anything, I want to go back home but they won't let me, there aren't any buses that go that far." So I had to tell her to try to do her best, if anyone goes home she could follow them, otherwise, just stay there."* (Mother of a female worker in the informal sector, Tay ethnicity from Ha Giang, 36 years old)

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In addition, workers in the informal sector also shared that they did not have access to vaccination. Therefore, the condition of the workers in the informal sector during COVID-19 and the lockdown can be described as vulnerable due to their immobility and perilous circumstances.

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## The impacts of migration

On a scale of 1 to 5, the majority of migrants rated their migration experiences as Level 3 'acceptable' (47%) and Level 4 'satisfactory' (43%). On average, the overall general level of satisfaction is the same for both genders, at 3.48/5 points (between 'acceptable' and 'satisfactory'). More women (47%) reported feeling satisfied with their overall migrant experiences than men (37%).

Looking at how EM migrants rate the improvement or decline of different life aspects after migration, on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being 'much worse than before migration', and 5 being 'much better than before migration'), all aspects have an average point between 3 and 4 (generally better since migration).

TABLE 9. **The improvement of aspects after migration**

Aspects	Avg.	Female	Male	Difference (F-M)
Income	3.89	3.89	3.89	0.00
Work skills	3.82	3.77	3.86	-0.09
Social knowledge	3.78	3.73	3.83	-0.10
Confidence	3.75	3.70	3.80	-0.10
Work relations	3.73	3.70	3.77	-0.07
Social relations at destination	3.70	3.68	3.72	-0.04
Savings	3.60	3.52	3.67	-0.15
Healthcare	3.57	3.53	3.62	-0.09
Neighbourhood security	3.53	3.47	3.58	-0.11
Decision-making power	3.52	3.46	3.58	-0.12
Mental health	3.49	3.44	3.54	-0.10
Children's studies	3.47	3.39	3.55	-0.16
Family relations	3.46	3.41	3.51	-0.10
Meal quality	3.46	3.42	3.50	-0.08
Environment quality	3.43	3.44	3.41	0.03
Accommodation	3.38	3.35	3.41	-0.06
Social relations at hometown	3.34	3.31	3.37	-0.06
Physical health	3.33	3.28	3.38	-0.10

More female migrants feel satisfied with their overall migrant experience. However, when looking at each aspect separately, male migrants tend to report a slightly higher level of improvement in all areas (except for income, where the average is the same for both genders at 3.89/5).

The gender gaps in how EM women and men assess the improvement from their migration are highest regarding savings (where women have, on average, 1.5 times less in savings than men), child education (where women often reported higher difficulties relating to child care), and decision-making power (women rated the improvement as 3.46/5, whereas for men it was 3.58/5).

### **Improvement in the social skills and confidence of women**

The aspects that see the highest improvement after migration include income, work skills, social knowledge, personal confidence, and work-related relationships. The decision-making power of EM women also improves, on average, after migration, at 3.46/5 points. This is probably due to their becoming more economically independent and as well as more socially confident and knowledgeable. This result matches with findings from our interviews with EM migrants working in both formal and informal sectors:

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*"I'm much more confident now than before. Before (migration) I was still very timid and self-conscious, but now I'm more confident." (19-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, working freelance as a nanny)*

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*"I do feel more confident and communicate better as well. I also learnt more computer skills working for the company." (20-year-old Tay woman from Ha Giang, electronics factory worker)*

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*"(People back home) they still ask how I'm doing and smiling more with me. Like my neighbour, they saw that I make more money now they also look at me differently, unlike in the old days when my family was still poor then they also looked at us in a different way." (26-year-old Giay woman from Lao Cai, working in an electronics company)*

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## **Improvement in income and, consequently, the family's living standards and livelihoods**

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*"Some couples, after they migrate for a year or so, they could make 50 to 60, sometimes 100 million Dong and they can use that money to build a house." (35-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)*

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*"Both of us, husband and wife, used to migrate for work, and our income was better, our livelihood also became more stable." (35-year-old Hmong man in Son La – husband of a migrant factory worker)*

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*"Normally, after they've migrated for a while, they will accumulate some money and build houses for their parents. Where I'm from, that is quite common, there are some who were able to build very big houses." (Brother of a female migrant working in an electronics company, Thai-ethnic in Son La, 17 years old)*

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*"It will be a lot better (when we could both migrate). If our parents could take care of the kids for us to both migrate to work, then the income will be good." (36-year-old Thai man from Son La, currently a shrimp fisherman, husband of a migrant factory worker)*

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However, migration for jobs in urban areas is a relatively new phenomenon in many EM regions. Therefore, the longer-term impact of migration on the home communities is to be studied in more future research:

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*“Just from 2018 to 2019, 2020 there are more people migrating to work at companies, and those who return with some capital are basically not that many... for some couples where both husband and wife migrate then they could build a house, that’s all.” (35-year-old Hmong man in Son La, husband of a migrant factory worker)*

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### **Improvement in trading skills of women to build a better livelihood at home**

Testimonies from village heads point out that, upon returning, migrant women have developed useful trading skills and confidence to rebuild new forms of livelihood in their home communities:

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*“Women who migrate, they are more socially interactive, and when return home they can often sell things online or sell vegetables, which is very different from the women who just stay at home... There’s a trend of selling vegetables, (but with those at home) they’re too shy to sell them at the market. But with those who migrated then return, they grow a lot of vegetables, then stock them up and sell right away... They are not so shy you see, and do not shun away from social interaction either, so they are much better in that matter.” (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)*

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### **A shift in gender roles in EM families**

Migration also brings about a shift in traditional gender roles, where men take on all housework responsibilities and childcare when the women of the house migrate. The men shared in the interviews that they struggle to balance the burden of housework with other tasks like schooling or their main jobs. Therefore, there is a chance that they could start to better understand similar burdens that their sisters or wives used to have:

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*“As I stay here, I have to take care of the children as well as my own job. Most of the time it’s okay but sometimes, when I have to go on a business trip for a week or two, then I have to hire a nanny, which can be a bit complicated.” (35-year-old Hmong man in Son La – husband of a migrant factory worker)*

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*“When my sister went to work, I had to take over all the housework on her part; when she was still here, she could help with tasks like cooking or washing dishes. Now that she has gone away, I have to do all of them.” (Brother of a female migrant working in an electronics company, Thai-ethnic in Son La, 17 years old)*

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However, other studies have pointed out that although there was a shift in gender roles during migration, as the women return home, they will resume their former responsibilities of taking care of all the housework.<sup>115</sup> Whether this is also the case for EM women will require future studies on EM migrant returnees.

## Increase in care work burdens and emotional strain on family relations

Besides the above-mentioned positive impacts, migration also leads to an increase in the burden of care work at home (be it for the men or women who stay behind). There can be some emotional strain on marital and family relations. Meanwhile, it can also take a mental toll on the children at home as well as the migrants themselves. As mentioned earlier, homesickness was the most prevalent negative feeling that EM migrants experienced at the destination. This feeling was also found to be much more prevalent among female respondents in this study. The issue of negative emotional impact has also been emphasized as a common hardship for migrants in general in other studies:<sup>116</sup>

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*“When more women are migrating for work now without the husbands then divorce risks also rise... What I understand from the cases, in reality, is that the working times of husbands and wives can be very different: If the husband works night shifts, then the wife works day shifts, for example. So, the feelings between them could be... you know. I can’t be sure on this, but maybe that’s why, after some time, both the husbands and the wives have an affair.” (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)*

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*“I have two kids at home, when I call them, they say ‘mummy, please come back to us, we miss you too much,’ the older one also tells me to come home, and that really gets me down sometimes, as I really miss them.” (37-year-old Thai women from Son La, electronics factory worker)*

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## Difficulties in caring for young children in the home communities

According to our interviews and survey, most people leave their children at home when migrating. In many cases, both husbands and wives migrate, leaving their children in the care of grandparents. However, older grandparents do have certain limitations due to their advanced age and the generation gap when taking care of young children or supervising their education. That is also why, for some EM couples who joined our interviews, they alternate migration between husbands and wives so that one can stay at home to better take care of their children:

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115 Resurreccion, B.P. and Ha, V.K.T., (2007), ‘Able to come and go: reproducing gender in female rural–urban migration in the Red River Delta’, *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 211–224.

116 Deshingkar, P., (2006), ‘Internal Migration, Poverty and Development in Asia: Including the Excluded’, *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 88–100, doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00272.x.

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*“There are people who can be very knowledgeable, but when it comes to taking care of kids or taking them to school, they don’t know much about it, so it’s not easy... Now my parents are already old, so one of us must stay home to care of the kids, you know, there is also the matter of their education, if the wife migrates then the husband must stay and take care of the kids.” (Husband of a migrant worker from Son La, Thai-ethnic, 36 years old)*

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*“...the local authority here only hopes that people understand that migrating for work can also be very challenging, and difficult for matters like childcare or if a family member got sick then they couldn’t be there to care for them either.” (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)*

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### Loss of the younger workforce and community members

When young EM migration becomes increasingly common, there is also the threat of losing young labour resources and the breaking down of local communities at the places of origin:

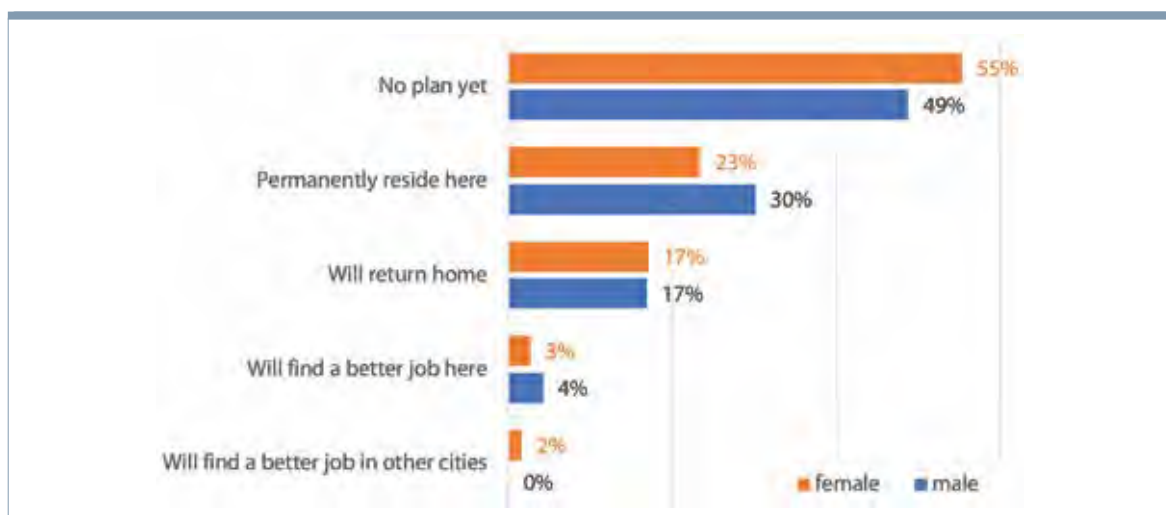
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*“Now, everyone in my village has migrated. There are very few young people left. Now, when you attend weddings or funerals in the village you don’t see young people there anymore.” (Brother of a female migrant working in an electronics company, Thai-ethnic in Son La, 17 years old)*

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Though most migrants are still to decide, the percentage of those wanting to reside at their destination permanently is currently higher than those who want to return.

GRAPH 17. Long-term future plans





## Remittances

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*“If I stay home then there would be no money at all, but when I work here and do more overtime then I could earn up to 4-5 million Dong. From that 4, 5 million I can take 2 million for rent and food, and so I still have money to send home the next month for my mum to pay school fees for my brothers and sisters.” (19-year-old Dao woman from Ha Giang, working seasonally at a company in Bac Ninh)*

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On average, EM migrants send home 2.3 million VND/month - equal to 25% of their monthly income. This is already slightly higher than the average per-person income of migrant households in their home provinces (around 1.9 million VND/person/month), according to the survey data. These remittances, therefore, can make a significant contribution to household finances at home.

The amount of remittance sent home by EM migrants in this study is also three times higher than that reported in the 2016 GSO report, where migrants (mainly Kinh-ethnic) sent home around 8.3 million VND a year (roughly VND 692,000 per month).<sup>117</sup> Formal workers being able to continue their jobs during lockdown is a crucial reason to sustain this amount of remittance.

The average monthly remittance in the last 3-6 months sent by male migrants (at 2.4 million VND) was slightly higher than that sent by female migrants (at 2.1 million VND). This is similar to the findings of the 2016 GSO migration survey.<sup>118</sup> Both female and male EM migrants send home about 25% of their monthly total income on average. However, the total income of female migrants (8.54 million VND) is, on average, also lower than that of their male counterparts (8.99 million VND). This explains their lower remittance amount.

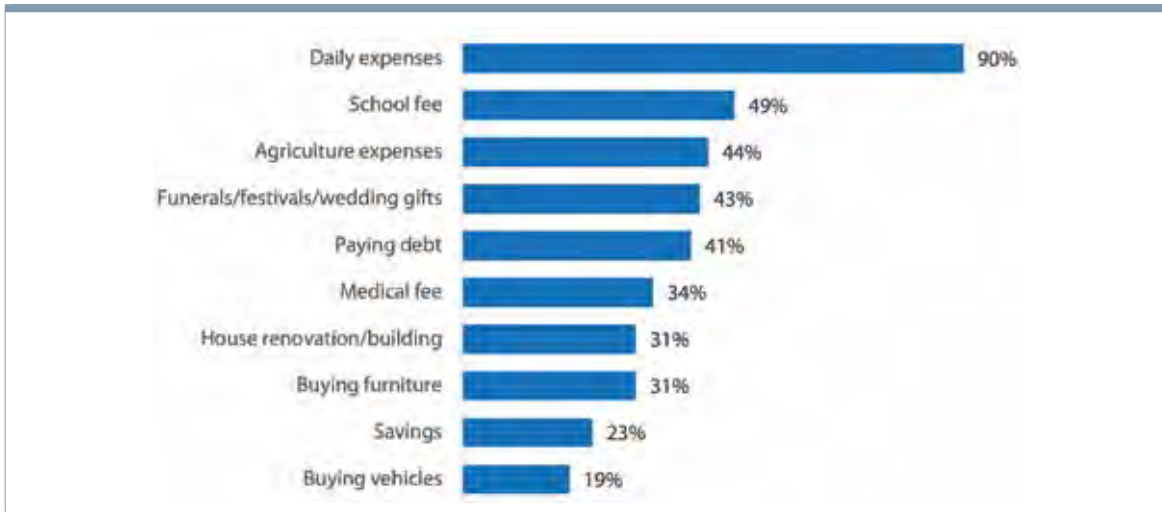
Since the data on remittances was collected during a recent 3-6 month period, COVID-19 might have limited the amount of money sent by migrants due to social distancing and logistical reasons (though their income was unaffected). Considering that the average working time of the survey cohort is just about 1.5 years, their accumulated savings and remittances might also be limited.

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<sup>117</sup> GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey'.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

GRAPH 18. Spending of remittances



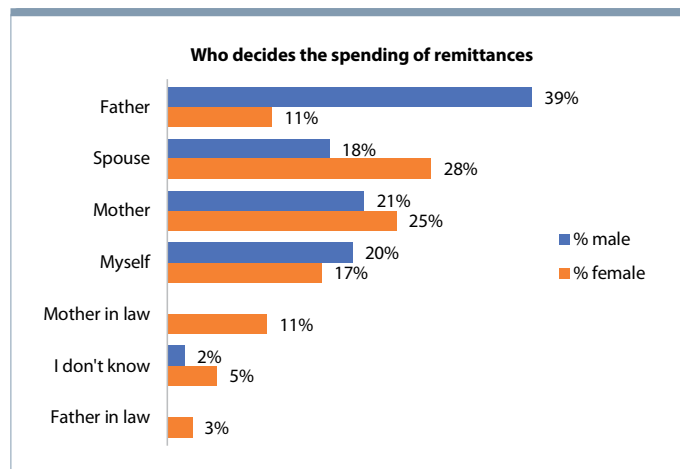
The majority of migrants’ remittances are used for daily expenses and essentials such as paying school fees (49%), agricultural expenses (44%), and gifts and offerings at social events (43%). Remittances are also used to pay off debt burdens at home in 41% of cases, and the more urgent costs of medical and healthcare fees (34%). Remittances of EM migrants also help with house building/renovation and buying new furniture for 31% of cases, which improves the general living standards of the family. More than 20% of the time, remittances also go into savings for the family at home.

While daily expenses remain the most common usage, remittances were also often spent on education, health care, agricultural production, home renovations, and savings. These outgoings could contribute to sustainably improving the living standards and livelihoods of EM households in their home communities. This

is quite similar to findings from CARE’s 2020 report, which was conducted with a larger sample size and scope nationwide. There were no significant gender differences in how the remittances of female and male migrants were spent.

For the majority, the father or spouse often decides how migrant remittances are used, followed by the mother. Compared to men, the use of women migrants’ remittance is more

GRAPH 19. Who decides the spending of remittances



often decided by their spouse (who handle all affairs at home when their wives migrate). This is the case for 39% of married female migrants, compared to just 29% of married male migrants. EM male migrants also more often see their father as the one in charge of home expenses:

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*“Since my husband is home more then he should be taking care of all the affairs, right? Because I’m never home how could I know much about things at home as him. For example, things like hosting ceremonies and events then he will have to take care of the expense. Since I’m away all the time, you tell me how could I also take care of all of that, right?”* (45-year-old San Diu woman from Ngoc Thach district in Vinh Phuc, working as a family helper)

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Often, many married women also send home all their hard-earned savings to help with the family spending and childcare costs, under the supervision and decision-making of those at home, often their husband. As highlighted in the survey, there is a very real risk that women might end up with no savings at all from her migration. However, current stereotypes could easily blame this risk on the migrants’ lack of ability to save:

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*“...the women who don’t know how to save money, then it makes no difference if she’s gone for two months or two years, not to mention they might owe more money. Then there are many husbands who gamble and drink as well... For couples where either the wife or the husband doesn’t have the right mindset, then however the wife might save up, the husband might just spend it all on gambling.”* (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

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# Conclusions

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This study combines findings from a quantitative survey with 360 EM migrants working at a factory in Vinh Phuc province with qualitative data from follow-up interviews with survey participants, six female EM migrants working in informal jobs, women migrants' family members, two local community leaders in their hometowns, and their Kinh-ethnic colleagues regarding their views and experiences working with EM migrants.

The participants came from 12 different ethnic groups. The most common were San Diu, Tay, and Cao Lan people. Participants came from 16 places of origin, mainly Tuyen Quang, Phu Tho, Yen Bai, and the more remote regions of Vinh Phuc.

Nearly 80% of the survey participants were under 30, while the oldest group (22%) were aged from 30 to 41 years old. Therefore, the study cohort and findings represent mostly the younger EM groups.

Most of the EM migrant respondents were married, with more women (71%) being married than men (57%). Meanwhile, 74% of EM migrants had children, with 60% having either one or two. However, only 3% migrated with their children. The percentage of female migrants with children (80%) is also higher than men (68%).

Most survey participants working in factories were high-school graduates (62%). The ratio of male respondents who attained higher education levels (high school or above) was higher than female. Meanwhile, the percentage of women with no qualifications was also higher than that of their male counterparts. This contradicts findings from the 2019 national survey of the 53 EM groups, which showed that EM women have less access at lower rather than higher education levels. However, this could also indicate that EM women with higher levels of education (college/university degrees) do not tend to become factory workers as often as EM men.

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## Pre-departure

Due to the lack of career opportunities at home and higher incomes in the industrial sector, young EM people migrating for factory work in more industrialized provinces is a growing trend.

Before migration, the income of the surveyed EM migrants' households was just above the poverty line – at 1.9 million VND/person/month. Over one-fifth (22%) of female and one-

quarter (25%) of male respondents reported coming from a poor or near-poor household. Agricultural jobs with incomes of just around 2.5 million VND per month were the most common occupation (for 40% of female and 45% of male respondents), followed by industrial jobs (for 29% of female and 38% of male respondents). EM women were more often unemployed and earned less than men on average before their migration.

The lack of career options and low incomes are the top push factors of migration in EM hometowns – a finding that has been repeatedly highlighted in multiple studies on domestic migration and EM migration in Viet Nam<sup>119</sup>. There were no significant differences between EM men and women regarding their reasons for migration, except that EM men think about self-development (50%) more often than women (41%). Regarding the pull factors at the destination, good incomes and job opportunities were also top of the list, followed by the destination being close to the hometown of the migrants, and self-development opportunities. There are no significant gender differences, except that more EM women quoted incomes, living conditions (i.e. a safe environment and service access), and having acquaintances or spouses/lovers migrating with them as key reasons for choosing a destination place. The last reason could come from a stronger safety concern for women who migrate.

The autonomy of migration decision-making of EM migrants is quite high, with slightly more women (96%) reporting that they decided to migrate on their own than men (93%). Most EM families now also support migration for work. There were very few objections reported, mainly coming from migrants' parents out of concern for their safety or the hardships of the trip. EM women (4%) met with more objections than men (2%) when migrating.

Key job referral channels include EM social networks (40%) and Facebook recruitment (37.5%), with fewer women finding jobs on the internet than men. More women depend on referrals from acquaintances, while more men reported finding jobs online.

Enabling factors for EM migration include the social networks among migrants between the destination and the places of origin that facilitate job opportunities and information exchange. They also help to alleviate worries about migrants' safety and encourage approval of the decision to migrate, especially for women migrants. Families and friends have also been the greatest and most common source of pre-departure support for EM migrants regarding all aspects deemed essential, such as financial or emotional support, job introduction, or information about the destination.

The increasing access to education – especially for girls – and the general advancement of gender-equality promotion in EM areas has also made a meaningful contribution to expanding migration and job opportunities for EM women. Over 60% of our female survey respondents have a high school diploma or higher.

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119 GSO, (2016), 'The 2015 National internal migration survey: Major findings', Statistical Publishing House; CARE, (2020), 'Labour migration among ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam: Situation and Policy Implications'.

The increase in access to the internet and digital information also facilitates greater access for EM people from remote areas to the job market in towns and cities. Other enabling factors also include the ease of public administration services, and the proactive leadership of well-informed community leaders who support education and migration opportunities for women, and gender equality in general.

On the other hand, gender inequality continues to create barriers for female migrants. These barriers include uneven access to quality education among men and women, especially for older EM generations (and for EM groups, in general, compared to Kinh people); the perception that EM women are easy prey to sexual abuse and social vice at the destination when migrating alone; and husbands' jealousy and possessiveness being enforced by collective social norms, which then become a form of emotional and economic violence against women.

Another major challenge is the lack of pre-departure training or support programs from the local authorities for EM migrants to increase their competitiveness in the job market compared to Kinh-ethnic workers or mitigate migration risks. The five most essential pieces of pre-departure support reported by female EM migrants include finance (54%), emotional support (39%), job introduction (30%), migration information (28%), job training (27%), and traveling to the destination places (24%). However, according to the survey, about half of women did not receive the support they needed to prepare for their migration journey.

Compared to EM men, women more often require support such as migration information, assistance completing administrative documents, and help with the housework after leaving home. The last case might also reflect the reality that (unpaid) care work responsibilities still fall mainly on women.

Except for job training and housework, female EM migrants received support less often than men in all other aspects. This deficiency of support for female EM migrants is most serious in three specific areas, with respondents receiving no support in respect of accommodation arrangements (51%), traveling to the destination (47%), and finance (42%).

Although EM migrants often get financial support from their families, the amount of this support is very limited (500,000 to 1 million VND, at best). This puts them in a precarious situation as many are often left penniless for weeks when first relocating to their destination.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also preventing women and EM in general from migrating for work, especially for opportunities that are further from home or in populous and wealthier areas.

Nearly half of the surveyed migrants did not have access to the internet at home. This might have hindered their technological abilities and access to information that, consequently, lowered their work capabilities and competitiveness on the job market compared to Kinh workers.

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## During migration

At their destination, migrants receive opportunities not available to them in their home provinces, including work prospects, higher income, and self-growth. However, they also face many challenges.

Nearly 50% of the income of factory workers comes from overtime. EM migrants in the formal sector were working 12 hours a day, seven days a week to generate incomes of 8.7 million VND a month, on average. Therefore, mental stress and physical exhaustion are significantly present for both genders. EM women also reported earning less than their male counterparts working in the same sector by 400,000 VND a month on average. However, despite working overtime and utilizing other cost-saving strategies like room-sharing (72% of respondents) or eating two meals at the factory, one-third to half of respondents still struggled to make ends meet or accrue savings, especially those participants who were married. More female than male respondents reported that their income was insufficient to meet their expenses. This is probably due to the fact that a higher percentage of female respondents were married or have children.

Homesickness and tiredness are the prevalent feelings among EM migrants in the survey. Women experienced these feelings much more often than men: Nearly 50% of women reported 'often' or 'always' feeling homesick, and almost 30% 'often' or 'always' felt tired.

The most challenging aspects for female EM migrants at the destination include living costs (42%), paying rent (33%), childcare (28%), accommodation conditions (23%), and public administration procedures (23%), with female respondents reporting 'high' to 'very high' hardships in these areas. EM men tend to report encountering higher levels of difficulty than women in most aspects, except for childcare and public administration procedures.

One of the major challenges reported by EM migrants was administrative procedures. One-third (34%) of EM migrants reported having no residential status, with an equal ratio for female and male respondents. This is 2.5 times higher than the 2015 GSO national survey data of mainly Kinh migrants – indicating a clear disadvantage for EM migrants in this matter. The lack of residential registration is observed more often among the 18-24 age group (34%), and the San Diu (23%) and Tay (40%) ethnic groups. Not having residential registration can limit the access of EM migrants to services and benefits as well as complicate a number of administrative procedures.

The work of EM women in the informal sector is characterized by precariousness, the risk of violence, and lower-incomes. Social and health insurance is deemed essential by 99% of respondents. However, women from the informal sector said that they have neither. Having insurance is important because 20% of male and 18% of female respondents report 'high' to 'very high' challenges regarding health issues at the destination. Meanwhile, being treated at the hospital with health insurance is the second-most common illness treatment approach of both male and female EM migrants at the destination.



Over half (52%) of EM women have also experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity (compared to 60% for EM men). The most common forms of discrimination include comments about their distinctive accents or appearance, questions about their work abilities, difficulties in administrative procedures, and being called discriminatory names. This created a feeling of being deceived, underestimated, and misunderstood, and was most often experienced in the form of verbal abuse. This mistreatment by Kinh colleagues/employers was based on the common stereotypes that EM people get married early, are not educated or skilled, and can be easily abused. Discrimination also arises from their migration status. However, the study found that younger EM people are more likely to resist this discrimination rather than internalize it. Participants did not see the long-term consequences of such abuse, but it could create more tension on their social relations at their point of destination.

Though not common, incidents of violence (42 cases reported by 8.6% of respondents), occurred with both male and female EM migrants of diverse ethnic groups. Half of these cases were emotional abuse or economic violence in the form of verbal abuse, isolation, control of social relationships, threats, pressure, or stalking mails and messages. The perpetrators of such actions are often the supervisors/employers or colleagues of the migrants, though others are strangers.

The main sources of support for EM migrants at their destination remain their families, friends, neighbors, and colleagues; but not local governments or employers. While all participants depended most on their relatives for support, the percentage of women reaching out for help from other social relations like friends, neighbors, or colleagues was often lower than men. Both male and female participants reported keeping in frequent contact with their families or friends back home. While the social connection with home is important and remains strong, EM migrant networks at the destinations are expanding to different-ethnic groups as well. On average, both genders reported having five friends from the same ethnic group and six from different ethnic groups (with little gender differences).

COVID-19 has impacted EM migrants in both formal and informal sectors. The factory workers in our study did not lose their jobs and received some assistance such as vaccination and some benefits through their companies. However, extra shifts can be exhausting and the workers have had no chance to return home and visit their families. Meanwhile, workers in the informal sector not only lost their jobs but also experienced immobility in finding a new job or returning home. In addition, they have not received any COVID-19 support from the government. All groups experienced hardship due to the increased prices of daily necessities and the burdens on their mental and physical health.

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## The impacts of migration

In general, the overall level of satisfaction of EM people with their migration experience is positive with very little gender differences. However, when examining each aspect separately, EM women

often reported a slightly lower level of improvement than men. This is especially true for savings (where women have, on average, 1.5 times less savings than men); child education (where women often reported greater difficulties relating to childcare); and decision-making power (women rated their improvement as 3.46/5 compared to 3.58/5 for men).

Aspects in which EM migrants saw the greatest improvement include income, work skills, social knowledge, personal confidence, and work-related relationships. Interviews with community leaders in the home provinces also highlighted that, upon returning home, EM migrant women have developed practical trading skills and confidence to reform livelihoods in their home communities, such as online trading or vegetable trading at the local markets.

The decision-making power of EM women also improves, on average, after migration. This is probably due to their becoming more economically independent and as well as more socially confident and mature. Migration also brings about a shift in traditional gender roles, where the men take on the responsibilities of housework and childcare when the women of the house migrate.

Meanwhile, the negative impacts of migration could include an increase in the burden of care work, be it for the men or women who stay behind, and an emotional strain on marital and family relations, which could take a toll on the mental health of the children at home as well as the migrants themselves. Most EM migrants leave their children at home under the care of grandparents, who have certain limitations when taking care of young children or supervising their education due to their advanced age and the generation gap. More and more young EMs choosing to migrate also poses the threat that young labour sources of livelihood development will be lost as well as the breaking down of local communities in the home provinces.

EM migrants send home about 2 million VND a month. This is already higher than the average per-person income of the migrants' households (1.9 million VND/person/month). Therefore, these remittances can make a significant contribution to household finances and expenses in the home communities. The amount of remittances sent home by EM migrants in this study is also three times higher than that cited in the 2016 GSO report. While both male and female EM migrants send home – on average – about 25% of their total income, the monthly earnings of female migrants is also lower than that of their male counterparts. This accounts for the lower remittance amount from female migrants.

While daily expenses remain the most common usage, remittances are also often spent on education, healthcare, agricultural production, home renovations, and savings. This can contribute to sustainably improving the living standards and livelihoods of EM households in their home communities.

Compared to that of married men, the use of a married women's remittance is more often decided by her spouse, who handles all affairs at home when she migrates. This is the case for 39% of married female migrants compared to 29% of married male migrants.

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# Recommendations

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Domestic migration should receive more attention from government development programs in EM areas, as it is playing an increasingly important role in improving local incomes and livelihoods, as well as the social confidence, decision-making, economic power, and the empowerment of EM women in general.

It is important to have more pre-departure training in home provinces to improve the competitiveness of EM people in the job market and mitigate migration risks. This could be integrated into multiple projects relating to job creation, career orientation, and skilled workforce development within SEDEMA:

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*"I just want for there to be a consultation program of some sort, to inform them of the risks when they migrate to those places so they could avoid them. There is generally no guidance here at the moment, people mostly migrate on their own and they meet with many risks... so that they could survive the difficulties and handle (dangerous) situations better."* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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Essential training could include (but is not limited to):

- Language proficiency, especially for older women;
- Practical computer and technological skills for EM groups;
- Information on safe accommodation, quality jobs, and general knowledge about safe migration, especially for EM women; and
- Labor rights and public administration procedures for migration, especially regarding residential registration at the destination.

Pre-departure training could be integrated into sub-project 2 of Project 4 (Invest in Education Equipment & Facilities), sub-project 3 of Project 5 (Job Creation & Career Orientation), and sub-project 2 of Project 10 (Increase Technological Access for Socio-economic Development) of SEDEMA. Migration data and beneficiaries of pre-departure support should also be recorded and monitored by gender to ensure adequate and equitable access to these support.

The continual promotion of gender-equality in EM areas is also important to facilitate better access to education for young EM women and men. This could then lead to better self-development and career opportunities for EM women, including migration opportunities.

Additional financial support is essential to help EM migrants prepare for the initial months of their journey and also to cover accommodation and food costs in the first one to two months before they have secured their income at the destination. This support could be mobilized through the budget from sub-project 3 of Project 5 of SEDEMA, extended to domestic rather than just international migration support. It could also be mobilized through informal, low-to-zero-interest loans from the budget of local unions like the Women's Union or Youth Union to avoid the hassle and inflexibility of bank loans.

As demonstrated in this study, EM migrants can bring back a lot of valuable skills and capital upon returning home to improve and even transform local livelihoods. Therefore, it is important to help facilitate this change through livelihood development projects for returnees to effectively utilize their new skills, knowledge, social networks, and accumulated capital from migration. This includes the continual improvement of infrastructure for livelihood development – especially in more remote areas – including electricity and roads, internet access, and better-facilitated schools (Project 4 of SEDEMA). The livelihood development program should also consult and cooperate closely with proactive community leaders who have in-depth knowledge of local culture to appropriately accommodate the needs and strengths of the local communities:

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*“When they return, there should be orientation programs in agriculture or manufacturing or cooperatives, for example, [this is] what we are needing... I hope there are jobs so that women could return home and that there are business development policies, programs or products for them to trade and earn money.”* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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*“One of my suggestions for returnees is that they use the money to buy livestock like buffalos, cows or goats to make a better living... I introduced this through our village meeting, firstly for women is to grow grass for livestock farming... I looked it up on the internet then guide people to compost straw and grass for the livestock...”* (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

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*“...especially in the last few years there were so many uncertainties that it must have been very difficult for women... many wanted to go home but couldn't... I hope the government will have policies and practical guidance for local people to apply (migration experience) into building back better at home, and eventually don't have to migrate so often anymore.”* (35-year-old Hmong male, community leader in Son La province)

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In the long run, there should be education and training strategies that **expand the general career prospects for EM youth**. In particular, these strategies should assist them to go beyond high-school-level factory work that is often hazardous or laborious, or precarious informal jobs of lower income with zero social protection schemes. Investment in education in EM areas should continue to focus on developing quality career orientation programs and increasing access to information about quality jobs on the job market. This should be integrated as early as high-school. This is also a focus of Project 5 (sub project 3) of SEDEMA:

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*“If you are the consultant, then help me suggest programs for those (EM) with more knowledge, like university graduates to be recruited for more companies, so they have more leaning opportunities, then they could come back and guide the local people here which would be easier as well. I think that should help create jobs for many.”* (26-year-old Hmong man, community leader in Son La province)

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The precariousness of informal EM workers is similar to that of Kinh-ethnic informal workers, especially due to the impact of COVID-19. This will require **a radical reform in Viet Nam’s social protection schemes so that coverage is extended more to informal workers**.

On the other hand, EM migrants might experience greater difficulties in returning home when their home provinces – often in more remote and less developed areas – are unable to accommodate migrant returnees soon enough. This requires **more attention for EM migrant groups from government COVID-19 relief programs** in both home and host provinces, including:

- Developing COVID-19 response capacity for local authorities with a culturally-sensitive approach;
- Highlighting EM migrants (especially those working in informal jobs) as one of the priority groups in delivering COVID-19 assistance programs; and
- Ensuring COVID-19 and essential social services (such as education and healthcare) do not discriminate based on residential status, and increasing awareness, access, and ease of EM people in performing migration-related public administration procedures.

To reduce the stigma and discrimination that many EM migrants face at their destination, it is important to increase the diverse voices of EMs and their representation in mass media. Their representation should not echo the discriminative narratives that put EM groups in an inferior position to Kinh-ethnic people.

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