



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
**COUNTRY GENDER  
EQUALITY PROFILE**  
VIET NAM 2021

## **Country Gender Equality Profile Viet Nam 2021**

Published 1st edition 2021

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The CGEP represents the collective knowledge, advice and dedication of many agencies and individuals. It has been a truly collaborative endeavour, combining national and international expertise, in order to produce a report that could be a reliable source of information and advocacy messages on gender equality in Viet Nam.

**Government of Viet Nam:** This report would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Government of Viet Nam. A senior statistician from the General Statistics Office (GSO) was on the core CGEP team, and facilitated access to data from across the GSO. We are also thankful to the Labour Statistics Section. Lastly, special thanks are owed to Tran Bich Loan, Deputy Director, Gender Equality Department of the Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs who provided technical advice over the course of the CGEP, and careful review of the final report.

**CGEP Management Team:** For their knowledge, savviness, solidarity and patience, enduring gratitude is owed to Dr Vu Phuong Ly (Program Specialist, UN Women), Than Thien Huong (Gender Specialist, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia), and Nguyen Thanh Giang (Senior Social Development Officer-Gender, Asian Development Bank).

**UN Women: Viet Nam Country Office:** Elisa Fernandez Saenz (Country Representative), Dr Vu Phuong Ly (Program Specialist) and Bui Thanh Ha (Program Consultant) led the CGEP for UN Women, and provided technical and drafting guidance throughout. Section author: Vu Thu Hong (WPS section). Advice and review were provided by the following staff: Hoang Bich Thao, Le Thi Lan Phuong, Luong Nhu Oanh, Nguyen Kim Lan, Pham Thi Lan, Tran Thi Thuy Anh, Atty-Roos Ijsendijk, and Clara O’Leary. **Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific:** Hulda Atieno Ouma (Regional Planning and Coordination Specialist), Sara Duerto Valero (Regional Adviser, Gender Statistics); **Headquarters:** Alicia Noemi Ziffer (Knowledge Management Specialist).

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australian Embassy, Hanoi:** Than Thien Huong, Kerrie Anderson and Carly Main provided review and advice.

**Asian Development Bank:** Section authors: Kathleen McLaughlin, Le Van Son, Tran Thuy Hai (Urban Development; Agriculture and Rural Development). Nguyen Thanh Giang and Danka Rasic provided review and advice.

**International Labour Organisation:** Section authors: Valentina Barcucci (Workforce Participation); Betina Ramírez López, Marielle Phe Goursat, Nguyen Hai Dat, Nguyen Thi Le Van and Doan Thuy Dung (Social Protection over the life course). We also wish to thank the following ILO colleagues for their expert review and advice: Deepa Bharathi, Jane Hodge, Nguyen Thi Mai Thuy, Carlos Andre da Silva Gama Nogueira, and Anna Olsen.





**Feature sections:** The CGEP wishes to acknowledge the following subject matter experts who contributed to feature sections: Luong The Huy (Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and Environment-iSEE) with Viet Nam Youth Alliance and ICS Centre; Luong Thi Truong (Centre for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Areas-CSDM); Nguyen Thi Lan Anh (Founder-CEO Action to the Community Development Centre-ACDC); Dr Vo Thi Hoang Yen (Founder-Director Disability Research and Capacity Development-DRD); Ngo Thi Huyen Minh (Director, Will to Live Centre); and Helle Buchhave (Senior Social Development Specialist, East Asia and Pacific Gender Coordinator, World Bank).

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The CGEP team would like to also acknowledge the following contacts who offered data and advice on specific topics: Dr Lan Anh Hoang (Senior Lecturer, University of Melbourne), La Anh Lan (Education Specialist, UNICEF), Dr Le Thi Quynh Nga (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) Manager-Aus4Equality|GREAT program), Dr Luong Thu Hien (Executive Director, Vietnam Center for Gender Studies and Women's Leadership, Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics), Professor Nguyen Huu Minh (Institute for Gender and Family Studies), Dr Nguyen Thu Giang (University of Queensland), Vu Thu Hang (IFC). Erin Anderson (then Team Leader, ASEAN ACT), Dr Melissa Jardine, and Dr Paul Schuler (Consultant, UNDP). A great debt is also owed to Professor Yvonne Corcoran-Nantes (Flinders University, Australia) for her careful, feminist review and editing of the CGEP drafts.

**CGEP Core Team:** The core team that led the development and drafting of the overall CGEP comprised the following 'sisters': Mia Urbano (CGEP Team Leader/Senior Gender Equality Adviser, DFAT Viet Nam), Dr Khuat Thu Hong (Founder-Director, Institute for Social Development Studies), Pham Thu Hien (Independent Senior Gender Expert), and Nguyen Thi Viet Nga (Senior Statistician, Social and Environmental Statistics, Gender Statistics Office).

**Layout and Design:** Colorista

# KEY GENDER EQUALITY INDICATORS



Domain	Indicators
Political	<b>Proportion of women National Assembly Deputies:</b> 30.26% (2021-2026) <b>Global average:</b> 25.5% 1 <sup>st</sup> June (2021) <sup>1</sup>
	<b>Women ministers (including 18 ministries and 4 ministerial-level agencies):</b> 9% / 2 of 22 (2021-2026 term) <b>Global average:</b> 22.6% (2021) <sup>2</sup>
	<b>Percentage of women Deputies in the People's Councils:</b> 29%, 29.08% and 28.98 % at the Provincial, District and Commune level respectively (2021-2026 term)
	<b>Percentage of women in the Viet Nam Communist Party:</b> 33% (2019) <sup>3</sup>
Social	<b>Percentage of women in the Viet Nam People's Army:</b> 2.8% of whom 31.9% are in management positions.
	<b>Literacy rate among people aged 15 and older:</b> 98% of men, 95.6% of women; 86.3% among ethnic minority men, 73.4% of ethnic minority women (2019) <sup>4</sup>
	<b>Proportion of children under 3 years of age enrolled in creche/kindergarten:</b> 28.9% (2018-19 school year) <sup>5</sup> ; VLHSS 2018 reports 12%.
	<b>Sex-ratio at birth:</b> 111.5 boys per 100 girls (2019) <sup>6</sup>
	<b>Proportion of women aged 15 years and over who have experienced one or more forms of physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence, and controlling behaviours by their husband in 1) their life time, or 2) the last 12 months:</b> 1) 62.9% and 2) 31.6% (2019)
	<b>Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were first married or in a union before age 18:</b> 9.1%; 12.6% among women in rural areas; and 21.5% among women in the northern mountains (2019) <sup>7</sup>
	<b>Proportion of LGBTQI persons who experienced a form of abuse at home:</b> 62.9% experienced pressure to change their appearance or gestures, and 60.2% experienced scolding (2015)
	<b>Social insurance coverage, by sex:</b> 31.3% for women, 22.1% for men (2019) <sup>8</sup>
	<b>Gender gap in pension value:</b> 19.8%, favouring men (2019) <sup>9</sup>

1 <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>

2 World Economic Forum (WEF). 2021. *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. Geneva: WEF.

3 General Statistics Office (GSO). 2019. *Result of the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey 2018*. Hanoi: GSO.

4 Government of Viet Nam. 2020. *2020 National Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

5 Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) data cited in Government of Viet Nam. 2020. *2020 National Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

6 Government of Viet Nam. 2020. *2020 National Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*. op.cit

7 General Statistics Office (GSO). 2019. *Viet Nam Population and Housing Census 2019: Selected Key Findings-12/2019*. Hanoi: GSO.

8 ILO statistic based on data from Viet Nam Social Security.

9 ILO. 2020. Technical note on new parametric reform scenarios for pensions. Hanoi: ILO.



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## Social

**Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods:** 69.2% in urban areas, 63.3% in rural areas (2018)<sup>10</sup>

**Adolescent birth rate:** 35‰ of adolescents aged 10-19 years<sup>11</sup>

**Maternal mortality ratio:** 46 cases per 100,000 live births (2019)<sup>12</sup>

**Under 5 mortality rate, by sex:** 27.3‰ among boys, 14.2‰ among girls (2019)<sup>13</sup>

**Deaths (cases) due to suicides per 100 000 population:** 7.54 male deaths/100,000 population, 3.12 female deaths/100,000 population (2017)<sup>14</sup>

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## Economic

**Labour Force Participation Rate:** 62.3% for women, 75.4% for men (2020)<sup>15</sup>

**Informal employment:** 54.6% of male workers, 46.3% of female workers (2019)<sup>16</sup>

**Weighted gender pay gap based on monthly wages:** 13.7% (2019)<sup>17</sup> **Global pay gap:** 20.5% (2018)<sup>18</sup>

**Unpaid domestic and care work:** Women reported 275 minutes per day compared with 170 minutes per day for men (2016).<sup>19</sup>

**Hours spent on services 'for own use':** 20.2 hours per week on average for women, and 10 hours per week on average for men. Close to 20% of men did not report any hours (2019).<sup>20</sup>

**Proportion of LGBTQI people who reported experiencing discrimination or harassment at work:** 50% (2015)<sup>21</sup>

**Share of female managers in foreign-owned firms:** 34.1% (2019)<sup>22</sup>

**Jointly titled residential land:** 55.6% (2014)<sup>23</sup>

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## Environmental

**Division of labour for water collection in urban households without access to safe drinking water:** 69% performed by women, 29% by men, 9% jointly (2015).<sup>24</sup>

**Number of people with temporary residency in current place of residence:** 5.6 million, with women estimated to account for a half (2016).<sup>25</sup>

**Perception of public safety:** 50% of women did not feel safe on crowded buses or at bus stops; 49% of adolescent girls said they did not feel safe in public settings. (2017)<sup>26</sup>

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10 General Statistics Office. 2018 Population and Family Planning cited in Government of Viet Nam. 2020. *2020 National Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

11 Government of Viet Nam. 2020. op.cit

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/> Accessed 18 May 2021.

16 Government of Viet Nam. 2020. op.cit Please note that this calculation is based on Viet Nam's national definition of informal employment as at 2019.

17 General Statistics Office (GSO). 2020. *Viet Nam Labour Force Survey 2019*. Hanoi: GSO.

18 ILO. 2018. *Global Wage Report 2018/19: What lies behind gender pay gaps*. Geneva: ILO.

19 ActionAid Viet Nam. 2016. *Make a house become a home*. Hanoi: ActionAid Viet Nam; Government of Viet Nam. 2020. *2020 National Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*.

20 General Statistics Office (GSO). 2020. *Viet Nam Labour Force Survey 2019*. Hanoi: GSO. op.cit This is the phrasing used in the Labour Force Survey and represents unpaid work.

21 Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE). 2015. *"Is it because I am LGBTQI?" Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Viet Nam*. Hanoi: Hong Duc Publishing.

22 General Statistics Office (GSO). 2020. *Viet Nam Labour Force Survey 2019*. Hanoi: GSO. op.cit

23 General Statistics Office. (GSO). 2014. *Result of the Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey 2014*. Hanoi: GSO.

24 General Statistics Office and UNICEF. 2015. *Viet Nam Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 – Final Report*. Hanoi: GSO.

25 World Bank Group and Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences. (2015) *Vietnam's Household Registration System*. Hanoi.

26 ActionAid. 2017. *Policy Brief for a Safe City for Women and Girls*. Hanoi: ActionAid; Plan International. 2017. *Adolescent Girls' Views on Safety in Cities – Findings from the Because I am a Girl: Urban Study in Cairo, Delhi, Hanoi, Kampala and Lima*. UK: Plan International.







Photo: UN Women/Vu Minh Hieu

## VIET NAM'S PROGRESS ON GENDER EQUALITY



Against a backdrop of remarkable GDP growth, and major social and economic modernisation over the past five years, Viet Nam continues to grow in prominence as a regional leader and international partner. Its deft management of successive COVID-19 outbreaks in the first year reinforced the reputation of Viet Nam as a capable nation. Viet Nam has become more integrated into global production and value chains, with female-intensive export-oriented light manufacturing being a major stimulus of GDP growth. The country has also maintained a high international profile in its multilateral engagements, such as its Presidency of the UN Human Rights Council in 2021 and its deployment of a UN peacekeeping contingent for the first time in 2018, which exceeded the UN guidelines on the recommended level of participation by women (15%).

Viet Nam maintains a positive reputation as a country where women enjoy formal equality under the law, have comparatively high workforce participation and access to economic opportunity, and ever improving health and higher education attainments. However, at an aggregate level, closing gender gaps in Viet Nam must now move well beyond a focus on basic human capabilities towards addressing the barriers and biases to women's empowerment, participation and security. This needs to be done with attention to the compound negative impact of gender and other socio-economic variables – or what is termed 'intersectionality'.





Existing gender gaps are coalescing with a new generation of equality concerns. Persistent gaps include: a widening sex ratio at birth in the context of son preference; stereotypes on gender-appropriate fields of study and streaming into a narrow range of occupations; vulnerable, unprotected and low paid employment among women; bias against women in leadership, especially with respect to holding executive positions or in public office at the commune level; a high prevalence of intimate partner violence, alongside the low availability of support services; and a societal expectation that women are responsible for unpaid care work in the home, and obliged to balance this with paid work - in the face of a limited child and elderly care infrastructure. There is also a greater acknowledgement of the extent to which patriarchal norms restrict women's choices.

Emerging concerns include: women's rebound and recovery from COVID-19 in workforce participation and business; women's access to skills, qualifications and jobs in an increasingly digitalised economy requiring labour literacy in new technologies; gender wage and pension gaps leading to impoverishment in later life; urban development that reflects women's realities and preferences; managing the restructuring of the agricultural sector which facilitates women's transition to new income opportunities; and the low involvement of women in information, decision making and plans relating to climate change resilience. Most important is the need to consider how greater inequalities persist for certain groups of women and girls, such as women from ethnic minority groups, women living with disabilities, rural or migrant women, and single mothers. An analysis of the needs and barriers faced by specific groups of women must be integrated into policy and program responses.

This report was finalised as Viet Nam was responding to its fourth COVID-19 wave across the country. As of 12 August 2021, Viet Nam had recorded 256,000 laboratory-confirmed cases and 5,088 deaths<sup>27</sup> since the World Health Organization's declaration of a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. Sex-disaggregation of the official case number is not available. However, unlike previous global public health and financial crises,<sup>28</sup> COVID-19 has been singularly detrimental for women and has exposed gendered fault lines in the economy and social structures. COVID-19 has necessitated unprecedented, extreme public health measures, including the closing of national borders to travel and trade, interrupting supply chains, tourism and commerce; prolonged school closures, requiring online learning and home tuition; periodic shut downs and social distancing requirements in retail, hospitality and services, thus weakening business; stay-at-home orders with family confinement; and an increase in domestic tasks and care responsibilities which have been placing much heavier burdens on women, rather than men. Job and income losses, and elevated anxieties relating to livelihood and fear of the virus, have also increased the stress on households.

These factors have played out to disproportionately impact women worldwide, with the World Economic Forum estimating that COVID-19 has delayed closing the gender gap 'by a generation' (from 99.5 years to 135.6 years, based on current progress).<sup>29</sup> In Viet Nam, COVID-19 led to double the number of hotline calls and shelter admissions of women experiencing violence, as compared to the same period in 2019; women healthcare workers, two thirds of the workforce, reported high stress levels in having to maintain their caregiving role at home, whilst working on the frontline of the pandemic response.

27 COVID-19 Data Repository by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University. <https://github.com/CSSEGISandData/COVID-19>

28 Blanton, R. & Peksen, D. The Gendered Consequences of Financial Crises: A Cross-National Analysis. *Politics & Gender*, 15 (2019): 941–970.

29 World Economic Forum (WEF). 2021. op. cit.

For the first time in a decade, Viet Nam saw a drop in the labour force participation rate of both men and women, and some of the hardest hit economic sectors such as tourism, hospitality, retail and light manufacturing were female-intensive industries. There was an 'exponential increase' in women's unpaid care and domestic work with respect to household hygiene vigilance, home-based schooling supervision, increased time in meal preparation as well as the care of sick relatives. Traditionally regarded as the 'secondary earner', this jeopardises women's return to employment, at the same pace as men. Hence, within the space of 15 months, the prediction that COVID-19 could reverse fragile gender equality gains is unfortunately already materialising – both worldwide and in Viet Nam. Responding to these new challenges for women and countering increasing inequality is in Viet Nam's economic and social interest. Pragmatically, such efforts will add to Viet Nam's development momentum, and distinguish the nation among its peers.



## FINDINGS



The key findings from the thematic chapters are summarised here. Complete referencing is provided in the full report online.

### Institutional framework for gender equality

- Review of the *National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) 2011-2020* found **that two thirds of its targets were met (14 of 22), 7 were not met and 1 had insufficient data to measure.** Not one of the three targets on political leadership were achieved. The new national strategy for the period 2021-30 has simplified, more readily achievable targets, and Guidelines for data collection and reporting on the implementation of the Strategy is in process. New targets to lower the adolescent birth rate, increase all women's enrolment in vocational education while education targets for ethnic minority boys and girls have been introduced, alongside health services for 'LGBT people'.<sup>30</sup> Issues not covered by the Strategy or other laws include addressing adverse social norms, digital inclusion and parity in STEM, women's involvement in disaster risk reduction and environmental decisions, and LGBTQI equality priorities.
- Important reforms towards gender equality have been enacted, including **specific directives on gender mainstreaming in legal normative documents**, with 40 of 111 documents passed since 2015 having satisfied gender mainstreaming requirements. The Labour Code 2019 has significant favourable revisions, including the removal of the list of prohibited occupations for women, increasing paternity leave entitlements, a clarification of the definition of sexual harassment, and reducing the gender gap between men and women's retirement age from 5 to 2 years by 2035.
- **Budget commitments to implementing the NSGE have not been realised in full.** For the *National Program on Gender Equality 2016-2020*, 103 of 180 billion VND (57%) was mobilised. Over the period, 2011-2020, overseas development assistance (ODA) was equivalent to 212 billion VND, 128% of the original budget projection. With ODA declining as a percentage of GDP from 1.81% in 2016 to 0.63% in 2020, financing for gender equality will become far more reliant on state and private sources.
- A **new framework for national gender statistics** was endorsed in 2019. The set of 78 indicators is aligned with the Viet Nam Sustainable Development Goals. Challenges remain in terms of data gaps, data access and sex-disaggregation across all ministries. Progress for the period includes the General Statistics Office (GSO) undertaking a second national violence against women prevalence survey, initiating a national time use survey and publishing a biennial Gender Statistics Book.

30 'LGBT people' is the term used in the new strategy - *Government Resolution 28 NQ-CP* dated 3 March 2021.







Photo: UN Women/Dzung Nguyen

- **Gender equality is defined in binary terms at law and in the institutional framework**, comparing men and women, and recognition of gender diversity in new draft legislation is contingent upon medical intervention in the case of transgender people. This leaves those with other gender identities and sexual orientations unrecognised, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and intersex people.
- In Viet Nam, **gender equality has been institutionally associated with the advancement of women**, and therefore is under the responsibility of the Viet Nam Women’s Union and the Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs. There is still a need to socialise the concept of substantive gender equality, to distinguish between women’s attendance and their full inclusion, challenge gender biases that hinder women’s empowerment, and demonstrate the relevance and benefit of gender equality to all sectors, especially planning and finance, technology and science, energy and transport, and the environment.

### Equality in leadership in politics and public administration

- Women’s **political representation enjoyed some significant advances in the 2016-2020 term**. For the first time a woman was appointed Chair of the National Assembly, three Politburo members among 19 were women, and a woman proposed a bill in the National Assembly.<sup>31</sup> However, for the **2021-2026 term, women’s participation at the highest echelons of**

31 Data on the bill from UNDP’s research into women in leadership under the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) program.



**leadership fell;** only one woman remained in the Politburo, and women were no longer present in the top four highest leadership positions of the country.

- For the 2016-2020 term, **women's share of National Assembly seats was 26.8%, just above the current, low global average** of 25.5%.<sup>32</sup> In 2015, Viet Nam legislated a candidate quota for women of 35%, and while there was a 2% increase for the 2016-2020 term, it still fell short of the designated quota. However, there was a major turnaround for the **2021-2026 term**. In the 2021 elections, women candidates accounted for 45.38% of the total number, and the proportion of **women National Assembly Deputies increased to 30.26%** – this is the first time that women's representation has exceeded 30%, the highest since 1976.
- **Women are concentrated in certain National Assembly committees for the 2016-2021 term<sup>33</sup>**, for example Ethnic Affairs (51% of members), Culture, Education and Youth (48.6%) and Social Affairs (43%). By contrast, women's representation in the committees for Finance and Budget (15.2%) and Security and Defence (6.3%) is relatively low. There are also very low levels of women who are the Chairs of People's Committees (between 11 – 17%, across all administrative levels).
- In the 2016-2020 term, **women were less likely than men to vote** at the National Assembly and People's Council elections, at 63% of women and 76% of men, respectively. It tapered dramatically for village elections, with only 26% of women voting as compared to 42% of men.<sup>34</sup>
- **Both men and women prefer to vote for men** for the National Assembly and People's Council, and women candidates encounter greater **bias with respect to executive positions** (i.e. most senior decision-making positions) over legislative positions. Bias is **greatest for women candidates in village elections**, and they are less likely to appeal to voters if they have families. For male candidates, having a family is considered an asset and, as such, they are rewarded with a much higher proportion of the vote in local elections.<sup>35</sup>
- Women continue to account for a solid **one third (33%) of the 5 million Vietnamese Communist Party** members. However, they only account for between 10 and 20% of the central and local-level Executive Committees, respectively.
- There is **no systematic collection, updating and publication of data** on women's share of senior leadership positions in public administration. However, there is one female minister (Ministry of Home Affairs), and a woman is the new Governor of the State Bank of Viet Nam.

32 <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>

33 At the time of CGEP finalisation, data on women's representation in National Assembly Committees was not yet available.

34 UNDP. 2021. 'Roles of women representatives in Viet Nam's development during the 2016-2020 term!' Thematic Study from the *Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index*. Hanoi: UNDP.

35 Ibid.

**Equality in social development and family life**

- Viet Nam has an **extreme imbalance in the sex ratio at birth** due to son preference and sex-selective abortion. The Census (2019) reported sex ratio at birth to be 111.5 boys born for every 100 girls. The country is among the five lowest ranked countries globally. In 2020, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that 45,900 female births are missing every year in Viet Nam due its current high rates of sex-selective abortion.<sup>36</sup>
- At 76.3 years, Vietnamese women live longer than the global average life expectancy for women at 74.3 years, and there is a 5-year gender gap with men who have a 71-year life expectancy. **Women face greater vulnerability and risk of poverty in old age** due to life cycle breaks in earnings and financial disadvantages. The latter includes the gender wage and earnings gap, and the 5-year gap in the retirement age between men and women, which is to be reduced to two years by 2035 with the passage of the revised *Labour Code 2019*.
- In 2019, the total fertility rate was 2.09 children per woman, with rural areas being higher at 2.26 children and urban settings at 1.83 children per woman – below replacement level. A new Prime Ministerial Decision was issued in 2020 to promote the national birth rate, in regions where it is low. A range of **incentives were prescribed for men and women to marry before the age of 30 years and for women to have their second child before the age of 35 years.**<sup>37</sup> These include income tax reductions, support for rent or the purchase of social housing, and children will be given priority in admission to public schools. This program would have a discriminatory impact on people who opted not to marry or marry young or have two children. With women’s culturally ascribed caregiving role, the effect of this decision would also impact on their life choices and economic participation.

36 GSO. 2020. *Population and Housing Census 2019. Sex Imbalance at Birth: Trends, Variations and Determinants*. Hanoi: Finance Publishing House.

37 Prime Minister Decision 588/QĐ-TTg *Approving the Programme on adjusting the fertility rate suitably with subjects and regions until 2030*, dated 28 April 2020.



Photo: UN Women/Bui Duc Viet

- The belief in women's 'heavenly duty' (*thiên chức*) to give birth and take care of children is widely held. **Unpaid care and domestic responsibilities underpin gender gaps** in areas such as career trajectory, lifetime earnings, and leadership roles.
- The abortion rate declined to 13.8 cases per 100 live births (2019 data), although this is considered to be an **underestimate since it does not capture the number of abortions performed in private medical clinics**. There is no data available on sex-selective abortions – which are illegal in Viet Nam – nor on the adolescent abortion rate.
- An understanding the priorities, preferences and life circumstances of people with disabilities, including across a diversity of impairments, is seriously limited in Viet Nam. This is due to a lack of co-conducted consultations and research among people with disabilities, limited disaggregation of administrative and survey data by disability, and few formal mechanisms for the engagement of representative organisations in policy forums. Where data does exist, it highlights how **women and girls with disabilities face multiple barriers**. This holds for educational and vocational training access, labour force participation and access to rehabilitation services (the latter being 5.9% for women, as compared to 8.19% for men) whereby women have consistently lower levels of access than men. Women with disabilities also experience higher levels of physical and sexual violence than women without disabilities, at 33% compared to 25.3%, respectively.
- **Parity has been reached up to lower secondary education**, however girls account for a greater percentage of enrolments at upper secondary level than boys, at 76.7% versus 67.7%, respectively. Rates are considerably lower overall for ethnic minority girls and boys, at 50.9% and 43.4%, correspondingly.
- The **disparity flips at the graduate level in tertiary education** where women only account for 28% of doctoral degrees.
- The ratio of **women in leadership positions in the education sector is inverse to their proportion in the workforce** (13% of Department Directors, and 34.8% of Vice Directors).
- Gender-based **segregation and occupational streaming in vocational training and occupations** is along gender stereotypical lines which limits both women's and men's access to the full range of jobs.
- While same sex activity is not illegal, same-sex marriage is not recognised. There is **no legal recognition of sexual orientation and gender identity** and **gender equality is defined in binary terms** in the law and institutional framework.
- **Gender stereotypes are pervasive in the media** and women are under-represented as subject matter experts.





Photo: UN Women/Vo Van Bang

- The second national prevalence study confirmed that **2 in 3 ever married women (62.9%) experience violence by their husbands/partners in their lifetime**, and nearly 1 in 3 have experienced intimate partner violence in the past 12 months (31.6%). Around half of the women interviewed had not told anyone (49.6%), and the **majority did not seek support** (90.4%). Moreover, experience of physical or sexual violence is higher among women with disabilities (33% compared to 25.3% of women without disabilities), and for certain groups of women living in remote areas. One in ten women (11%) had experienced non-partner violence since the age of 15, and **13.3% of women experienced lifetime sexual violence** - an increase on the rate at last measurement (9.9% in 2010). More than half of the women interviewed (51.8%) agreed with at least one situation in which partner violence was acceptable, and this was higher for women in rural areas, highlighting the extent of the normalisation of violence. Nearly 1 in 5 women had to leave home during their lifetime due to violence, and of those who returned, half of the women interviewed (50.4%) did so for their children.
- Sexual harassment in the workplace was clearly defined for the first time in the *Labour Code 2019*, in line with the ILO definition. However, sexual harassment per se is not covered in other broader legislation despite an increased occurrence in public places. According to the 2019 VAW study, **nationally, one in ten women (11.4 %) had experienced one or more kinds of sexual harassment in their lifetime**. Incidents of sexual harassment against young girls or women in public places have been repeatedly reported in recent years in the media.<sup>38</sup> Recent

<sup>38</sup> *Sexual harassment against female student in elevator was charge with...200,000 dong.* <https://tuoitre.vn/cuong-hon-nu-sinh-trong-thang-may-bi-phat-200-000-dong-20190318190546984.htm>; *Sexual harassment against girls in a park, what is the reason?* <https://tuoitre.vn/be-gai-bi-quay-roi-o-cong-vien-vi-dau-754563.htm>



studies have also documented the high prevalence of sexual harassment among students in schools and in other public places. A separate study in 2018 revealed that 60% of students from secondary school to university level in four provinces of Viet Nam reported having been sexually harassed at least once, half of whom reported suffering from anxiety and fear after the incident.<sup>39</sup>

- Corridors for the trafficking of women and girls, and Vietnamese nationals in general, have attracted law enforcement and media attention – especially those bound for China, Europe and the UK. However, data is limited. The **majority of the 7,500 trafficking cases detected between 2012 and 2017 were overwhelmingly women (90%)**, and a high proportion of those had been trafficked to China, from ethnic minority communities.
- Although data sources vary, **the incidence of divorce cases is gradually rising**, with the GSO reporting an estimated 24,308 cases in 2016 (latest data) - an increase on the 2014 case number (19,960 divorces). Reports from the People’s Court noted the settlement of 1.4 million divorce cases over the period 2008-18. The cultural pre-eminence of marriage means that divorced women risk stigma, and socio-economic hardship due to lower property ownership and customary inheritance practices, which favours sons.
- Lastly, **social insurance coverage is low for both women and men**, with only 31.3% of women and 22.1% of men covered, reflecting the low levels of formal employment that social insurance is attached to in Viet Nam. The gender gap in social pension coverage is large (11.3%): 16% of women aged 65 and over receive a social insurance pension, compared to 27.3% of men. At older ages, the gap is even larger. In 2019, the value of men’s pensions was higher than that of women by an average of 19.8 per cent.

## Equality in the economy

- **Women’s labour force participation rate fell 2.2 percentage points** between the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2019 (76%) to the same period in 2020 (73.8%). Men’s fell by 2.1 percentage points from 81.4% to 79.3% for the same period. The **gender gap in labour force participation also widened** slightly to 10.8%.<sup>40</sup> COVID-19 contributed to a reduction in working hours for women, and the loss of jobs across manufacturing and services. Younger and older workers were more likely to leave the labour force as a result. Only 30.5% of women with disabilities participate in the workforce, and this was prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- High labour force participation rates tend to mask the fact that **women are in more vulnerable employment**. Although **men are more likely than women to be in informal employment 78.9% and 67.2%**, respectively, rates for both are high for a category of workers without job security and social insurance. However, women are **overrepresented in the category of contributing family workers**. This is the case for the majority (85.9%) of women working in agriculture. Furthermore, only an estimated **10% of domestic workers hold an employment contract**, rendering them one of the most exploitable categories of workers within Viet Nam.

39 ISDS & ActionAid. 2020. *Sexual harassment in youth at school*. Hanoi.

40 ILO calculations based on Labour Force Survey data. ICLS13 standards are applied.

- In Viet Nam, women migrant workers account for an estimated **one third share of its regular international labour migration**. Women in regular migrant work are concentrated in **manufacturing** in Japan and Taiwan, China (73 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively), as well as in **agriculture, fishing and care work**. Regular women migrant workers to the Republic of Korea are mostly divided between agriculture (50 per cent) and manufacturing (46 per cent), and migration from Viet Nam to Saudi Arabia by women is **almost exclusively for domestic work** (97 per cent), with the majority of workers originating from Thanh Hóa province. In 2020, Viet Nam strengthened provisions for gender equality in labour migration under the new *Law on Contract-Based Vietnamese Overseas Workers*, including the prohibition of gender-based discrimination in job advertisement and recruitment. Barriers to a safe, positive international labour migration experience for women in particular, include: limited legal protection for undocumented migrants especially women migrant workers (because the law only covers contract-based migrant workers); limited information on the type of work and realities in the country of destination; limited information, support and access to justice for those who experience problems – especially abuse, harassment or violence; low access to skills development or skill matching; limited support for particular social groups, including migrants from ethnic minority communities; and the need for additional reintegration support.
- The **gender wage gap** favouring men has persisted and is currently 13.7% for formal workers.<sup>41</sup> The GSO estimates the gender earnings gap to be 29.5%, with a gap of 21.5% in urban areas and of 35.2% in rural areas. Women work similar hours to men and there is no significant difference in educational levels. Women are overrepresented in lower paid segments of the labour market and in part time work. However, a portion of the gap is also ‘unexplained’ and reflects the structural discrimination<sup>42</sup> and the cumulative ‘motherhood employment penalty’ for women. Ethnic minority women who hold waged employment earn 17% less than their male peers.
- **Gender stereotypes profoundly affect women’s economic participation**, including barriers to leadership and promotion based on the perceived primacy of their care giver role which fuels prejudice in relation to women’s capabilities and knowledge. In Viet Nam, as elsewhere, there is a pervasive notion of women being the ‘secondary earner’, while men are considered the primary income earners. This is noted in both urban and rural settings.
- Despite advances for women in the economy through increased access to waged work, the economy is ‘a gendered structure’ and **women face formal, social and cultural barriers** for participating on a par with men. Factors such as care and domestic responsibilities and being disproportionately represented in more flexible but lower paid and skilled segments of the labour market, undermines women’s position in the economy. It also erodes their resilience to economic shocks and their job readiness for the future labour market.
- Women’s business ventures are clustered in small and medium enterprise (SME) ownership, with the majority having fewer than 50 employees. In 2018, **women accounted for 26.54% of SME ownership**, consisting of 31.6% in urban areas and 18.7% in rural areas. Women-owned SMEs employ a higher percentage of women workers in Viet Nam than those owned by

41 Please note that the gender wage gap is calculated in different ways, and this reflects calculations used by the GSO.

42 United Nations (UN). 2016. *Viet Nam Gender Briefing Kit*. Hanoi: UN.



Photo: UN Women/Aidan Dockery

men (43.4% versus 36%, respectively), and they contribute more to the economy via taxes per worker (VND 24.9 million compared with VND 24.5 million). Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), where women predominate as owners, were severely impacted by COVID-19-related downturns. By April 2020, a UN survey of **MSMEs reported a sharp reduction in revenue of around 78% as compared with December 2019**. MSMEs in ethnic minority areas also suffered substantial losses, reporting a revenue reduction of 44% over the same period.<sup>43</sup>

- After Thailand, **Viet Nam has the highest rate of women on the boards of publicly listed companies for the ASEAN region**. However, the rate remains low, at 15.4% (Thailand at 20.4%). Viet Nam is also second highest in terms of women in the role of chair of the board (7.8% of companies, after Indonesia with 11.7%). A total of 47% of listed companies in Viet Nam have no women at all on their boards.
- **Only 17% of large enterprises are run by women**. A 2020 VCCI survey found that around two thirds of these businesses (69%) had less than VND 5 billion in business capital. However, this represents only a slight difference from the 64% of male-owned enterprises. Notably, 17.8% of all women-owned businesses were joint stock, but only **0.4% of women-owned enterprises are listed on the Hanoi or HCMC Stock Exchange**, at present.

<sup>43</sup> UNDP and UN Women. June 2020. *Full report: COVID-19 Socio-economic Impact on Vulnerable Households and Enterprises in Viet Nam: A Gender-sensitive Assessment*. Hanoi: United Nations.



- The share of female **managers in foreign-owned firms is 34.1%** (2019). Data is not available on women's representation in senior management within state-owned enterprises.
- **Women in business reported encountering 'social prejudice'**, including the perception that women's 'natural' competency was for housework not in management and business, the idea that women should assume an auxiliary position ('second place') rather than assume a top leadership role, that women are unable to concentrate because of their primary focus on caring for their children and family and, moreover, that women are risk averse and not as skilled as men to make bold decisions.
- Women also stated that the **top obstacles they faced to business development** were finding customers (63%), market instability (34%), and access to credit and finance (30%). Women reported that loan terms were, on average, 13.7 months for women as compared with 16 months for men, and nearly half (40%) of the women found loan procedures difficult. Access to information on policies and the business support available, especially on land use, public investment plans, local industry and infrastructure plans were the most difficult to source. This is despite official requirements that this information be publicly available.
- **Sex-disaggregated data on land use rights certificates** is not available after 2014. Between 2004 and 2014, the proportion of jointly titled cropland had risen from 11.6 to 38.3 per cent while the rate of jointly titled residential land had increased from 15.7 to 55.6 per cent. Even though the rate of LURCs titled solely to men dropped significantly in the ten-year period from 2004 to 2014, men are still more likely to be the sole land/house owner when compared with women. As a major source of collateral for credit and business, and security in older age, this data is needed to gauge the outcomes of joint titling drives over the past decade.





## Equality in relation to the environment, urban and rural development

- **In the sphere of the environment - including urban and rural development planning and infrastructure, energy, and the climate – there is very limited available data** on women's representation and participation in these sectors and a limited consideration of gender specific needs and impact. Planning in these sectors is commonly considered '**gender-neutral**'.
- Although only small-scale study data is available, it is clear that **women are unrepresented in urban planning, transport, construction and energy-related professions and in urban planning decision making**. Urban planning is not directed to routinely consider how **built environments influence women's mobility and safety**. This includes women accompanied by children and those using prams, as well as women with disabilities and elderly women.
- Small scale studies have highlighted **safety concerns by women and adolescent girls**, with surveys finding that half of the women interviewed did not feel safe on crowded buses or at bus stops. This was mirrored in surveys with adolescent girls, whereby half felt unsafe in public settings, and of this number, 15.6% never felt safe in public.
- Women account for around half of the 5.6 million people with **temporary residence** in their current residential location, equating to 36% of the population of Ho Chi Minh City and 18% of Hanoi. Over 50% of rural to urban migrants in a major study reported living in crowded temporary housing, and women migrants were particularly concerned by the **lack of privacy and the risk of harassment and violence within their residential location**.
- Women are more likely to walk, use public transport, motorbike, or bicycle than men, who have greater access to cars. This influences women's ability to access and benefit from new connectivity infrastructure, such as bridges, if cars and truck routes are prioritised over pedestrian and public transport access. Global and local studies have also shown that women's daily itineraries demand multiple stops for children, household shopping, health care appointments, and work. The **design, user fees and location of transport infrastructure**, including distance between stops and to social services, **vitaly influences women's access**.
- The **improved levels of access to a clean water supply (95% of households) benefits women**, who undertake the majority of household water collection tasks and designate household use such as for domestic chores, health and personal care, in accordance with gender norms. Likewise, for upgraded sanitation, with women having a greater need for access, for example during pregnancy and menstruation. However, women's participation in water and sanitation supply decision making remains low, with clean water initiatives rarely considering a differentiated gender division of labour within households, especially among poor rural and ethnic minority communities.<sup>44</sup>
- Women have **low levels of representation in disaster risk management, and corresponding access to disaster preparedness training and knowledge**. For example, in the Steering Committee for the COVID-19 response, only 4 out of 25 members were women and they were not in decision making roles. This is despite women's specific responsibility and

<sup>44</sup> UN Women. 2020. *An Independent Gender Review and Impact Assessment of the National Target Programme on New Rural Development (NTP NRD) for the period of 2010-2020*. Hanoi: UN Women.

duty to care for children and older relatives when disaster strike. The Viet Nam Women's Union has been a member of the Central Committee for National Disaster Prevention and Control since 2013. However, a recent report noted that their members have only been invited to committee meetings in 29% of the provinces, 44% of the districts and 51% of the communes.

- With only 23% of agricultural cooperatives being led by women and the low level of female representation at district and commune level, **women are seriously under-represented in planning and decision-making processes with respect to agricultural production**, with ethnic minority women being particularly marginalized. This is despite the fact that rural women outnumber men working in the agricultural labour force.
- **Sectors and subsectors** including forestry, rural roads, rural infrastructure, disaster reduction and climate management **infrequently consider the gender division of labour in both households and the community, including how labour divisions may differ between ethnic groups**. As such, there is a need for a comprehensive increase in women's contribution to planning, decision making and management of these development priorities, with a need for particular emphasis on the inclusion of ethnic minority women.



Photo: UN Women/Vu Ngoc Dung



# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



The CGEP has taken a two-fold approach to report recommendations. Individual chapters propose recommendations related to the issues that are discussed, specific to sub-sectors. This was considered to be of greater value to readers with a specific interest in a particular sector or issue.

The CGEP however also identified overarching recommendations that would support definitive progress towards substantive gender equality across Viet Nam. Intentionally, they are not directed to specific stakeholders, but identify the priority levers needed for improvement, and identify scope for public, private and social sectors to contribute to their achievement. They have been organised into three categories, as follows.

## **Recommendations to strengthen the implementation of existing gender equality commitments.**

### Recommendation 1:

Mobilise and expend sufficient public financing for the implementation of all objectives the *National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030*, together with the introduction of concrete mechanisms such as gender-responsive budgeting to ensure adequate resource allocation paired with the enforcement of laws, and the implementation and monitoring of policies and programs.

### Recommendation 2:

Undertake specific action to close gaps in gender statistics, including the disaggregation of data by sex, age, ethnicity and disability. This is especially needed in relation to issues which have a direct bearing on women's access to skills for future jobs, to financial and social security, and to the impacts of urban planning, rural restructuring, the environment and climate change.

### Recommendation 3:

Utilise the opportunity of the forthcoming revisions of the *Gender Equality Law*, the *Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control*, *Land Law*, *Marriage and Family Law* and the *Law on Social Insurance* to address gender gaps and areas for reform. This includes increased gender mainstreaming in laws, the introduction of measures and coordination mechanisms to combat all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, including new online forums, the recognition and elimination of harmful gender practices, improvement in the collection of administrative data on violence against women, and the expansion of the definition of gender equality beyond binary forms and with attention to intersectionality.





Photo: UN Women/Bui Duc Viet

## Recommendations to address the underlying barriers to gender equality.

### Recommendation 4:

Develop and implement a national communications strategy to tackle gender-biased social norms using evidence and data on the negative impact of those norms for Viet Nam's socio-economic development, including in partnership with public and community leaders.

### Recommendation 5:

Revisit strategies, quotas and sanctions and undertake pipeline planning to see Viet Nam's share of women in leadership rise. This needs to encompass politics, public administration, private sector enterprises, peace and security, and peacekeeping operations, especially in executive and senior management positions.



#### Recommendation 6:

Recognise and remove the barriers faced by women in the workplace and business, by promoting equality in access to safe, decent, formal work and equalising access to information, resources (including access to assets and rights to control and dispose of the same) and support including access to markets and financing on non-discriminatory and non-punitive terms, for women in business.

#### Recommendation 7:

Pursue strategies to better target and address the lower development outcomes and discrimination faced by ethnic minority women, women with disabilities, young and elderly women, LGBTQI people, migrant women and women in informal work.

#### Recommendation 8:

Recognise, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid work including through public campaigns on a shared division of labour in the household and by facilitating greater investment in gender-responsive social and economic infrastructure including child and elder care services, including frameworks for private sector engagement.

#### Recommendation 9:

Urgently increase the availability and quality of multi-sectoral, coordinated and survivor-centred essential services for women and children experiencing violence.

#### Recommendation 10:

Intensify public messaging and measures to reduce sex-selective abortion, and to promote the equal value of a child, irrespective of gender.

#### Recommendation 11:

Recognise sexual harassment in public places as a criminal act and include a definition of sexual harassment and all its forms, as well as related measures and penalties, in the *Criminal Code*.

### Recommendations to drive gender equality progress in the coming decade.

#### Recommendation 12:

Eliminate the gender stereotypes in the education and training system that stream young people into gender segregated, 'suitable' fields of study and occupations, and greatly increase the coverage of labour-market oriented technical training for all workers.

#### Recommendation 13:

Provide targeted programs and support for girls and women to enter STEM study and professions,

and to reduce gender gaps and bias in access to digital literacy and employment opportunities in the digital economy.

**Recommendation 14:**

Create a mandate for women’s representation in decision making bodies for preparedness and management of disasters, climate change and pandemics, and facilitate gender-responsive relief and recovery measures including women’s uptake of government assistance as workers and businesses in recovering from COVID-19 impacts.

**Recommendation 15:**

Increase public investment in gender-responsive urban planning and development policies, and smart city development programs; climate change resilience and climate smart agriculture and rural development policies and programs that reach women; and gender-responsive socio-economic development policies and programs for ethnic minority groups and mountainous regions.

**Recommendation 16:**

Close the gender gaps in girls’ and women’s access to information, technology, markets and business development advice, in order to support the growth in the number and size of women-led businesses.







Photo: UN Women/Vũ Minh Duc





# COUNTRY GENDER EQUALITY PROFILE

VIET NAM 2021



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