

## VIETNAM

The Centre for Analysis and Forecasting (CAF) of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences conducted telephone surveys with 998 households with at least one member working in the garment or hospitality industries. Most workers had to take time off from work and/or work reduced hours. This significantly cut incomes as the pandemic spread in mid-2021, but most participants reported significant employment recovery in mid-2022.

The impact was greater on workers in the hospitality industry than on those in the garment industry. Female-headed households experienced poorer recovery than male-headed households.

### The burden of care and domestic work falls mainly on women but more men receive support for their households.

Permanent layoffs were lower than expected in 2021, and 86.8% of those in the garment industry thought the impact of the pandemic would soon pass. By 2022, however this expectation had decreased to 48.9%.

In 2021, 31.6% blamed lack of suitable skills for being unable to move to other occupations, while most waited for the pandemic to pass. But in 2022, 45.6% attributed not changing jobs to lack of suitable skills. Women were found to have made a greater effort to switch skills to get different jobs than men.

The findings suggest that government support packages for households were inadequate, with only 27% of affected

households receiving any assistance in 2021, and 31.4% in 2022. Although the burdens of care and domestic work fall disproportionately on women, more men receive support on behalf of their households.

Problems facing all households, but especially those headed by women, were a lack of connection to online support, and weak access to the social protection system.



Female-headed households experienced poorer recovery compared to male-headed households.

This could be improved by developing more extensive citizen databases and providing advice available online, alongside efforts to improve skills and ability to access the social protection system.

## Three key lessons for the future

- 1 Emergency assistance and welfare provision should continue beyond the crisis.
- 2 People who need support should be able to access it easily.
- 3 Workers, especially women, need more skills training.

HOW THE  
PANDEMIC  
AFFECTED  
THE PEOPLE  
WHO MAKE  
OUR CLOTHES



# Women in Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam bore the greatest impact during the pandemic.

## There are lessons to learn and plan for the future.

The garment industry in developing countries suffered huge disruptions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with economic and social consequences that continue to this day. In addition to the direct effect of lockdowns, which decreased exports, the industry was severely impacted by its reliance on global imports of fabrics, raw materials and accessories.

Although recovery is well underway, some businesses have closed and most households have suffered significant financial and social harm. Effects on mental health have also been considerable.

Some of the greatest negative impacts have been borne disproportionately by women. There are lessons to learn and to plan for similar crises in the future.

The researchers examined the impact of the pandemic and the process of recovery, with particular attention to the significance of gender issues.

The focus on the garment industry was one aspect of a wider project entitled *“The Impact of COVID-19 on Inclusive Development and Governance: Rapid and Post-Pandemic Assessment in the CLMV”* funded by Canada’s International Development Research Center.



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## CAMBODIA

Researchers from the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) conducted phone interviews with 2,000 workers in the garment, footwear and travel goods sectors in June 2021 to assess the economic, social and mental impacts of the pandemic. Follow-up calls were made a year later. The results indicated that recovery was clearly underway, both in the garment industry and in workers’ lives, and that female respondents were benefiting just as much as male ones.

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**Government-led skills training will be crucial to improve workers’ options in the long term.**

Women were disproportionately affected by the sector’s shutdown, however, as they account for a significantly higher proportion of employees. Although the workers’ earnings were rising again, new stresses had arrived due to the increasing price of food and oil.

The CDRI team concluded that women in the sector remain more vulnerable to the long-term consequences of COVID-19 than men, and suggested gender-based actions to help them move forward and during future similar events. These should include government-led actions to improve



Financial literacy, digital skills and job-related training are crucial to improve workers’ options.

financial literacy and digital skills, in addition to more specific job-related training.

Skills training and retraining will be crucial to improve workers’ options, especially in roles such as salon work and tailoring. Women report having a preference for these specific roles, perhaps influenced by the traditional culture and the existence of barriers to other options. The authors emphasise that support will be required to ensure that workers don’t suffer loss of wages due to time away from work for training to improve and diversify skills.

## MYANMAR

A study by the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Myanmar, found that COVID-19 has severely threatened the sustainability of the nation’s garment and textile industry, causing significant factory closures and business failures in the textile sub-sector that is unlikely to quickly recover.

The researchers found a substantial decline in employment within the industry relative to the pre-COVID period. Smaller firms were much more vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic compared to larger factories.

The dominant strategy favoured by the remaining businesses in the garment industry was to suppress wage

hikes to offer competitive labour prices for the brands that were struggling with weak demand in the midst of pandemic and preferred to cut costs.

Female employees comprise 86% of the workforce in the garment industry compared to less than 50% in all sectors nationally. Those who were affected by closures tended to be less likely or able to seek new jobs in sectors other than the garment industry. This made them more

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**Women were less able to seek new jobs outside the garment industry, compared to men who had more opportunities.**

vulnerable than male workers, who had more opportunities available to them in agriculture and other traditionally male-dominant occupations. Given this lack of alternative employment opportunities, these female workers have very little bargaining power with the employers too.

Women also faced more social challenges compared to men, including in healthcare and social support structures. For example, fewer reproductive health and maternity provisions were on offer once the pandemic subsided.

To arrive at these findings, the researchers used a combination of phone surveys and focus group discussions between July 2020 and January 2021, collecting meaningful data from 610 participants.



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