

THE LIVES OF WOMEN INTERNAL MIGRANT WORKERS IN VIETNAM

FACTS AND STORIES from
Vinh Phuc and Hai Duong
provinces / Northern Vietnam

COLLECTION
**ACTING
FOR...**



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INTRODUCTION	04
Which goal and for who?	07
What is BATIK International?	07
HOW WE CONCEIVED THIS BOOKLET?	08
Focus on the figure of the woman leader	09
Insights from the gender training in the morning	10
Identification of stereotypes in the afternoon	15
The in-depth interviews to collect more personal stories	18
THE REALITY OF THE LIVES OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERSECTIONALITY	20
Life at the common housing area	22
A life articulated around work	25
The interactions between living and working conditions	28
STEREOTYPES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS	30
Stereotypes they face and how they react to it	31
How do they see themselves?	33
SELECTED BITS OF LIFE FROM THE INTERVIEWS	36
Hanh	37
Huong	40
Phuong	42
Binh	45
Duyen	48
Nuong	51
Phong	53
“AS A WOMAN MIGRANT WORKER I FACE HARDSHIPS, BUT I AM TOUGH AND RESILIENT”	56
ANNEXES	58
Glossary	59
Training materials	61
Shared definitions	63
References	64
Acknowledgments	66



INTRODUCTION

Despite undeniable progresses for women's rights in Vietnam in the past decades, inequalities still exist and with the recent and fast growing of the economy, the existing gap between men and women even tends to widen itself. Even if, through the development of the economy with the *Đổi mới*¹ reforms, women entered more and more the job market, this came with an increased vulnerability. Indeed, women, especially the ones coming from the poor rural areas, account for the majority of the people working in factories², mostly in the garment and electronic sectors, for South-Asians companies which are, in reality, the subcontractors of multinationals. Those women suffer from very bad living and working conditions and must face many stereotypes in relation to their multiple identities: as worker, as woman but also because of their young age and internal migrant status. However, they have also been able to show an extreme level of resilience to be real actresses of their life.

Since 2014, the Phu Nu project (women in Vietnamese), led by BATIK International in two provinces of Northern Vietnam (Hai Duong and Vinh Phuc), jointly with its partners, the Gret and the CDI³, has been implemented in order to address such a context.

The main targets of this project are the women internal migrant workers of these two provinces who face very hard-working conditions (with low-wages, overtime work, issues regarding security and health at work, etc.) as well as precarious living conditions (difficult access to public services for them and their children as well as to quality water and electricity at a fair price, social isolation, etc.). Moreover, they lack the knowledge and capacities to be able to defend and promote their rights. To bring an effective answer to such a situation, the Phu Nu project directly acts on the immediate betterment of the working and living conditions of the women through construction work as well as dialogues with the different stakeholders (landlords, enterprises, local authorities, etc.). It also aims at generating impact on the more permanent structures (political institutions, economic actors but also social behaviors and norms) responsible for this situation by empowering the women, meaning by giving them the capacity to act and decide for their personal life as well as to contribute to the overall society choices. Through this process of empowerment, women will be able to durably defend and promote their socio-economic rights in front of various stakeholders. To do so, the project has implemented various

1. Reforms of 1986 which switched the Vietnamese economy from a socialist economy to a market economy opened to foreign investments, leading to the inclusion of Vietnam to the category of "emerging" countries in 2010 with an overall economic growth of 7% per year.

2. ActionAid, *Creating a better working environment to say no to sexual harassment in the garment sector*, 2019.

3. The Gret is a French NGO which was created in 1976 and has been operating in Vietnam since 1989 in the sectors of nutrition, local capacity-building, micro-credit as well as agricultural and environmental development. The Center for Development and Integration (CDI) is a local NGO which fights for the defense of the rights of vulnerable population and for an equitable share of Vietnamese economic growth.



trainings activities, both regarding “soft skills” as well as “hard skills” and has also contributed to the creation of women’s clubs in which women who have been elected as “women leaders” can act as resource persons for the others as well as spokespersons in front of the actors of both the public and private sectors.

One of the dimensions of this empowerment process is to make the women aware of the stereotypes they are subjected to because of their status as women but also because of all the different identities that intersect with their gender. Indeed, these women, as part of the Vietnamese society, face stereotypes which are embedded and normalized in the culture of the country, but they also

endure some added layers of prejudices leading to discrimination and inequalities because of their very specific situation. When it comes to the profile of the women workers of the Phu Nu project most of them are women aged between 18 and 35 years old having migrated to the industrial zones on their own, leaving their family back home out of pure necessity. Some of them migrated within the same province but some others come from other, and sometimes, very far away provinces of Vietnam. Moreover, if most of the Vietnamese population belongs to the Kinh people, Vietnam counts 53 other ethnic minorities to which some of these women belong to, leading to an extra layer of potential hardships and difficulties.

WHICH GOAL AND FOR WHO?

This booklet aims at raising awareness, both in Vietnam as well as abroad, on the daily situation of these women as explained by themselves with a focus on the stereotypes that they deal with, day by day. Not to speak on behalf of them but helping them to raise their voices, we have based this booklet on stories which were directly collected from the women. By doing so, we hope to provide the general public as well as the stakeholders involved (whether in the civil society or in the public as well as private sectors) with alternative

narratives regarding the daily life of women internal migrant workers in the specific context of the provinces where the Phu Nu Project is conducted. And as we think that, in matters of empowerment, the process is as important as the results, the way we gathered all the information was also a way for us to contribute to our primary goal of empowering these women. For all these reasons, we thought that it would be valuable to the other actors to share the methodology we used for replication and capitalization purposes.

WHO IS BATIK INTERNATIONAL?

BATIK International, a French NGO, was created in 1998 with at the center of its work the creation, the coordination and the management of projects adopting equity and reciprocity principles in its partnerships. The gender approach and capitalization (lesson-learned) are at the center of the actions developed with its local and international partners.

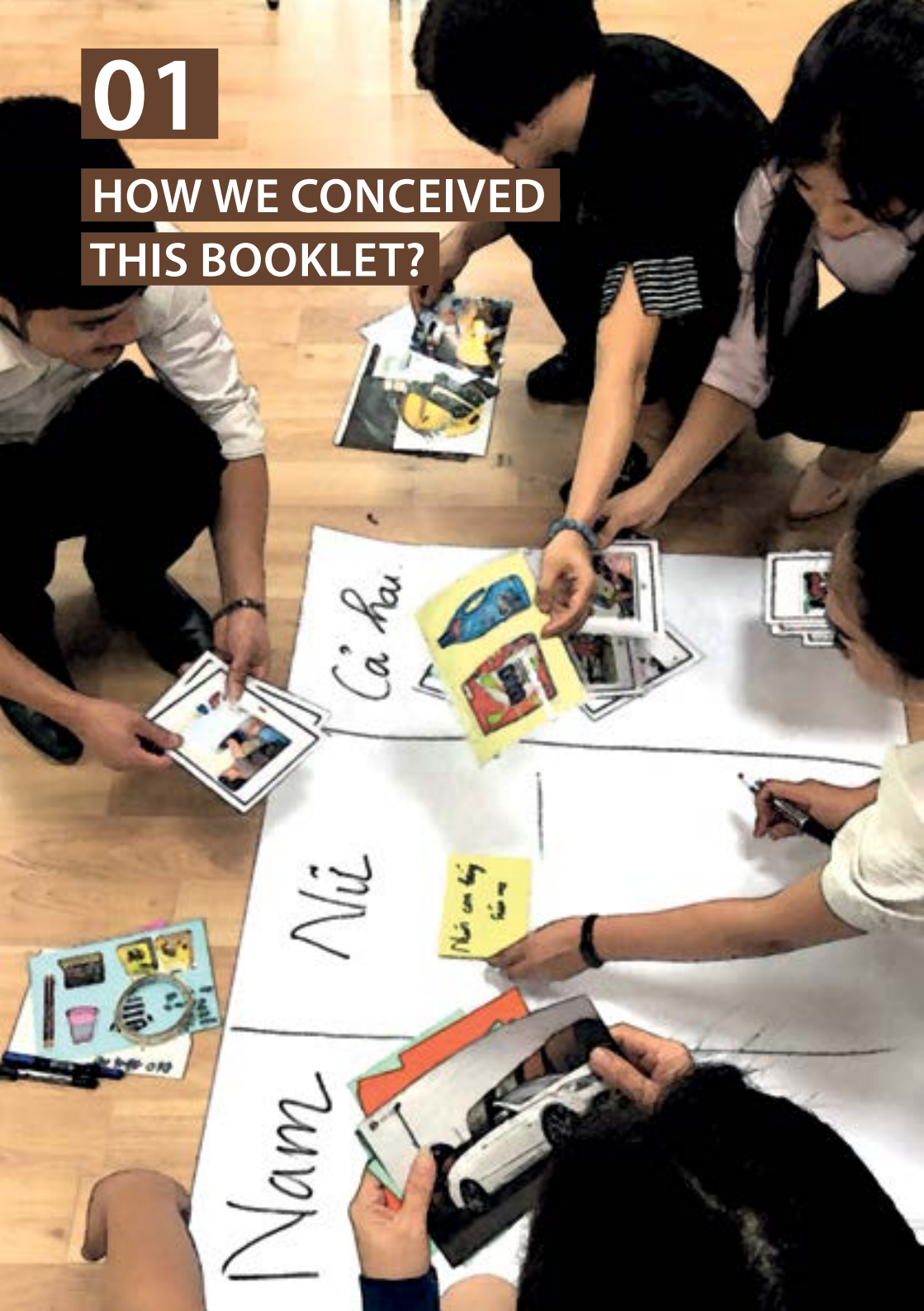
Projects led by BATIK International aim to develop the capacity to act and choose of vulnerable people and communities for them to become real agents of change, capable to reveal their talent and to build a better future for everyone, and this in various countries: France, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Vietnam. Thus, projects

are expected to answer to people’s needs in the domains of:

- ▶ Access to socio-economic rights (sessions of sensitization, of information, etc.),
- ▶ Socio-economic integration (support to income-generating activities, trainings, etc.).

BATIK International also brings technical support to its peers (civil society actors) to allow them to be of better help to their audience (women, youth, migrants, etc.) by proposing trainings, experience-sharing sessions, and personalized support depending on their needs.

01

HOW WE CONCEIVED
THIS BOOKLET?

In order to create this booklet, we used two main methodologies:

► **We gathered 25 women leaders**⁴ of both provinces during a full day in Hanoi (which took place on a Sunday-

4. Under the term of “women leader” we include some men as well. For this specific training, 7 men participated as well as 18 women.

5. A training similar to the one we organized in the morning is only required if your audience doesn’t have a preliminary knowledge of gender.

of August, only day of the week when the women don’t work) where they participated in various animations on gender, intersectionality and gender stereotypes which allowed us to collect qualitative information⁵.

► **Seven in-depth interviews with women** from both provinces to collect more personal and elaborated stories.

FOCUS ON THE FIGURE OF THE WOMAN LEADER

The women leaders of the project are referent women who have been elected by the other women of the project gathered into clubs in the housing areas they are living in. As such, they are supposed to complete various roles:

► **Logistics, organization and networking:** women leaders are responsible for the autonomous organization of the club meetings within the housing areas the workers live in, which are moments where women gather to share their needs as well as exchange and learn on various subjects of their interests. As well, they have to organize themselves by establishing an operating network with a strategy and an action plan of its own.

► **Information, sensitization and multidirectional communication:** women leaders can autonomously convey soft as well as hard skills during women’s club meetings to the other women migrant workers. Beyond the

transmission of knowledge and skills, they are also active in fostering the critical thinking ability of the other women.

► **Collection of the needs expressed by the women migrant workers:** women leaders have the ability to encourage the other women in the expression of their needs as well as to identify unvoiced ones. The collection of those needs is essential in the perspective to voice them in collective negotiation with other stakeholders.

► **Spokesperson:** women leaders act as spokesperson of the other women migrant workers during the multi-stakeholder dialogues. Progressively, women leaders have to act as the lead of those dialogues (choose the priority subjects to be addressed, facilitate and be involved in negotiations with the other stakeholders).

INSIGHTS FROM THE GENDER TRAINING

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE MORNING TRAINING

- ▶ Acquire a basic understanding of gender and sex and of the differences between the two.
- ▶ Recognize sexual harassment behaviors and seek the solutions and responses to sexual harassment.
- ▶ Share the gender issues they may face in their personal life as well as at the community-level.

WHAT IS CSAGA?

The Center for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender, Family, Women, and Adolescents is a Vietnamese NGO created in 2001 and dedicated to the promotion of the rights of vulnerable women and children facing violent situations, as well as to the care and support of the victims. Its current projects mainly focus on prevention, support, socio-economic empowerment and advocacy on gender-based and child-based violence issues. Moreover, CSAGA has good connections with the local media as well as with the public actors which allow them to raise awareness on gender quality and violence perpetrated against women.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SEX AND GENDER

Overall duration of the exercise: 1h

Presentation of the activity and methodology

1. The participants were divided into 3 groups and each group was provided with images depicting objects and characteristics, such as cars, cleaning products, charming, powerful, shy, ovaries, testicles, beard, housework, penis, uterus, a pilot, earrings, alcohol, etc.
2. Each group had to dispatch on a A0 paper the cards in different columns which had the following titles: "men", "women", or "both".
3. After sharing the definition of sex and gender, each group filled a table to associate affirmations and proverbs with either sex or gender using the following table ▶

Differentiate between sex and gender	Sex	Gender
Men often marry younger women than themselves.		
The proportion of women in the National Assembly (of Vietnam) decreased from 32% in 1975 to 18% in 1995.		
Women can breastfeed their babies.		
Traditional families need sons more than girls because boys are the lineage descendants.		
For people having similar job occupations and working in the same industry, female earnings are 91% the ones of men ⁶ .		
Both boys and girls break their voices at puberty.		
Flowers are planted for people to pick, girls are born for people to tease.		

4. The trainer then shared definitions on gender prejudices, gender stereotypes and substantive gender equality (all the definitions are in Annexes).

Restitution and discussion

The trainer provided definitions of gender and sex, highlighting the differences between the two:

SEX (female or male)	GENDER (man, woman, transgender, transsexual, etc.)
Biological traits that a society associates with being male or female.	Social characteristics of men and women which don't come with birth, but are behaviors, roles and positions of the person which are taught, socially expected, and regarded as belonging to men, women, boys or girls.
Thought to be natural, innate, unchanging and identical everywhere, but can change too (for instance, transsexual people do transition from one sex to another for it to match their gender identity).	Cultural meanings attached to being masculine or feminine and which influence personal identities.
	Meanings associated to gender go through variations in time and space, and can change when political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions evolve.

6. East Asia & Pacific Gender (2018) *Gender Gap in Earnings in Vietnam: Why Do Vietnamese Women Work in Lower Paid Occupations?*

The trainer then shed light on some prejudices related to gender with the participants, asking them if they had ever been confronted with one of those or to some other kind of judgments or stereotypes:

- ▶ Taking care of the children is the responsibility of women
- ▶ The wife is the husband's property
- ▶ Men are better leaders

▶ Women should not study beyond secondary school

▶ Women who are housewives are good mothers

Creating a link between those stereotypes and their consequences in terms of gender equality, the trainer shared facts on gender inequalities in Vietnam by sector:

SECTOR	GENDER INEQUALITY FACTS
Labor	Under Vietnamese Decree No. 26/2013, women are banned from 77 occupations (e.g.: metal processing, seafaring, autopsy surgery etc.) ⁷ .
	The retirement ages are different depending on the sex (55 for women and 60 for men at the moment) ⁸ .
	Women are not allowed to rise to manager positions as gender preference application processes discriminate against women ⁹ .
	Weak provisions for parental leave and childcare to allow both men and women to balance between work and family duties ¹⁰ .
Marriage and family	Domestic violence issues: 58% of women who were once married have already experienced a form of physical, emotional and/or sexual violence.
	While 87% of them never tried to seek help from official services, notably due to their insufficient level of response ¹¹ .
	Discrimination in heritage due to gendered social and legal norms.
	Human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women.
Education	Families invest more in boys' education than in girls' one allowing boys to have better education opportunities and to study in better conditions than girls.
	In many poor rural areas, there are more female than male school dropout.
	Men are less likely to participate in lower levels of education, such as preschool or primary school.
	The percentage of boys and girls attending grade 1 is the same, but the higher the level is, the more girls drop out.

7. Tuoi Tre News (2013), *Vietnam women banned from 77 jobs; some complain*.

8. In 2019, according to a draft Amendment to the Labor Code, the retirement ages will be changed from 2021 onwards, going in the sense of a harmonization (60 years old for women and 62 for men).

9. To know more: Vietnam Law & Legal Forum (2018), *Vietnamese women still face numerous barriers to employment*, 3rd of April.

10. To know more: Aeberhard-Hodges, J. (2019), *Driving gender reform in Vietnam's Labour Code*, East Asia Forum, March 27.

Health	No full respect of their sexual and reproductive health and rights Forced and early marriages: 11% of Vietnamese girls are married before the age of 18 ¹² , 1% before 15 ¹³ .
	Gender-based violence in all its forms exist in Vietnam: sexual harassment, sex-selective abortion ¹⁴ , sexual assault and rape, domestic violence, etc.
Political leadership	Underrepresentation of women in politics.
	Widespread belief that men are better leaders than women.

How did it go?

Initially, the pictures/cards exercise showed that 100% of the participants did not understand the concepts of gender and sex. Indeed, when they were initially acquainted with the last exercise where they had to associate sentences/judgements with sex or gender, they expressed confusion or went silent because these questions bare gender stigmas which are common in their daily life and which they were, at first, unable to recognize. However, in the end, they were able to correctly answer to 70% of the questions on gender and sex, thus showing their ability to distinguish the two definitions.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ITS DIFFERENT TYPES LEARNING THROUGH WATCHING

Overall duration: 1h

Presentation of the activity and methodology

1. Participants were invited to watch the film "Hang's story", produced by

CSAGA (here, you can use a video depicting gender-based a woman can face). Each participant was asked to note down on cards the character's behaviors which they thought could be considered as sexual harassment behaviors and then share it in plenary.

2. Participants dispatched the cards onto 3 columns representing different types of sexual harassment: physical, verbal and non-verbal harassment.

3. The trainer provided the participants with the definition of sexual harassment at the workplace as well the definitions of physical, verbal and non-verbal harassment.

Restitution and discussion

The trainer shared information to clarify the differences between sexual harassment and friendly behaviors, notably by saying to the participants that the way they feel regarding the behavior as a recipient of it is the most important indicator of this slippery line between friendly behavior and sexual harassment. If the recipient feels in-

11. General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2010), *Keeping Silent is Dying – Results from the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam*.

12. 13. Girls Not Bride (2018), *Child marriage in Vietnam*.

14. Sex-selective abortion refers to the practice of terminating a pregnancy upon the discovery of the predicted sex. Due to gender norms and their related discriminations, it mostly affects unborn girls.

sulted, offended or insecure, it is sexual harassment and it doesn't matter what the person at the origin of the act claims about her intentions. A friendly behavior is one that is based on mutual respect and consensus.

Finally, 3 main points were emphasized to conclude the discussion on sexual harassment:

- ▶ Both men and women can be sexually harassed,
- ▶ Sexual harassment can occur between people of the same gender,
- ▶ However, women are more sexually harassed than men and men are more responsible for sexual harassment behaviors than women.

How did it go?

Thanks to learning through watching films, the participants were then able to list sexual harassment behaviors at work: staring, leering, unwelcomed touching, sexually explicit emails or SMS text messages, invitation to the private office room, to suggest/force some exchanges, etc.

Then the participants gave also examples of sexual harassment behaviors in public spaces and in their daily life: being touched when on the bus, being forced to kiss when in the elevator, being teased and whistled when passing by beer restaurants, etc.

While at the beginning of the activity when the facilitator asked, "Among yourselves, who has ever suffered from sexual harassment?", only one partici-

pant raised her hand. When finishing the activity, they were 80% to put up their hands. They said that as they now were understanding what sexual harassment actually was, they could recognize that they had previously been sexually harassed.

HOW TO DO DEAL WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT BEHAVIORS?

Overall duration: 30 minutes

Presentation of the activity and methodology

1. Participants were divided into 3 groups and each group had to discuss and answer to the following question: "What will you do now when being sexually harassed at work and/or in the public space?"

2. Then they would share their stories and ideas in plenary.

Restitution and discussion

The responses to sexual harassment at the workplace which were suggested by the participants were the following:

- ▶ Expressing your discontent and disagreement to the perpetrator to let him know your uncomfortable feelings
- ▶ Reporting to the trade union or managers
- ▶ Sharing with co-workers and friends to seek their help

Likewise, the participants were productive in thinking about responses to sexual harassment in public spaces

- ▶ Ignoring if passing through a crowd

- ▶ Showing uncomfortable feelings
- ▶ Fighting against if being strong enough and trying to find one or several allies in the crowd

How did it go?

Responses to sexual harassment suggested by them were quite strong, showing that the participants were not tolerant towards sexual harassment and would seek the support from groups/their community.

Feelings shared by the workers upon concluding the morning session

Old people often said: "*Boats follow the oars, girls follow their husbands*" and "*Girls get married to serve their husbands, then serve their sons if their*

husbands die", these statements give the vision of women as being inferior.

- ▶ A male participant, Vinh Phúc

After work, men go to beer restaurants, women rush to the market, pick children up, wash and ensure that the meal is ready when husbands go home.

- ▶ A female participant, Hải Dương

If a couple lives with a mother-in-law, it's hard for the wife to ask the husband to wash dishes. The mother-in-law often says: "What are you doing? Washing dishes and sweeping the house are women's responsibilities"

- ▶ A female participant, Vinh Phúc

In a relationship, men often have to spend their money on presents, inviting women to restaurants... It is a burden for men.

- ▶ A female participant, Vinh Phúc

IDENTIFICATION OF STEREOTYPES

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE AFTERNOON SESSION

- ▶ Help the women in the identification of their different identities and how they are interconnected as well as how these identities positively or negatively impact their life.
- ▶ Help the women reflect on their own perceptions of themselves, as a whole made of different identities, as well as of the others and on how they think people perceive them as well as the others.

- ▶ Providing the participants with an understanding of what stereotypes, and especially gender stereotypes, are as well as their consequences.

THE IDENTITY WHEEL

Overall duration of the exercise: 1h¹⁵

Presentation of the exercise and methodology

1. Women leaders were introduced to the identity wheel (see the Annexes) to fill it individually with the following

rules: they should firstly fill the boxes with the different types of identity and then answer to the questions.

2. Voluntary women leaders shared how they filled the wheel or asked the questions than they wanted to. The trainer showed to the women leaders that the different identities they are made of can have various and overlapping impacts on their lives and that these impacts are partly due to the stereotypes which are associated to their different identities.

How did it go?

The participants took more time than initially forecasted to fill the wheel and especially to answer the questions because they were not “yes or no” questions and that they were reluctant to write too much. Facilitators had to take time to exchange with the participants during one-to-ones to help them write down their thoughts. However, the restitution time was much more fruitful. So it is better to favor discussion time over writing.

Regarding the satisfaction of the participants, they seemed to really enjoy filling the wheel because they were interested in the various identities of each one of them which stimulated their curiosity.

THE SENTENCES ON GENDER STEREOTYPES

Overall duration of the exercise: 1h25

Presentation of the exercise and methodology

1. Participants were separated into small groups of 4/5 people and were provided with a table sheet on which were displayed several types of identity to which were matched sentences to fill in group in order to generate debate within them (you can find the whole table in the Annexes at the end of this booklet).

2. After they filled the table, the facilitator introduced the notion of gender norms and roles.

How did it go?

One of the difficulties we encountered was that the few men which were present during the exercise were very loud and affirmative when expressing their ideas and opinions which impeded the women to feel free of expressing theirs. For this reason, and when no preliminary work of consciousness-raising on equal gendered power relationships has been conducted, our advice is to do this type of exercise with unmixed groups to allow the women to express freely.

Moreover, the special characteristics of the targeted group was also a limiting factor for such type of exercise. Indeed, the workers we conduct the project with have most of their time dedicated to work and they are only free on Sunday, only time when the pro-

ject team can thus do such type of trainings. However, they are by then naturally very tired and thus not very keen on writing intensively. This had also an impact at the time of sharing their work sharing their work came, because they had lost their enthusiasm. If your audience is similar to our advice is to limit the amount of writing which you require from your participants, especially for the afternoon session.

THE HUMAN CONTINUUM

Overall duration of the exercise: 45min

Presentation of the exercise and methodology

1. Women leaders were asked to form pairs and to stand on a line at the back of the room. Then they randomly picked a paper in a box where were written different roles such as the following ones (see the full list of roles in the Annexes of this booklet) that they will keep until the end of the exercise.

Young migrant woman worker

Young migrant man worker

Married woman with children

Single woman

Woman from an ethnic minority

Man from an ethnic minority

Man with HIV Woman with HIV

Office man worker

Office woman worker

2. The facilitator read out loud the following statements.

- *I can easily find a job that I like and positively evolve in this job.*
- *I can easily enjoy free-time after work to do things that I like.*
- *Cultural and sport facilities are easily accessible to me (financially, physically, geographically, etc.).*
- *Health and educational facilities are easily accessible to me.*
- *If a sudden and negative event arises, both personal (disease, death of a relative, unemployment, expulsion, etc.) and exterior (natural disaster, etc.), I can rely whether on the support from my relatives and/or on the support of the institutional system.*

For each, the participant determined their ability to complete the situation or no. If yes, they move one step forward. If no, they stayed immobile.

To clarify the exercise, you can provide your audience with an example:

- Statement: *“free tickets have been distributed to go to the movies after work, can I go?”*

Plausible answer: *a woman with children couldn't supposedly go because, based on the stereotypes and gender roles which have been attributed to her by society, she would have to cook for her family at night (so the participant with this role doesn't move). On the contrary, an unmarried young man could do so because he would not have to cook for the family or take care of the children. It would potentially be the same for a married man with children, in the case where*

15. The timing mentioned have been adjusted from what we forecasted upstream the training based on the feedbacks of our facilitators. Those timing are relevant for a group of 25 people.

the organisation of the couple would be based on unequal power relationships.

3. After the conduction of the exercise, there was a common restitution during which the women leaders shared what they thought of the exercise and what it has made them realize.

How did it go?

This exercise was the one that was the most appreciated by the participants as it was very interactive and action-based. Having smaller groups would it will limit the confusion of the participants which can arise from having too many different roles and it would allow them to put themselves in the shoes of the various roles more easily.

At the end, a good thing to experiment would also be to take the opportunity to go through the roles which the women didn't pick up for a restitution to generate active and collaborative critical thinking.

THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS TO COLLECT MORE PERSONAL STORIES

CONTEXT OF THE INTERVIEWS

At the end of September-beginning of October 2019, we conducted a series of interviews with 7 women migrant workers, 4 of them in Vinh Phuc and 3 of them in Hai Duong.

The interviews in Vinh Phuc (Khai Quang industrial zone) took place on

Recommendations

- ▶ Focusing on quality rather than quantity as it is difficult to organize such sessions with a large number of people and to collect meaningful information;
- ▶ Organizing intensive 1 to 2 days training workshops/discussions on a regular basis to help the participants to understand deeply about gender and its influence on their life;
- ▶ Developing a document to facilitate groups meeting
- ▶ Training more the group leader on facilitation skills (public speaking, listening skills, and synthesizing skills);
- ▶ Considering to organize unmixed group work if the men participating are not fully aware of the imbalance of power between men and women yet and thus don't act in a way that allows for the free flow of the women's feelings and thoughts.

a Tuesday afternoon and night with women having done the previous night shift or women having just come back from their day shift. The interviews in Hai Duong (Nam Sach industrial zone) took place on a Sunday, only resting day of the women.

When conducting the interviews, some social biases arose:

- ▶ The location of the interviews: some interviews were conducted in the living rooms of the landlords and landladies, which does certainly carry some social biases in terms of the women's responses to some questions, notably the ones related to their living conditions,
- ▶ The time of the interviews: some interviews took place quite late at night with women who were very tired of their day of work or with women who had to work in few hours and thus needed time to sleep,
- ▶ The presence of other women during the interviews,
- ▶ The presence of two interviewers and notably of a foreigner who doesn't speak Vietnamese, even if her presence didn't seem to impede the sharing of information.

Sample

For both provinces, the profiles of the seven interviewees were diverse and quite representative of the target of the project. We interviewed both women leaders and women migrant workers who don't have this status, women of various ages (from 22 to 36 years old), women who have been installed in the province for a long time as well as women who have recently arrived, divorced women as well as married and single women, women coming from other provinces as well as women coming from the same province where they now live and work, and finally women from different ethnic backgrounds.

The women were identified following the collection of the information

session that we conducted in August based on the information on which we wanted to dig deeper.

Method used to conduct the interviews

The interviews were conducted by two members of the project team who are BATIK Int.'s employees. Julia, a French volunteer and Hang, Vietnamese employee of BATIK Int. Vietnam.

Semi-structured questionnaires were used to conduct the interviews which allowed the women to express more freely without dispersing too much.

The repartition of the roles between Hang and Julia was as followed:

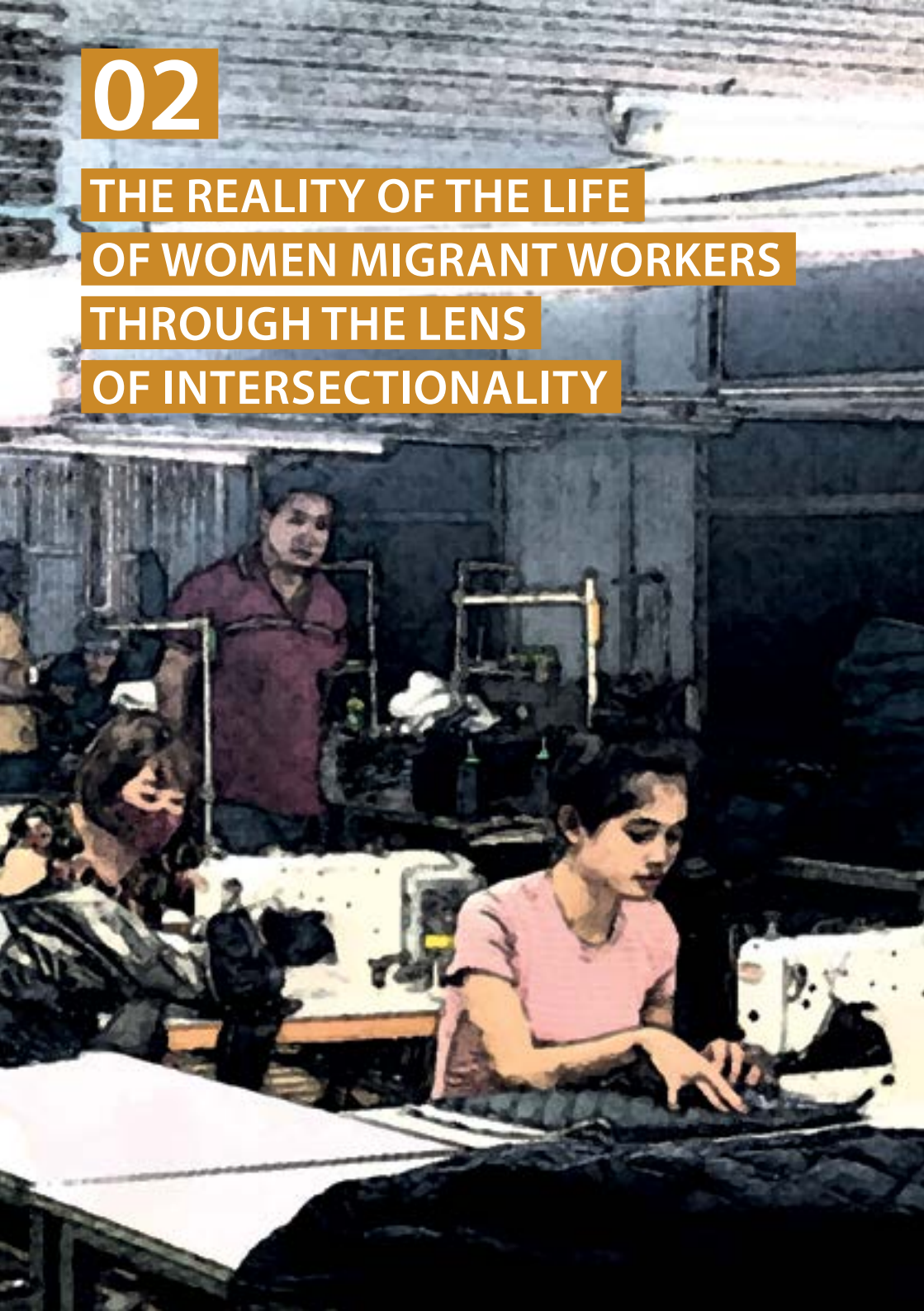
- ▶ Hang, native Vietnamese speaker, was asking the question to the women while taking notes in Vietnamese
- ▶ Julia, non-native Vietnamese speaker, was in charge of picking up on what was being said by the women to allow to dig deeper into their thoughts

They used Google translation as a supportive tool. Hang was thus directly writing the answers into Google translation and Julia was reading them. When the translation was fairly limited and unclear, Hang was giving precisions to Julia.

All the stories are presented in the last part of this booklet, *Personal insights from the interviews*.

02

THE REALITY OF THE LIFE OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERSECTIONALITY



The lives of women internal migrant workers in Northern Vietnam is subjected to various influences which are directly linked to the various identities of these women:

- ▶ as internal migrants coming from **rural areas**: 79,1% of internal migrants in Vietnam were born in rural areas¹⁶.

- ▶ as **women**: 52,4% of internal migrants aged 15 to 59 in Vietnam are women¹⁷.

- ▶ as **young people**: 85% of internal migrants in Vietnam are aged 15 to 39 with female migrants tending to move at a slightly younger age¹⁸. In respect to the provinces of intervention of the Phu Nu project, the average age of the women at the time of diagnosis was 23.8 years old.

- ▶ as **single or married women**: internal migrants are less likely to be married than non-migrants. Moreover, 61,7% of them tend to move alone.¹⁹ In respect to the provinces of intervention of the Phu Nu project, the number of married women was equal to the number of single women (48,9%) with a significant difference between the two provinces of intervention (the percentage of single female workers in Hai Duong was relatively high at 64,2%, while in Vinh Phuc this number stood at 28,2% due to the younger age of the women in the first province)

- ▶ as **mother**: in respect to the provinces of intervention of the Phu Nu

project, 45,3% of them had children at the time of diagnosis.

- ▶ as **educated people**: internal migrants, and especially rural-urban ones, tend to have received a higher level of education than non-migrants, almost a quarter of them having received university level education.²⁰ In respect to the provinces of intervention of the Phu Nu project, 46,5% of the women had achieved high school and 8,1% of them vocational or university education at the time of diagnosis.

- ▶ for some of them, as people coming from an **ethnic minority**: as most of ethnic minority people live in very remoted areas where they have few information and from where immigration costs are very high, people who migrate are mainly from two ethnic groups of Vietnam: the Kinh (the majority group) and the Hoa.²¹

- ▶ and finally, as **factory workers**: 74,8% of internal migrants work with women predominantly working in the garment sector (where they account for 78,5% of the workers²²). Women from the Phu Nu project mostly work in garment or electronic factories.

In this part, we will explore both the living and working conditions of these women, taking into account all these identities and the way they influence how the lives of women migrant workers is structured.

16. General Statistics Office (2016), *The 2015 National Internal Migration Survey: Major Findings*.

17. / 18. / 19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. ActionAid, *Creating a better working environment to say no to sexual harassment in the garment sector*, 2019.

LIFE AT THE COMMON HOUSING AREA

The women migrant workers taking part to the Phu Nu project all live in **common housing areas** where the majority of the tenants are **factory workers**. In these common housing areas, they either rent **a private room or a shared one**, which size ranges from 6m² to 30m², the average size being **12.5m²**, most of them sharing the toilets. The price of the rent varies between the common housing areas, but it ranges **from 300,000 VND** (roughly 12 dollars) **up to 900,000 VND** (roughly 35 dollars), **bills excluded**. Then, tenants still have to pay for the water and electricity bills which are directly charged to them by their landlord or landlady who plays the role of intermediary between them and the electricity and water companies. This role of intermediary bears in itself a potential of distortion of the price that tenants are supposed to pay, certain landlords and landladies practicing some **overpricing**. When it comes to electricity, the cost ranges **from 2,500 VND/kWh to 3,000 VND/kWh** (roughly 10 cents). There actually is a regulation for the electricity price, with a fix unit price, but it only applies to households of a minimum of 4 people, thus impeding the workers of being able to benefit from it. Indeed, if

“ Taken as a global problem, the question of the access to water and electricity can be summed-up as one of lack of access to information. ”

the workers who live in the same room can apply to benefit from this fix price, the landlords and landladies don't practice it as they argue that the overpricing they implement allows them to compensate for the energy losses. In Vietnam, the unit price increases with the level of consumption.

The question of what is the **“fair” price** that should be paid by the tenants is even more central in matters of water cost as there is **no official regulation** and that water is billed freely by private water companies. In the provinces of intervention of the Phu Nu project, the average water price is of **20,000 VND/m³** (roughly 90 cents). Moreover, the price paid by the internal migrants within the common housing areas is also subjected to **discriminatory practices** as they pay higher prices than the local population. These bills, rent included, weigh quite a lot upon the purchasing power of the workers, accounting for up to **one fourth of their income**.

Apart from the price, access to water and electricity also generates issues related to the **quality of the service provided**, and especially for water. Indeed, a large number of workers have reported having some doubts regarding water quality, both coming from the tap as from the well, and



have complained about **regular water shortages**. However, the absence of a public regulation, whether it is provincial or national, on the matter makes it harder to have the quality of the water being independently accessed. Taken as a global problem, the question of the access to water and electricity can be summed-up as one of **lack of access to information** as the tenants have no personal visibility of their own consumption because of everything going through the landlord or landlady and that they don't sign a contract with either the electricity nor water company. Likewise, **they don't have a rental contract** with their landlord or landlady, as everything is done orally. Such a normalized practice bears potential

risks for the defense of their **legitimate rights** by the tenants.

Lack of privacy within the common housing areas has been highlighted as one of the main issues as some of the rooms lack a locker or even a concrete door (even if it has been less and less the case thanks to renovation works). Moreover, the **lack of isolation** and the permeability of the rooms to **temperature variations** is also something that significantly impacts **the well-being** of the women and their relatives, especially of their younger children. Indeed, the lack of a heater in winter or of an air conditioner in summer, may have serious **repercussions on the health** of the tenants.

However, and overall, tenants living in the common housing areas covered by the Phu Nu project reported being **quite satisfied** with their living conditions. It is mainly due to the fact that they have **good relationships with their landlord or landlady**, and that their living conditions have been improved in regards of their situation prior to migration.

Still, their **status as migrant** can also be a **source of trouble** for them, especially upon arrival.

Indeed, the first step in order to be integrated to a province in Vietnam and to be able to benefit from the public services is to be **administratively registered**. When it is not the case, the migrants can't access **health or education facilities**, reason why most of the women migrate without their children. Such an administrative process can sometimes be tricky for migrants who don't have been previously informed on the different steps and needed documents. However, the situation has improved a lot thorough the years and most of the migrants involved within the realm of the Phu Nu project haven't really experienced any particular trouble regarding their registration process.

Thinking about the situation of women migrant workers through an **intersectional lens**, their situation may be very different depending on their status. For instance, **married women with children** and **single women** may face completely different situations. Indeed, married women, in addition to their already very intensive day of work at the

factory have to face what we call **"the double day"** as they are the ones to be supposedly in charge of **taking care of the children**. They also face **extra costs and difficulties** notably when it comes to finding childcare, reason why a lot of them leave their children in their hometown for them to be taken care of by their grandparents, and this even after they completed the registration process. As for single women, whereas they can enjoy from more **freedom**, they, however, are more subjected to **social isolation**.

This issue of social isolation within the common housing areas is linked to **many factors**. First, due to the migration they had to go through in order to be able to find a job, women migrant workers are **far away from their family** which is, naturally, very hard on them. It is even truer in a country as Vietnam where **the family institution** is at the center of everything. As mentioned earlier, lots of women migrate on their own, some of them having children they are forced to leave behind in order to ensure their well-being. Such a distance from their close relatives is a source of **psychological strain** for the women even more so as their working hours - 6 days per week, 8 hours a day and very often even more due to overtime work - combined with the high-cost of traveling expenses, especially during bank-holidays, impede them to visit their loved-ones regularly.

Consequently, and as the women are isolated from their family, they try to create **new social links** once they are

settled in the province. But, it is not always that easy. Notably, as the workers of a same common housing area don't necessarily share the same working schedules - some working at night, others during the day, some working on the Sunday, others not- it may be tricky for them to socialize. Moreover, and even when they have similar working hours, **the intensity of their work takes most of their energy** and their main priority when coming home is to enjoy some **tranquility and rest**. Indeed, most of them have shared with us that, as most of their time is split between working and resting, they don't have the opportunity to think about - and even less to take part

to- any sort of leisure activities which could contribute to their **personal flourishing and happiness**. Finally, **gender and generational factors** also appear to play a role when it comes to social relations within the common housing areas. Indeed, some of the women we interviewed shared with us the fact that an **intergenerational gap** was existing, and that the younger generation tended to be more included, leaving the older people even more excluded. Likewise, it seems that men are more comfortable in socializing with the others than women who tend to be shier and to be more in need of their own personal space when coming back from work.

A LIFE ARTICULATED AROUND WORK

When asking to the women migrant workers which one of their different identities plays the biggest role in their daily life, they were almost all unani-

mous in speaking about their **identity as worker**. Here are some of the words they used to depict the impact that work had on their life:

“time consuming”

“pressure”

“stress”

“restrictive”

“psychological and economic burden”

“source of tiredness”

“low wages”

“unfixed working schedule”



From all these words and expressions, we can imply that for women migrant workers, work is only seen as **a way to earn money** to provide for them and their family and that it weighs a lot of on their well-being without being a source of personal development. And indeed, their working conditions are a real cause of both **mental and physical strain**. First, when it comes to working hours, they all work at least **8 hours a day, 6 days per week**. However, most of them **work overtime**, up to 4 extra hours per day (with a legal limit of 30 hours per month and 200 years per year). If such amount of work allows them to almost **double their initial salary**, such type of schedule put at risk their psychologi-

cal and physical health even more so for the workers who **work at night**. Indeed, at one club meeting in Vinh Phuc province, a worker even advised his peers that even if you can double your salary thanks to overtime work, you shouldn't do it too much as "the extra money you will earn will be later spend on health expenses". Also, the electronics or garment factories in which their work require production processes which can undermine the physical well-being of the workers. For instance, a worker shared that as, in her garment factory, a certain level of humidity has to be maintained in order to ensure the quality of the clothes, they are forced to use sprinklers which make the room very cold. Converse-

ly, another worker pointed out the very high temperature in her workplace as a result of all the machines in operation and the absence of air conditioning. However, and as all these inconveniences are directly linked with manufacturing procedures, they can't be solved because the priority is put **on efficiency and productivity**.

Working conditions not only have an impact on the **physical health** of the workers but also on their **mental well-being**, notably through the **pressure** they receive. The women are quite shy when it comes to expressing themselves more thoroughly on the pressure they experience at work (*especially when we did the in-depth interviews, the workers were less shy in expressing themselves during the more informal and collective session that we organized*) which tends to be minimized, especially because they consider that their line manager also receives lots of pressure from above and has thus "no choice". Nevertheless, they do acknowledge the existence of such pressure, especially for new employees who need to demonstrate their skills in order to remain employed.

Moreover, the time spent at work outside of the hours when the workers actually perform their tasks does not quite offer better conditions, notably concerning **break time** or lunches. Indeed, lots of workers complained about the **very low quality of the food**, sometimes even forcing workers to bring their own food from home,

taking extra hours of their time to prepare it. The workers do organize **regular protests**, notably on **social media**, to alert their employers and their representatives such as the Labor Union or trade unions. However, if their employers react by improving the quality of the food provided, it never lasts very long up to the time when everything goes back to the way it initially was. In addition to that, workers can't benefit from any **moment of sociability** and, as a consequence, don't really know each other as the only time they have is to discuss about working matters. The **noise** during working hours also impedes them to have real discussions.

Finally, thinking in more transversal terms about the influence of gender at work, it is important to highlight the fact that most of the workers in the factories where the women of our project work are **women**. Even if, in some factories, the base-line managers and higher managing posts are held by women as well, in the majority of the cases all the **office work and top-management positions** are performed by **men**. There are more women at higher-ranking positions in the textile industry, but this phenomenon matches **unequal gender norms and roles** arising from **gender stereotypes and prejudices**. Moreover, when raising the issue of **sexual harassment** with the women workers, the question seems to remain **highly sensitive** and to represent a bit of a "**taboo**". Indeed, even if almost **half of the women** interviewed in factories in three provinces

of Vietnam by CARE Int. and The Fair Wear Foundation recognized they had faced **at least one form of harassment and/or violence** in the past year²³, it is very hard to have the women to feel more at ease to share more thoroughly

on this issue. However, one of the women we interviewed did mention to us that verbal sexual harassment between workers of the same hierarchical level was **widespread** within her factory.

THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

As **working and living conditions influence each other**, reality that we can clearly see from what has been previously highlighted, it is not possible to think them in isolation.

Especially, if by taking into consideration all the above-stated working conditions and comparing them to the level of remuneration of the women as well as to their living conditions, it is very clear that they don't receive what Oxfam has defined as a **"living wage"** for factory workers in Vietnam:

"A living wage:

- ▶ Must be established in **consultation** with workers;
- ▶ Is sufficient to cover basic needs including food, housing, clothing, medical care, education, social relations, transportation and some **savings**;
- ▶ Includes enough for some **discretionary income for unforeseen events** such as accidents or illness.

- ▶ Supports more people than just the individual worker – it is a family wage;
- ▶ Includes consideration of the number of hours needed to earn a living wage – **not more than 48 hours per week**;
- ▶ Includes strategies to periodically update rates, so that workers keep their relative purchasing power²⁴

Taking this definition as a reference, we can see that the situation of women migrant workers doesn't match all the requirements, and especially the ones in **bold letters above**. First of all, even if the final salary of the factory workers is often higher than the average national Vietnamese salary of 150 dollars (3,823,000 VND), it is mainly due to the fact that they include the **overtime work** which, even if it can allow the workers to almost **double their salary**, is **tremendous** and generate some high indirect costs, especially in terms of **health expenses**. Factory

workers can also earn some **performance-based bonuses**, but which are not really significant. Indeed, one of the women told us that she could benefit from such a bonus, but that it has to be shared among 17 employees for a total amount of 300,000 VND (roughly 13 dollars). Finally, some workers also cumulate their work at the factory with some **informal jobs** (as phone repairing for instance) in order to **make ends meet**.

As the workers have difficulties to track their own expenses, it is difficult to say if their earnings are sufficient to cover all of their **basic needs** which will actually be very different depending on the composition of the household. For instance, a male worker during a club meeting in Vinh Phuc province shared that his total expenses of the month were equal to 3.7 million VND (roughly 160 dollars), with a lot of his money spent on socializing. However, a couple with a young child explained they were spending 11 to 12 million VND (475-518 dollars) per month, including 1.5 million VND (roughly 65 dollars), thus **one tenth of their total income**, on medical expenses for their kid. Likewise, the women who have children they left in their hometown to the care of their parents also have extra expenses related to **sending money back home**.

For example, a woman shared during this same meeting that she was sending back home 4 million VND (roughly 173 dollars) each month which amount to **half of her total income**.

Generally speaking, it is also important to underline the fact that as community and family events are very important in Vietnamese culture, a large part of the income can be spent on events such as weddings which can become quite a burden for some families with limited financial resources.

Finally, most of the workers aren't able to **save money**, and logically, can't keep any financial resources for **potential unforeseen events** such as diseases or deaths. And indeed, most of the workers live their life day to day without wondering about the future. As **everything is articulated around work**, they don't have either the time and/or the financial resources to think about what they would like to do, or can do, after their time at the factory. Unfortunately, that

“
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to do.”

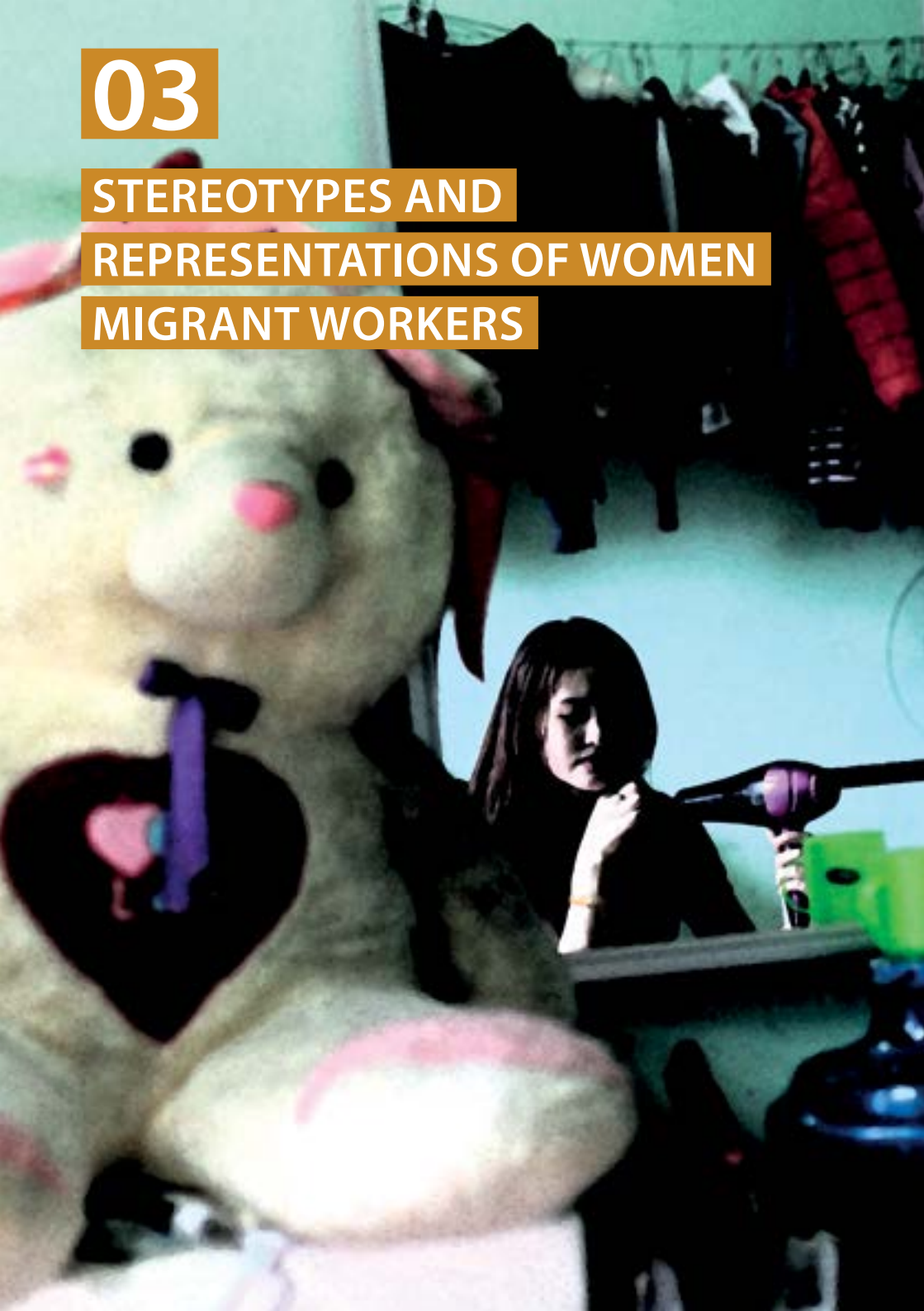
is a **real problem** as the period of time a woman has "value" as a factory worker is quite limited and that it is often very difficult to remain employed after **35 years** old in those industries.

23. Hodal, K. (2019), *Revealed: women making clothes for west face sexual abuse*, The Guardian, April 7th.

24. Oxfam Vietnam (2019), *The consequences of low wages – a study on fashion suppliers in Vietnam*.

03

STEREOTYPES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS



STEREOTYPES THEY FACE AND HOW THEY REACT TO IT

“As a Vietnamese woman, I have to get married before my thirties”.

The **pressure to get married and build a family** is pervasive in Vietnam and impacts both men and women. Yet, women are only thought in their role as **birth-giver** and as evolving solely in the **domestic sphere**, are even more subjected to this **social norm**, and this regardless of the social class they belong to. More than only getting married, the logical requirement stepping out of the act of marriage is to have children, reason why women are urged to get married before their thirties, as, you know, “the clock is ticking”.

However, nowadays, more and more Vietnamese women, in **all social ladders** of the society, are trying to **escape from this social norm**, including women migrant workers. For instance, Phuong, 36 years old, one of the women participating to the Phu Nu project (see her full story on the *Personal insights from the interviews* part of this booklet), shared her personal experience relating to this matter. When she initially started to work, her parents wanted her to stop in order to get married but, as she wanted to be financially autonomous, she decided to leave her hometown. Now that she succeeded in achieving her financial autonomy, she decided to get married to a man she really loves, this

year. They are now waiting for their first child and, even if she received a lot of criticisms from her surroundings, and still now that she has a “late pregnancy”, she doesn’t regret her life choice.

“People think I dress myself too ‘many’”.

Dress codes, in Vietnam as in many other parts of the world, can be a real **burden** for women of all social classes. If a woman departs too much from the norm of dressing following what is considered by the society as being feminine (e.g.: by wearing jeans and baskets instead of heels and skirts), there is a high probability that she will become the target of criticisms and judgements. The fact that, quite often, the people at the origin of such remarks are the women themselves is a strong indicator of how the women interiorized **male domination** over women. Moreover, we can add to this **gender factor**, a **generational** one as the older generation will tend to be more critical towards the younger generation and notably on the way they dress.

For example, Binh, another woman who takes part to the Phu Nu project (see her full story on the *Personal insights from the interviews* part of this booklet), received criticisms from elders women when she first arrived in the province.

According to them, she was dressing herself “too manly” wearing jeans. As the pervasiveness of **Confucianism** in Vietnam make the **respect of your elders** almost an unbreakable rule, she never replied to these criticisms and decided, instead, to ignore them. As a result, disapprovals have stopped, and she still dresses the way she used to and as she wants to.

“As a woman coming from an ethnic minority, some people think of me as being backward.”

Vietnam is a **multi-ethnic** country made up of 54 different ethnic groups. The fact, however, that the Kinh make up 86% of the population, leaving only 14% to be split between 53 ethnic minorities, is a source of potential discriminations for the people pertaining to those ethnic groups.

In the case of women migrant workers, the fact that ethnic minority people live in **remoted and rural** regions of Vietnam, limits their access to **information** and increase the costs of their **internal migration**. As a consequence, they represent a very low proportion of internal migrants, making them even more vulnerable than usual to stereotypes and discriminations.

Workers involved in the Phu Nu project, indeed, reported us having been labelled as “backward” because of coming from an ethnic minority. Likewise, Phong, a woman taking part to the project (see her full story on the *Personal insights from the interviews* part of this booklet), shared that her

landlord was discriminating against the people coming from the ethnic minorities by considering them as **backward and lacking culture**. Another testimony on this matter is the one of Phuong, who noticed that it is more difficult for the *Montagnards*, one of the ethnic minorities of Vietnam who come from the Central Highlands of the country, to be fully integrated within the common housing area than for the others because they don't master the culture and thus don't have access to all the needed information and services. It is even truer considering the fact that they are very few within this specific common housing area (roughly 4 to 5 people) which make them more marginalized and targetable.

“As a factory worker people think of me as lacking an education.”

The **growing industrialization and development** of Vietnam has certainly created a significant amount of **job opportunities**. However, most of those are concentrated in **low-skilled factory positions** while a high number of people who occupy the position of factory workers have actually completed a fair level of education.

Indeed, contrary to many beliefs, internal migrant workers tend to have received **a higher level of education** than non-migrants, almost a quarter of them having received university level education. As such, they are not less educated than the rest of the Vietnamese population. In the case

of the women living in the provinces of intervention of the Phu Nu project, 46.5% of them had achieved high school and 8.1% of them vocational

or university education at the time of diagnosis prior to the project in 2014.

HOW DO THEY SEE THEMSELVES?

“It is men that make the final decisions and women are undecided.”

At first, when speaking with the women of the Phu Nu project, they tend to affirm us that the **relationships** they have with men are **equal**, whether it is at work or in their personal life. However, when we dig deeper, making them reflect more on the nature of these relationships, we find out that even if the women are, to some extent, able to voice their **opinions** in front of a male counterpart, for instance their boyfriend or husband, he is the one who will have the **last word**.

For some of them, as Hanh (see her full story on the *Personal insights from the interviews* part of this booklet), it is because men have naturally **stronger spirit** than women who are more hesitant. However, they also recognize the influence that Vietnamese culture can have on such a phenomenon. For Phuong, in spite of thinking of herself as having a strong personality, she says that even her can't express her opinions in all circumstances and that Vietnamese women have to adapt themselves. For her, it is due to the Viet-

namese culture that considers men as being the **decision-makers**. Phuong strongly disagrees with this cultural fact, even more so as the women have to go through this **“double day” of work**, outside and inside of the house, and that they should even be more entitled to have an equal voice in the different decision-making processes. Indeed, according to a 2017 study led by ActionAid, Vietnamese women spend on average **4.5 hours** of their day doing **housework**, three times more than men²⁵. However, this **unpaid work**, which adds up to their paid working day, is made invisible by social norms which pervade the whole society and weighs on all women regardless of their **social ranking** and **education level**, even if women from the H'mong ethnic minority are even more affected by it (spending an average of 7 hours a day on unpaid labor, 2 extra hours compared to their male counterparts).

25. Bui, T. (2017), *Invisible labor: Vietnamese women and all the unpaid hours they are forced to accept*, VNEExpress, October 20th.



“Women are shier, less skilled and weaker than men.”

Such vision of themselves came a lot during the different interviews we had with the women as during the collective session we organized. However, those only seemed to be first thoughts as when we pushed the critical thinking a bit deeper, the women were able to depict themselves, or at least other female counterparts, as **skilled, strong and assertive**.

For instance, in the garment factory in which Binh works, 90% of the workers are women and most of the line managers are women because the selection is **skill-based**. But, **all the top-management positions are held**

by men. Phong did the same observation.

When it comes to shyness and assertiveness, we could also say that it is more the vision that people have of women and of their behaviors which lead them to think they are shy and unassertive, while they are not really. It is the case for Duyen (see her full story on the *Personal insights from the interviews* part of this booklet), who, at first, when speaking to us, qualified herself as being quite shy but then shared with us that she was able to express her opinions and that it was more the others who perceived her as shy because of her quiet voice.

“As a woman, there are various jobs that I can’t do.”

The **incapacity of performing certain jobs** is a fact that came quite often in the interviews as well as during the collective session. However, the source of such incapacity, in the words of the women, was more coming out of the vision that the Vietnamese society carries of themselves and the constraints they face as women in such a society rather than of some perceived personal limitations. And indeed, in Vietnam, both **legal** and **socio-cultural norms** undermine the ability of women to enter specific workforces. Notably, under Decree N°. 26/2013, women are banned from 77 occupations (e.g.: metal processing, seafaring, autopsy surgery, etc.). Moreover, and even without such legal provisions, women will struggle to perform some jobs because of **unequal power relations between men and women** which could put them at risk, or at least give them the feeling that some professions are risky for them. For instance, Phong would really have liked to be a taxi-driver but as she perceives the risk of gender-based violence as being very high when doing this type of job, she doesn’t think she will ever be able to become one.

Likewise, **gender stereotypes**, even when they don’t completely forbid women of performing certain jobs, limit their ability to do it in the most beneficial way. That is what Phuong refers to when she says that she would like to open her own store but that, as a woman, there are too many obstacles to do so, notably regarding the type of products you can sell. Apparently, it is very hard for a woman to sell electronic products, which are the most profitable ones, because the customers will not trust you as they trust men.

04

SELECTED BITS OF LIFE
FROM THE INTERVIEWS

HANH

Late afternoon, end of September 2019, in her room in the common housing area, Khai Quang industrial zone.



Hanh was born in 1977 in Tam Duong, 20km away from Khai Quang industrial zone where she works in a factory assembling electronic devices. She has worked in factories from the age of 20, notably in Ho-Chi Minh City (Southern Vietnam) but also abroad, in Malaysia, in the same enterprise as she now works in. Before doing so, and as many other Vietnamese women, she was working in the fields. She got married very young, just after finishing high school, when she was 19.

She lives on her own, on the second floor of one of the common housing areas in which the Phu Nu project intervenes.

— On her living conditions

Hanh shared that she feels **very safe** inside of the common housing area where she enjoys from a clean environment and a very good relationship with her landlord. However, there are still things to be improved in the common housing area for the living conditions of the women migrant workers to be truly decent. Notably, Hanh informed us that her room wasn't isolated and so that she feels very intensively all the **extreme weathers**, whether it is hot or cold ones. She doesn't have a heater, so she feels very cold in the winter. Having no heater also means that she hasn't access to hot water for her shower.

At the common housing area, relationships with the others can sometimes be a bit difficult and Hanh reported that she felt **quite isolated**. Indeed, if, for her, relationships between men and women are good, intergenerational relationships can sometimes be more difficult to handle. She doesn't have much contacts with younger people and this is complicated by the fact that she often works at night.

— On her working conditions

Hanh considers her working conditions to be **"decent"**. Yet, through her testimony, we can see that she suffers from **discrimination related to her age**: she has been working at the same position



for 9 years without being promoted. Her salary is increased by 5% every year but only because that is what is required by Vietnamese law. All in all, she perceives a salary of 5,066,000 VND per month (roughly 200 dollars) in addition to 250,000 VND of allowance (roughly 11 dollars) which is a bit more than the average national Vietnamese salary of 150 dollars (3,823,000 VND).

According to her, **the security at work is good enough** but she considers that the meals can still be improved, even if they are apparently better than the ones in the textile sector. When we ask her about the relationships between men and women at the factory, she answers that everything goes well as **the majority of the line workers are**

women and that the men are more in the management positions, so she doesn't see them much. When trying to get her vision on why the share of the work between men and women at the factory is done in this way, she doesn't seem to see any harm to it as, for her, **men are "more abled, intelligent, flexible"** so it is normal that they benefit from higher work statuses.

Similar to her social relationships back to the common housing area, **she doesn't have much contacts with the other workers**, so she wasn't able to share with us her thoughts on the relationships between men and women at the factory, which she also thinks, are equally treated by the management. However, when asking her if she has

ever noticed any sort of abuses coming from the managers on the workers, she shares that when the line managers are **pressured** by their boss, they will tend to put more pressure on the workers. But, overall, she insisted on the fact that, it was "ok". Likewise, **sexual harassment** at the factories doesn't seem to be an issue that she has faced, neither as a direct victim or as a witness.

— On her personal life and identity

Hanh shared a lot with us her feeling of **loneliness**. In addition to the fact that she has difficulties to be fully integrated in the common housing area, she misses a lot her family that she doesn't see often because of them being far away. She revealed having a son, aged 21, with who she has a **distanced relationship** because she hasn't lived with him for a long time. They don't share much because of that but also because, according to her, "he is a boy" and **boys don't share**.

Her husband died 10 years ago, and she never wanted to start a new life with someone "for her son". She feels that raising her kid on her own has been **very hard**, especially in comparison with married women who can "share the burden" with their husband. Moreover, she still provides for her son who works but doesn't make enough money to live, so she shares a part of her income with him.

Thorough the interview, Hanh shared a lot with us her felling of **not being brave enough** to start her life anew, whether it is romantically or profes-

sionally. For her, her "weak" character can be an explanation of why she doesn't get any promotion and not the fact of being discriminated against because of her age, even if she acknowledged a bit before in the interview that her age could be an obstacle at work.

She admires women with strong spirit. She tried to be strong, but she didn't succeed, reason why she sometimes would have liked to be a man to be able to "take decisions more quickly and not hesitate" because "men are stronger and protect women".

— How she sees her future

As many other women migrant workers, **Hanh hasn't really got the opportunity to think deeply about her future**. She shared to us the fact that her future life choices will highly be dependent on her financial capacities and that she doesn't know which types of jobs she can do with her level of qualification, apart from factory work.

Younger, she used to be a sewer, but she had to stop to be able to raise her son thanks to a fixed salary.

However, she does have a **big life project**: she wants to **build her own house** for her and her son on the land of her parents. The latter, however, are opposed to it because they think it is not the job of a woman to build her house.

HUONG

Beginning of the night, late September – In the living room of her landlord, Khai Quang industrial zone.

Huong was born in 1989 in Vinh Tuong, in Vinh Phuc province. She left Northern Vietnam as a kid with her parents to move to Ho Chi Minh City before returning back to the North when she was 22, in 2011.



She spent the first two years of her return working inside of a company doing electronic assembly notably of smartphones.

She got married in 2013 to one of her landlord's son and has two kids. To raise them, she now stays home from where she works selling imported food. She is thus an example of a woman who has evolved outside of the factory to build her own project, even if it was made out of the necessity of staying home to raise her kids.

She is a woman leader of the Phu Nu project, but she confessed to us that, as she is very busy, she doesn't have the time to complete fully her role anymore and so, instead of acting as the principal woman leader, she sometimes covers up for the one who replaces her.

— On her living conditions

According to her, her living conditions are **pretty good**.

As many of the other interviewees, she considers that the **relationships between men and women** within the common housing area are **running smoothly**. She thinks that it is notably related to the fact that **the new generation** is now more **open-minded**, reason why men and women are more respectful of each other.

— On her working conditions

She shared with us the fact that as an **independent worker** she works as much as she used to when working in the factory, and this for this **same amount of money**. However, she now can **work from home and is "totally free"** contrary to the time she was a factory worker which was a **"disaster"**. She declares loving her job which she chose for its easiness and convenience, as everyone, according to her, can sell

things. Nevertheless, she still has **no free-time** and her only spare time is used to sleep.

— On her personal life and identity

Her status of **internal migrant** coming back to the North after having spent most of her life in the South has not been always easy for her. Her parents stayed in the South, in Dong Nai, and she misses them a lot because she is not able to visit them very often. Moreover, it took her almost one year to fit in again when she came back, notably **to get used to the accent and the culture** again. However, she is now registered in the North and feels fully integrated to where she lives.

Another reason why she decided to work from home and take care of the kids is because her husband works in a private company and finishes work very late, he most of the time comes back around 7pm, even sometimes around 2am. She declared to us to be respectful of his work, reason why she accepts the fact of handling most of the housework which, apparently, doesn't bother her.

However, we can see that her statuses as a wife and mother, and the fact that those roles take the biggest part of her life, make her feel different compared to the other women in the housing areas, particularly the single ones with no children. She thus considers that **single women** have more **freedom** because they don't have to, contrary to her, think about all the family when making a decision. For instance, she

had to renounce to travel because it is not easy to travel when you have kids: whether you don't want to let them or whether you can't fully enjoy from your trip if you have to take care of them. It is the same when it comes to spending money. When she was young, she could spend her money as she wanted but, now, she has to save money for the kids.

For her, it is not the fact of being a woman that limits her freedom but rather the fact of **having children**. She feels pretty lucky with her husband because he lets her do whatever she wants: if she wants to work, he is ok, if she doesn't want to work, it is fine with him to. They get along very well because, according to her, he is, by nature and not out of his education (his father is totally different) a "free spirit" who loves freedom for himself as for the others. But she knows that it isn't the **norm in Vietnam** as many women **fear expressing their feelings**. She thinks that it is notably due to their financial dependence over their husband after marriage but also because of the way parents have forever treated boys and girls in an unequal way, thus impacting negatively the character of girls from their earliest childhood. According to her, **sons' preference over girls is so deeply rooted into Vietnamese culture** that you can't change it and that the only solution for girls is to go **live abroad** to be able to build their **confidence**.

PHUONG

Beginning of the night, late September – In the living room of her landlord, Khai Quang industrial zone.



Phuong was born in 1983, 23km from where she has been living for two years now.

She finished high-school before working in the fields which was exhausting, reason why she chose to join a sewing professional training during 5 months in 2002. After that, she was able to be hired in the textile industry in Vinh Phuc. Her first years working were very unstable, showing the precarious nature of the works performed by these women: she worked in three different factories during the first year, then in nine different factories between 2002 and 2009 before settling to the one she still works in (HJC Vina which produces helmets).

– On her living conditions

According to her, **the living conditions in the common housing area** have improved a lot in the recent years: she has now a **private room** that she can lock with her own toilets inside. It matches her needs in terms of security but also of access to water and electricity even if the price of the room has increased.

Nevertheless, and even if she feels lucky about her own room, she underlines the fact that some other rooms still need to be renovated because they have not been improved since 2007. However, she acknowledges the

fact that it is difficult for the landlords to invest for the renovation of all the rooms at the same time.

She doesn't notice any difference within the common housing area based on gender, but she shares with us the fact **the young people** are more integrated (2000 generation) than **the older ones** as hers and that it is also more difficult for **the Montagnards**, one of the 53 ethnic minorities of Vietnam who come from the Central Highlands of the country. Indeed, they apparently take quite a bit of time to be fully integrated because they don't master the culture and thus don't have access to all the needed information and

services. It is even truer considering the fact that they are very few within this specific common housing area (roughly 4 to 5 people).

– On her working conditions

When it comes to work, the more important according to her is to have a **good relationship with your supervisor**, otherwise you can't get any **promotion**.

She shared to us being **happy** about her work, the factory providing a **good security level, even if most of the salary increases** she gets are the ones specified by the law. Otherwise you have to pass a type of test to be able to get a promotion, or... be a member of the manager's family as **nepotism** seem to be occurring.

Moreover, she specifies that, as they can't put the aircon because too many machines function at the same time, it is very hot at work, but the factory still can't find a solution. Moreover, she also shared with us the story of **how the workers mobilized themselves on the social networks**, criticizing the quality of the food at the factory which led to a temporary improvement in food quality. But, once the lights were not on the employer anymore, the quality of the food started to decrease again.

Factory workers are mostly women so there is no issue related to **sexual harassment**. However, **90% of the managers are men**. For her, it is due to the fact that, as women has to take

care of the children and take maternity leaves, they can't be promoted to higher positions. Moreover, workers tend to have higher pressure from their manager during the high season as they also receive higher pressures from their bosses.

– On her personal life and identity

She initially got difficulties to find a **job** and an **accommodation** when she firstly arrived. But she has been part of the project for a while now, so she **feels well integrated**.

Her personal story tells us a lot about the social and family pressure that women in Vietnam have to go through. Indeed, when she firstly started to work, her parents wanted her to stop in order to get married but, as she wanted to be financially autonomous, she decided to leave, notably because she wanted to earn money to finance the education for her two younger sisters, thus giving them the opportunity that she didn't have to go to university.

Now that her sisters have graduated as well as married and that she **is financially independent**, she decided **to get married**. Which she did, one week before this interview. Even if she married quite late, based on what is commonly accepted in Vietnamese culture for which women don't marry after 28 years old, and that she got a lot of critiques because of that, she doesn't regret it saying: "it was the good time and I was thus able to get married out of love". She is now waiting for

her first child and the fact of having a “late pregnancy” has also made her the subject of critiques from her surroundings. However, once again, she doesn’t seem to really care.

In spite of her **very strong personality**, and as most of the women we interviewed, she thinks that **Vietnamese women can’t express their ideas and opinions in all the situations**, that they have to adapt themselves. For her, this is mainly due the Vietnamese culture, where men are the decision-makers, which is quite impossible to change. She strongly disagrees with this and thinks women and men should be equal even more so considering the fact that women currently have to go through this “double day” of work, outside and inside of the house.

Contrary to one of her peers who thought that **single women** were enjoying from more freedom, she thinks that her life as a **married woman** will be easier as she will be able to share the task with her husband, who seems to be willing to do so. However, the downside of being married is the fear that she has to be judged by the family of her husband with who she now lives.

— How she sees her future

In the future, she would like to open **her own store**. Her husband supports her in this project. But there are **many obstacles** for a woman to do so, notably regarding the type of products she wants to sell. Indeed, she shared with

us the fact that as a woman, it is more difficult to sell electronic products, which are the most profitable ones, because the customers will not trust you as they trust men. Moreover, she has to borrow money from the bank, but it is not much and, as a woman, she has to be more responsible for her children and thus she can’t risk investing too much money. She also has to save money to be able to get her pension when she will be retired at the age of 55 (legal retirement age in Vietnam for women which is 5 years less than for men)²⁶. Likewise, she would have liked to go work abroad to earn more money. However, if her husband can, her **duty as mother** impedes her to do so.

26. It is important to specify here that most Vietnamese continue to work after the retirement age, mostly in the informal sector.

BINH

Beginning of the night, late September – In the living room of her landlord and then in her room, Khai Quang industrial zone.

Binh was born in 1997. She comes from Tuyên Quang, 67km from Vinh Phuc. She has been in the province for four years now. She works in Vina Korea (textile industry) where she directly learnt sewing after finishing high school.



— On her living conditions

Overall, she considers that **safety and hygiene** are good within the common housing area. The only thing she mentioned and that should be improved, according to her, is the **water flow** which is **very low**, especially when all the workers come home at the same time.

As she lives in a common housing area where there are **more men than women**, she **doesn’t always feel comfortable** walking all the way to her room or to the toilets, more so as she doesn’t have private ones in her room because she can’t afford this type of room which are too expensive²⁷. However, she declares not being bothered by the men, and, as such, she **doesn’t feel unsafe**.

— On her working conditions

She considers her **salary to be decent** even if she underlines the fact that the wages in the textile industry are lower than the ones in the electronics industry.

In her factory, **90% of the workers are females**. Contrary to the norm, **most of the line managers are female as well** (let’s remember here that we are in a textile factory) and, according to Binh they are **stricter, “bossier”**, than the men. She doesn’t know why these women act in this way. For her, your level of responsibility within the enterprise is not related to your gender but more to your skills: there

27. In this common housing area, there is a difference of 300,000 VND (roughly 12 dollars) between the rooms with and without private toilets.



are more women managers because they are more skilled when it comes to the textile industry than men are. However, she shared with us the fact that **the top positions** are, once again, only occupied by **men except** from the **human resources position**. Following her same logic of reasoning, Binh told us that it came from the fact that the men were more “skilled and stronger than women and that they could speak English” reasons why they were in top-management positions.

She is **quite critical** about her **working conditions**: it is very **hot inside** of the factory and the **quality of the food** is **mediocre**. If it was even possible, she said that the food in her sister’s com-

pany (electronic assembly one) were even worse. Apparently, the Labor Union tried to negotiate with the factories to have the quality of the food being improved but it always lasts for a couple of days only before getting back to normal.

Work makes up for 70% of her time, thus she has no time for leisure or to go back home to see her family.

— On her personal life and identity

When she arrived in the common housing area, at first, it was very hard for her to be integrated as the other women didn’t want to work with her because the women of where she came from are thought as being “**male**

thieves”. She also received **criticisms** related to **the way she dresses**; too “manly” according to the older women. At that time, she didn’t say anything because “you have to respect your elders” but now the critiques have stopped, and she stills dresses the way she wants to.

She has a **boyfriend** who lives in the same common housing area, but they don’t share the same room. They come from the same hometown but were not together before. He is very protective though not intrusive, and they are going to get married next year.

She feels that her **young age** is an **advantage**. Especially when it comes to work because the employers think she can learn faster.

As a woman, finally, she thinks that it is good to **express your own opinions**. She feels comfortable doing so in most of the cases and with most of the people apart from her **manager**. With her boyfriend, she, for now, considers that they have an equal relationship and that she enjoys the freedom of a single woman. However, she thinks that it will change once they will get married as she will have more responsibilities, notably when it comes to housework, even if her and her boyfriend agreed to share the burden. She is not quite sure of how it will go in the end.

— How she sees her future

In the future, she would like to have a sewing machine at home to be able to **repair clothes**. She would also like to be trained to know how to design clothes, but she thinks that it is difficult and requires a lot of **experience**. The reason why she would like to do so is because it is harder to raise children when you work at the factory, so it is better to work from home. If she doesn’t have children, she will stay at the factory. She loves sewing, she has wanted to do this job since she has been little, but she thinks she doesn’t have the ability to design clothes and so that it would be easier for her to just do reparations.

As some of her peers, she has wished to go abroad to make a better living. She has thought about learning Japanese to go work in Japan. Yet, it is rather an ideal than a real project and she plans to continue working at the factory for the years ahead.

DUYEN

Sunday, late in the morning, early September – In the living room of her landlord, Nam Sach industrial zone.

Duyen was born in 1994. She has worked for one year in Nam Sach industrial zone, in the factory Tinh Loi 2. When we met her, she had just come back from Mai Chau (Hoa Binh province), a village of Northern Vietnam from which she comes from, where she spent 5 months because she was sick. Indeed, as she belongs to one of the 53 ethnic minorities of Vietnam (The White Tai) and used to live in a very rural area of Vietnam, she benefits from a full coverage of her health expenses that compensates for the fact that her company could only provide one month of sick leave.

She was initially forced to move from Mai Chau to Hai Duong as it is very difficult to find a job without

having qualification in the countryside, whereas in Hai Duong, according to her, she was able to be hired within one week. Upon arrival, she followed a one week training in sewing followed by 10 days of apprenticeship for which she was paid 3,500,000 VND (roughly 150 dollars) before signing a contract of 4,900,000 VND (roughly 210 dollars) per month, whereas as a fieldworker she was only paid 2 million VND (roughly 87 dollars) per month to work in very harsh conditions. She also shared with us the fact that she will follow a new training that will allow her to earn more money, increasing her salary up to 5,600,000 VND (roughly 240 dollars) per month.

She has a husband who works in another factory, Tinh Loi 1, as a cooker.

other common housing areas. For her, there is “nothing to be improved”.

When it comes to differences between men and women, she shared with us that women are **neater** than men and that they take better care of their room. Also, they seem to be **shier** than men because, most of the time, when they come back from work, they go to their room and close the door to have more tranquility whereas the men

leave the door opened to have a chat. As a consequence, she speaks more to the men than to the other women. It is also difficult for her to share moments with the other women as they don't have the same working hours.

– On her working conditions

She considers that her working conditions are as good as her living conditions and that “nothing needs to be improved”: **the security is good**; the meals are provided, and she can have different options, and **everyone is equally treated**. She doesn't feel much pressure as the result requirements are only for the new employees. She can benefit from a promotion, but it has to be shared among 17 employees for a total amount of 300,000 VND (roughly 13 dollars), which isn't much at all.

At the factory where she works, the men sew quicker than women, they are **“stronger”** than the women. However, her line manager is a woman as well as most of the factory workers, included at the higher levels of management, except for the ones doing the ironing because that is an “hard work” which requires more strength.

She doesn't share much with her colleagues as there is a lot of **noise** during working hours. She would like to have more spare time during breaks to be able to speak with them on other things than work.

She hasn't ever noticed any case of sexual harassment within the factory.

– On her personal life and identity

Even if she comes from another province, as she is now registered, she faces **no particular issue** due to her status as an **internal migrant**. However, because of having been forced to migrate for work reasons, she has been **separated from her son** who remained in Mai Chau with his grand-parents. She doesn't even consider taking her son with her to Hai Duong because her parents are opposed to it. Thus, she is very sad of not having him with her, but she thinks that it is for the best and she manages to get him on the phone quite often.

She is married to a man who comes from the same province as her (Hoa Binh). He is five years older than her and they got married when she was 19. She shared with us the fact that he was helping her for the housework. As a couple, they earn between **10 and 12 million VND per month, of which they only keep 2 to 3 million** for their expenses as they currently build a house in Mai Chau. However, she is happy with her level of income and could stay in the province for another 20 to 30 extra years she said.

She qualifies herself as being **quite shy** but when we asked her if she was able to express her opinions, she said that, indeed, she was able to do so. She said that, actually, it was more **the others** who thought of her as being shy as **she doesn't speak very loudly**. She likes women with strong spirit. When she compares her life to the ones of single

– On her living conditions

Duyen finds the landlord to be very nice and helpful as he has even reduced the rent of 100,000 VND (from 700,000 VND to 600,000 VND) for her first few months back to the common housing area which she qualifies as “clean and safe”. She has a room with private toilets and pays 2,500 VND/kWh for electricity, which, she informed us, is less expensive than in



women, she says that even if single women enjoy from more freedom, for instance for traveling, she thinks that women with children are happier, less lonely. She doesn't think that taking care of the children is difficult and she likes to take care of the ones of the other women in the common housing area.

— How she sees her future

In the future, and if she has earned enough money to do so, she would like to open an embroidery shop (local handicraft in Mai Chau), because she loves it. However, she doesn't know if it will bring her enough money to provide for her family.

She also likes to drive trucks and she knows that such a job would allow her to earn more money and to have more **spare time** to spend with her kid. However, she said to us that it was impossible as, in Vietnam, **transport companies don't hire women to drive trucks** at it is supposed to be "too hard" for them.

NUONG

Sunday, early in the afternoon, early September – In the living room of her landlord, Nam Sach industrial zone.

Nuong was born in 1994 in Thanh Hoa, 300km away from Hai Duong. She has been living in Nam Sach industrial zone (Hai Duong) for 3 years now. She used to work in an electronic factory and now works at Tinh Loi 1 where she works in textile quality control.

She got married at 23 in her hometown with a man she has known for 10 years. They have a daughter of 3 years old. Her husband works in the same factory as her as a technician. As the children of other women living in the common housing area, her daughter stayed in Thanh Hoa with her grand-parents. She visits her every one or two months.

— On her living conditions

To her point of view, her **living conditions are good**. The landlord is nice. The only thing she is a bit upset about is the quality of the water of which she is doubtful, reason why she uses bottled water for everything, including for cooking.

She has participated for three years to the activities of the Phu Nu project which allowed her to create **stronger social links** with other women within the common housing area as well as learning more on **social benefits and insurance**. However, she has only been able to participate to the club meetings a dozen of time because she works on Sundays and at night (the club meetings take place at night, around 8:30pm usually during weekdays).

As Duyen, she noticed that women living in the common housing area are **shier** than men.

— On her working conditions

She does **three night-shifts** at the factory which she finds to be **very difficult**. The manager of her department at the factory is a man, as most of the managers are, which she justifies by the fact that **"men have more experience than women"**. The conditions to get a promotion are the same for women and men meaning that they are capacity-based. She even considers that women are favored other men because they can rest longer when they are tired. As most of the women interviewed, she hasn't personally noticed any case of **sexual harassment** within the factory. She has good relationships with her line manager even if she shared with us the fact that he can "speak loudly" at people who don't do the job right. But, for her, it is completely normal.

The only thing she is **upset** about is the **quality of the meals**: only industrial pork or chicken and the owners don't want to change anything even after couple of demands from the workers.

— On her personal life and identity

As it is very easy to get administratively registered into the province, she didn't face any difficulty related to her migrant status. The main thing that bother her is the **quality of the food and of the water** which, she thinks, is less good here because of the proximity with the factories than in Thanh Hoa from where she originally comes from.

She shared with us **not feeling herself confident enough** to express her point of view, especially with **her manager**. She doesn't want to argue with him as, according to her, there is no point in doing so because if he also gets pressured from above and has thus "no choice". As a consequence, she sometimes accepts to **work overtime** even if she doesn't want to as **she fears of losing her job** if she doesn't do it.

When she compares her life to the one of **single women**, she thinks that they have **more freedom** to go out and that, even if her kid is not with her, she can't go out as she wants because her husband is **jealous** and want to know where she goes and with who. Even if she qualifies their relationship of "equal" she shared with us the fact that he was taking most of the final decisions and that she sometimes wanted to be a man to be able to do the same.

However, she was able to refuse when her husband wanted to move closer to his parents.

Nuong and her husband send **2 million VND** (roughly 87 dollars) per month to her parents who raise their daughter back to Thanh Hoa which account for up to **one quarter of their revenue**.

She doesn't have a real hobby. She does like to sew and would like to open a sewing shop, but she lacks the money to do so.

— How she sees her future

As for the future, she doesn't want to stay in Hai Duong and think that she may leave within 5 or 7 years to open a grocery shop back to Thanh Hoa.

PHONG

Sunday, late in the afternoon, early September – In her room, Nam Sach industrial zone

Phong was born in 1980 in Quang Ninh, 60km from Hai Duong where she arrived in 2012. Before, she worked in Dai An for two years. She also tried to go work to Japan but she unfortunately didn't succeed, reason why she came to Hai Duong to work at Tinh Loi 2 where she has now worked for 5 years as a sewer. Her current salary is of 5,400,000 VND (roughly 234 dollars) of which she



also adds 500,000 VND (roughly 22 dollars) of bonus per month. She doesn't work at night or on the Sunday. She is one of the woman leader of the Phu Nu project, role that she perceives as having a lot of advantages: improved knowledge, increased trust to speak and exchange with the others and to provide them with support notably on subjects related to law.

She has two daughters born in 1997 and 1999 who live in Quang Ninh with their dad from who she has been separated since 2014.

In 2007, she left to work in Jordan as a detached worker for three years. Her salary was higher than in Vietnam but not that much and it remained fix for the three years of her stay even if her skills improved during that time. Even if she didn't speak the local language and that she was only living with Vietnamese, she felt well adapted to the country and would have liked to stay more. However, she missed her daughters, reason why she came back.

— On her living conditions

There are various things regarding her living conditions of which she is critical of. First of all, she considers that the **cost of water is too high**: 20,000 VND/m³ instead of 15,000 VND

in some other housing areas. She highlights the fact that, some months, the cost of the bills is even higher than the rent (700,000 VND depending on the type of rooms) which, she thinks, is also quite expensive.

When it comes to the quality of her room, she thinks it is **too tight, deteriorated and too warm**.

Concerning the relationships between the people within the common housing area, she thinks that everything goes well expect from the fact that some people who don't participate to the project complain about the running of the club meetings within the yard of the common housing area as it appears to make too much noise. She shared the story of a man who was mad and started to be insulting towards the women, saying that they were making that much noise because they were alone and missing their husband and, thus, needed to have sex. Moreover, and even if she considers that there is no case of sexual harassment within the common housing area, she acknowledges the fact that **some exchanges between men and women are sometimes a bit "sensitive"** but that women are comfortable in reacting to them, so she sees no harm to it.

Finally, she shared the fact that the landlord was **discriminating against ethnic minority people** by considering them as **backward and lacking culture**.

— On her working conditions

She is also quite critical of her working conditions. Firstly, she thinks that the meals are of a **very low quality**, forcing the workers to bring their own food. Moreover, she informed us that it was **very cold** in the factory in **winter** as, in

order to insure the level of humidity to maintain the quality of the clothes, they are forced to use sprinklers. However, the factory hasn't brought any solution to this issue yet.

In her factory, there are **more women in position of management** because the selection is **skill-based**, which shows well that women can be as efficient as men and even more.

Phong was the only woman we interviewed to recognize the fact that **sexual harassment, in its verbal form, is widespread** within the factory, coming from men towards women of the same hierarchical level.

— On her personal life and identity

As a migrant worker, she sometimes has **felt disadvantaged in comparison to the local population** when it came to **find an accommodation or visiting her family**, notably during bank holidays when prices are doubled or even tripled. Likewise, **the cost of electricity and water** within the common housing areas, where the majority of people living are migrant workers, are generally more expensive than for the local population.

She has a normal relationship with her ex-husband. She doesn't provide him with a pension to help in the childbearing of the girls, but she often takes them to eat outside when she visits them or sends them food. She has been involved in a relationship for 3 years with a man from Hai Duong because, according to her, **she needs**

to be protected. She hesitates to get married to him as she still doesn't "understand him completely".

When it comes to her identity as a woman and her vision of the relationships between men and women, she shared with us that she had the feeling that some men don't want to be in relationship with a woman who has a **strong personality** as women should be **"soft and gentle"** and men think that they are "the best at everything". For her, because of this kind of beliefs, it is harder to express your opinions as a woman. Moreover, there are a lot of jobs that are considered as **only reserved to men** that she would like to do as **taxi driver or photographer**. She said for instance that women are of course able to take pictures but that they are limited in time because they have to take care of the kids and also it is difficult for them to do this kind of job because their husband doesn't want them to be surrounded by a lot of people, and potentially other men.

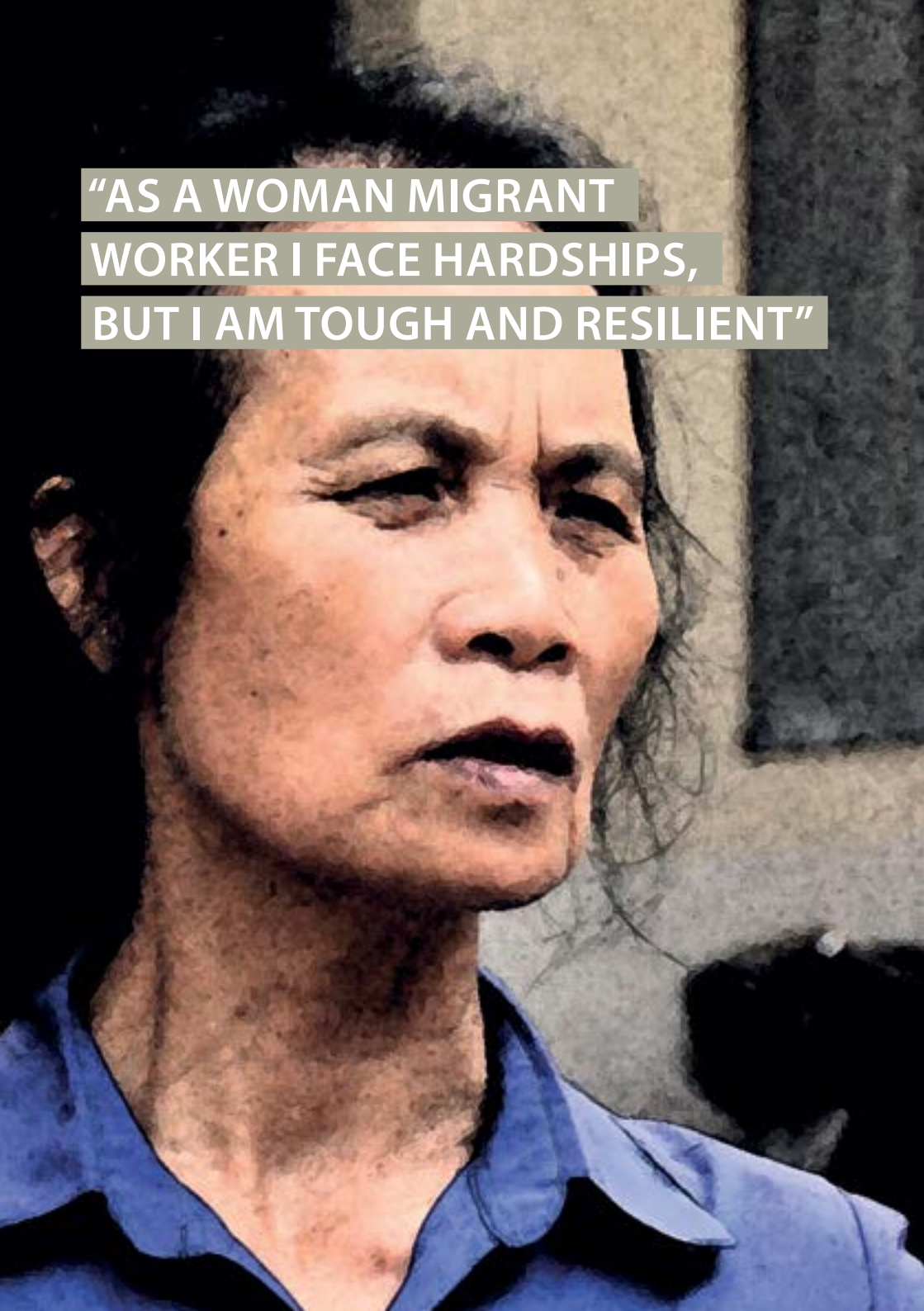
She tried to look for some solutions to change this kind of **prejudices and behaviors**, but she said that it was **very hard** as Vietnamese men are very **stubborn** and refuse to change their opinion. She thinks that holding meetings with only women is not enough and that **mixed meetings** should be organized to make the men aware of the **difficulties, needs, wishes and preoccupations** of the women. However, for men to adopt a **listening posture**, they need a **figure of authority** to be there. For her, Vietnamese law is also

not enough repressive. For instance, when it comes to sexual harassment, the price of the fine (200,000 VND) is insufficient and doesn't encourage the men to stop. Thus, she thinks that the State should work more on educating men as the same time as increasing the level of repression of harmful behaviors. Finally, she also raised the idea of taking **inspiration** from what is implemented **abroad** as she has the impression that women rights are more respected in other parts of the world than in Vietnam.

When she compares her life with the one of women who have children and live with them, she feels **lucky** because they are struggling with a **"double day of work"**.

— How she sees her future

In the future, she will go back to her hometown at the beginning of 2020 because it is now possible to find some jobs there. As a lot of other women migrant workers, she would then like to open a grocery shop, but only if she has the money to do so. She would really have liked to be a **taxi-driver** but as the **risk of gender-based violence** is very high when doing this type of job, she doesn't think she will ever be able to become one.



**“AS A WOMAN MIGRANT
WORKER I FACE HARDSHIPS,
BUT I AM TOUGH AND RESILIENT”**

Looking at the living and working conditions of women internal migrant workers, we can say without exaggerating that they do face very serious hardships, most of those due to a combination of factors arising out of their different identities: as women, as factory worker, as migrant, etc. The stereotypes linked with these identities overlap to create extra-layers of discriminations and difficulties that the women face. However, the resilience they consistently display, and which they use to describe themselves, is a proof of their ongoing journey towards empowerment, meaning towards the ability to make their own life choices but also to contribute to the overall society choices.

Notably, while participating to the Phu Nu project, these women, for instance through taking part to club meetings, with some of them acting as women leaders and negotiating with various stakeholders for the betterment of

their living and working conditions, have been able to increase their self-trust and level of critical thinking. If we are not yet to the point where these women can be full mistresses of their own life and personally flourish, the trials by which these women go through, have made of them strong and resilient people who need to be supported by structural changes, both political as well as cultural, in order to be able to thrive.


 ANNEXES

GLOSSARY

Gender norms: beliefs on women and men, how they are or should be. E.g.: Women are soft, and men are strong.

Gender prejudices: opinions, feelings and attitudes towards a person or a group of people based on their gender. They are at the origin of value judgements regarding what a person can and cannot do because of her gender²⁸.

Gender roles: beliefs on what women and men should and can do in a society or on how they can and should behave. E.g.: women should take care of their family and men should provide the money.

Gender stereotypes: overgeneralized and oversimplified thoughts about a person or a group of people based on their gender. More than just describing what people are they also determine what they should be and how they should behave based on the characteristics that society has attributed to them.

Intersectionality: “the interconnected nature of social categorization such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage²⁹”.

Non-verbal sexual harassment includes: undesirable behaviors such as provocative body language, sexual interpretations or sexually explicit finger and hand gestures. Non-verbal sexual harassment also includes the display of pornographic materials, images, objects, posters, emails, notes, and messages related to sex.

Physical sexual harassment includes: direct contact with the body or deliberately and unwanted touching, stroking, pinching, cuddling or kissing, sexual assault and rape.

Sexual harassment: any behavior of a sexual nature that affects the dignity of women and men, which is considered as unwanted, unacceptable, inappropriate and offensive to the recipient, and that creates an intimidating, hostile, unstable or offensive work environment³⁰.

Stereotypes: images, beliefs, assumptions on certain groups of people in relation to different dimensions of their identity. Those are generally negative.

28. Gender equality Cayman Islands (2011), *Stereotypes and prejudices*.

29. Oxford Dictionaries.

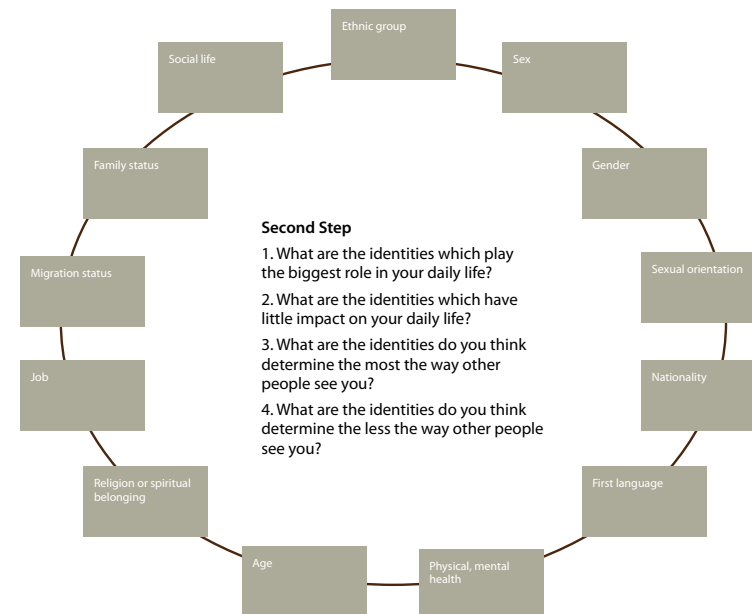
30. Viet Nam Code of Conduct on sexual harassment in the workplace, p.3.

Substantive gender equality (one of the three over-arching principles of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* jointly with non-discrimination and State obligation principles): combination of formal gender equality with equality of outcome, meaning that equality in law, equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men are complemented by equality in impact, outcome or result³¹.

Verbal sexual harassment includes: unwanted comments of a sexual nature or based on someone's gender identity such as suggestive jokes about sex or comments about the clothes or body of somebody. Verbal sexual harassment also includes unwanted sexual suggestions and hints or acts of soliciting sexual intercourse in exchange of benefits at work (e.g.: favorable assessments, light duty assignments or better pay, promotions or similar promises).

TRAINING MATERIALS

IDENTITY WHEEL



CLARIFICATION QUESTIONS FOR THE IDENTITY WHEEL EXERCISE

Physical and mental health

- ▶ Overall, do you feel good? Physically as well as mentally.
- ▶ If not, do you have any disease (both physical and mental): which one(s)? Small issues as bigger ones. Long-term issues as temporary issues. You can mention any of these issues even it is not one of your main preoccupation at the moment.
- ▶ Do you feel depressed? Or on the contrary, do you feel happy?
- ▶ Do you have any kind of disability: both physical and mental?

Ethnicity

To which ethnic group of Vietnam do you belong to?

Family status

- ▶ If you are married or not
- ▶ If you are in a relationship or not
- ▶ If you have (a) child(ren) or not
- ▶ If you raise your child(ren) alone or not
- ▶ If you have brothers or sisters or not: how many sisters? How many brothers? Older than you? Younger than you?

Social life

Do you have friends? How often do you meet with them?

31. European Institute for gender equality.

TABLE SHEET OF THE STEREOTYPE SENTENCES EXERCISE

Identity type	Sentences to fill	
Nationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that French are... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that Americans are... ▶ I think that Cambodians are... ▶ I think that Vietnamese are... ▶ People think Vietnamese are...
Ethnic group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that Kinh people are... ▶ People think Kinh people are... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that people from ethnic minorities are... ▶ People think that people from ethnic minorities are...
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that young people are... ▶ People think young people are... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that old people are... ▶ People think old people are...
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that physically disabled people are... ▶ People think physically disabled people are... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that mentally disabled people are... ▶ People think mentally disabled people are... ▶ I think that people with HIV/AIDS are... ▶ People think people with HIV/AIDS are...
Physical and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that depressed people are... ▶ People think that depressed people are... 	
Migration status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that migrants are... ▶ People think migrants are... 	
Job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that factory workers are... ▶ People think factory workers are... 	
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think men are... ▶ I think that men should... ▶ Women think men are... ▶ Women think men should... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think women are... ▶ I think that women should... ▶ Men think women are... ▶ Men think women should...
Marital status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that unmarried women are... ▶ People think unmarried women are... ▶ I think that unmarried men are... ▶ People think unmarried men are... 	
Gender identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that transsexual people are... ▶ People think transsexual people are... ▶ I think that transgender people are... ▶ People think transgender people are... 	
Religion and spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that religious people are... ▶ People think religious people are... ▶ I think that unreligious people are... ▶ People think unreligious people are... 	
Intersectionality (more than 3 identities combined)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that young women migrant workers are... ▶ People think young women migrant workers are... ▶ People think that young female migrant workers can... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ I think that young women migrant workers can't... ▶ People think young women migrant workers can't... ▶ I think that young female migrant workers can't...

FULL LIST OF THE ROLES FOR THE HUMAN CONTINUUM

Young migrant woman worker / Young migrant man worker
 Poor woman in a wheelchair / Poor man in a wheelchair
 University graduate woman / University graduate man
 Woman from an ethnic minority / Man from an ethnic minority
 Woman with HIV / Man with HIV
 Poor old woman / Poor old man
 Heterosexual factory worker
 Poor man with a mental health issue / Poor woman with a mental health issue
 Man factory worker / Woman factory worker
 Man office worker / Woman office worker
 Male homosexual factory worker / Female homosexual factory worker
 Heterosexual male factory worker / Heterosexual female factory worker
 Unmarried young woman / Unmarried young man
 Unmarried old woman / Unmarried old man
 Married woman with children / Married man with children
 Unmarried woman with children / Unmarried man with children

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Editing director: Heres Garcia Julia

Conception: My Van Tra, Hang Nguyen Thu, Nguépelbbé Tokinon and Julia Heres Garcia

Trainers and interviewers: Heres Garcia Julia, Nguyen Thu Hang, Nguyen Thu Thuy, Van Tra My

Interviewees: Dinh Thi Phong, Ha Thi Duyen, Le Thi Bich Hanh, Le Thi Nuong, Nguyen Thi Binh, Nguyen Thi Hong Phuong

Photos: French Embassy in Vietnam, CSAGA and BATIK International

Proof-reading: Gutierrez Sarahi and Tokinon Nguépelbbé

Grafic designer: Chauveau-Smolska Marianne

Printing: Công ty Cổ phần Công nghệ Truyền thông Hoàng Minh

This publication was published thanks to the financial support of the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation. Its content is the sole responsibility of BATIK Int. and can't be considered as reflecting the position of the funder.

THE LIVES OF WOMEN INTERNAL MIGRANT WORKERS IN VIETNAM

FACTS AND STORIES from
Vinh Phuc and Hai Duong provinces
Northern Vietnam

Providing insights on the living and working conditions of women internal migrant workers in Vietnam as well as on the stereotypes they may face in their daily life, this booklet intends to raise awareness among the general public, in Vietnam and abroad, as well as towards political and economic stakeholders who can act as real agents for change for sustainable and equitable improvements in the life of these women. To fulfill our goal of improving the working and living conditions of women migrant workers and ensuring that they can become real actresses of their own life and of the overall society, NGOs can't work in isolation, reason why we created this booklet as a resource for our peers working on this specific issue.

Empowerment being about allowing all people to raise their voice and tell their own stories, we intended to write down these narratives as they were shared to us by the women we are working with.

